1. Nic's Gift: Turning ethnographic data into knowledge

Yasmine Musharbash
University of Sydney

When we sat down to begin making some editorial decisions about the current volume, Marcus Barber and I found that the person to whom it was dedicated had immediately presented us with a problem. Professor Nicolas Peterson is an esteemed senior colleague, mentor and former PhD supervisor for both of us. His work is highly regarded nationally and internationally and he has been both involved and influential in major ethnographic, philosophical and policy debates surrounding Indigenous Australians for several decades—almost as long as we have been alive. His longevity at a key nodal point in Australian anthropology, combined with an unflagging enthusiasm for teaching and learning, has seen him directly involved in the training and mentorship of generations of scholars. Some of these have reached the professorial ranks themselves, while the qualifications others gained under Professor Peterson's guidance have enabled them to play important and influential roles outside the academy, both within Australia and overseas. Professor Peterson's professional and intellectual achievements are to be lauded.

Equally important to us, however, is a man called Nic: a friend, confidante, valued discussant and, along with his kind and generous wife, Ros, an exceptional host. He is someone who has a considerable amount invested in the person as well as the product, who at a professional level was far more concerned with the integrity of what we were doing than whether it was sufficiently intellectually branded to be self-evidently produced under his guidance. For all of the professional achievements of Professor Peterson, we suspect that Nic was a major reason for the enthusiastic uptake of the original call for papers, to which an overwhelming number of potential contributors responded.

These two facets of the same person presented us with an editorial challenge. To refer to him throughout the current volume as Professor Peterson would appropriately reflect his professional standing, but perhaps suggests a level of distance that does not do justice to the personal qualities, and indeed the capacity for intellectual self-effacement, that see him held in such high regard by those who know him well. In the end, Marcus and I chose to adopt a flexible approach, one that was sympathetic to the context of the reference, so at times the person to whom this volume is dedicated is described as Professor Nicolas

Peterson, at times as Nic. My introductory chapter is the place where the decision to make this reference context specific is most evident, but rather than it being seen as a product of a certain editorial carelessness, we hope it is a reflection of these two facets of the engaging scholar and person to whom this volume is dedicated.

I am using this introduction, as well as a general introduction to the volume and to Nicolas Peterson, as a personal opportunity to illuminate his contribution to anthropology through his exemplary supervisory practice. In keeping with the title and intent of the volume, my specific focus is on Nic's supervisory role in the promotion of ethnographic fieldwork as the primary generator of anthropological analysis and insight. I begin with some ethnography, or more specifically, with some ethnography of an ethnographer, and what it illuminates about him.

At my graduation dinner, Nic gave one of those speeches he is rightly renowned for, speeches that for decades have enlivened social functions at The Australian National University, where he works. In a clever, funny and at times moving presentation, Nic recounted the journey of our relationship as supervisor and PhD student, from a first meeting in Berlin, through the trials and tribulations of my fieldwork with Warlpiri people at Yuendumu in Australia's Northern Territory, onwards to the years of thesis writing in Canberra and finally to the (retrospectively!) hilarious dramas of submission day. Nic's speeches—inadvertently perhaps, but neatly nonetheless—illustrate his anthropological practice: they famously draw on the most careful ethnographic recording of the minutiae of the life of the speech's subject, they include research with the subject's peers and they draw on ancillary sources of 'evidence' (photos, excerpts from letters and emails, newspaper articles and so forth). Out of these 'data', he then paints engaging and enlightening images of his chosen (usually student or staff) subject. In his choices of what to include and exclude and how to present his data, Nic always weaves in a new twist, an additional moral or a novel perspective, something drawn from the data that conveys a new and perhaps unexpected interpretation, one that displays a genuine concern for his subject simply by the act of showing that he has paid enough attention to be able to choose the best evidence to support his analysis. The ethnographer is at work in the staff tearoom as well as in the deserts surrounding Yuendumu.

As he spoke, Nic produced forgotten incidents and unexpected anecdotes, while at the same time acknowledging all the way stations that stood out in my memory as well. Once again, this was a demonstration of Nic's technique; he was entertaining us at dinner, but also suggesting ideas based on detailed ethnographic observation. His speech also gave me cause for reflection; his slant on some of our shared experiences was distinctly different to mine. Perhaps, this is not all that surprising, given our differing structural positions, personalities,

perspectives on the world and history of extremely robust debates on matters of ethnographic interpretation. Yet it leaves me with a difficulty. *How* am I to sum up Nic Peterson's qualities as a scholar, a colleague and a mentor (my own, and that of many, many others) in such a way that readers, Nic included, will recognise what I describe? I should perhaps begin as he himself would tell me to, with a firm grasp on some important factual details.

Biography

Nic Peterson began his academic career with a BA (1963) from King's College, Cambridge, in the United Kingdom, which was followed by a PhD (1972) from the University of Sydney. He has been at The Australian National University since 1971, first as a Research Fellow with the Department of Anthropology at the then Research School of Pacific Studies and, since 1975, with Archaeology and Anthropology. He has undertaken research wearing an impressive number of hats: naturally, as PhD student, research fellow and academic, but also as Research Officer in the Northern Territory for the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies (1965–68), Research Officer to the Aboriginal Land Rights Commission (1973–74), member of the Aboriginal Housing Panel (1975–78) and member of the Bilingual Education Consultative Committee in the Northern Territory (1975–79)—to name a few. Last, but certainly not least, Nic Peterson has been undertaking extensive research as a consultant in land, sea and native title claims; research that, over the years, covered more than 150 000 sq km of land and about 15 000 sq km of sea.

One might think that the *pièce de résistance* of Nic Peterson's fieldwork—the eight months of his PhD fieldwork he spent 'walking' with a group of Yolngu people in Arnhem Land, and which truly set him apart from most of his contemporaries—would take more of a central role in his work (cf. Barber, this volume). Strangely, or perhaps not so strangely, it does not. Nic Peterson's PhD research was comparative; alongside the Arnhem Land research he also undertook fieldwork at Yuendumu in central Australia (where he had earlier spent time). Through his claim-related and other research, including two Australian Research Council (ARC) grants, he has been regularly returning to central Australia and occasionally to Arnhem Land. He added two more regions to his research expertise through claim work in locales in south-eastern Australia and the Torres Strait. I have a feeling that Nic values the collection of data independently (of the toughness) of the context. No matter where he works or what project he is undertaking research for, he is meticulous in documenting anything and everything he comes across in the field; at Yuendumu, I have *never* seen him without his notebook (even at dinner parties, it is always within easy reach and often used)! He says of his land-claim reports that they 'are only the tip

of a huge iceberg of maps, genealogies, field notes, etc.’, and I am sure the same is true for all of his research. Lastly, he certainly treasures the relationships that evolve during research—especially long-term research—and, speaking from my experience in Warlpiri country, he is held in very high esteem in return.

Nic Peterson’s personal qualities (his enthusiasm about research, generosity and conviviality, and joy in teaching), combined with the aforementioned longevity of his residence at a key structural point within Australian anthropology, have seen him supervise a substantial number of graduate students—an imposing 52 at last count—and a full list of these students and their thesis topics is provided in Appendix 1. These students made up the majority of the original 27 contributors who offered chapters for this volume. Before describing the volume and papers in more detail, it is to Nic Peterson’s role as graduate supervisor that I now turn.

Nic Peterson as supervisor

A few years after my graduation, after I had had some firsthand opportunities to experience the responsibilities of being a mentor myself, I commented favourably to Nic about what I thought was one of the best aspects of his supervisory style—that he seemed to tailor his role to the individual needs of his students. Perhaps predictably, given my previous experiences of our differences in interpretation, Nic strenuously objected to this commentary, saying that he treats all his students the same. If I were to refine my position in the light of this interaction, I believe I would say (and I am far more certain that Nic would agree) that he aims to teach us all the same things (of which more below). Nevertheless, I would maintain despite his protestations that Nic has a fortunate instinct for teaching those things in different ways. I certainly learned best through our—at times, daily—discussions, and if some of those discussions merged into arguments (strictly in the academic sense) I perhaps learned all the more. Other students I knew required more gentle feedback or a less ‘hands-on’ approach, preferring to work more independently and to obtain feedback only when they requested it. Others again required Nic’s skills in cajoling them away from distractions and back to their thesis writing, and so forth. The amount of involvement Nic has with a student’s work, the personalised way in which he interacts with each student—these things *do* differ and, as I said to him then and as I strongly believe, the differences were, perhaps instinctively on his part, based on and adapted to the needs of the respective students. Exemplary supervisory practice, then, even if this is praise Nic does not care for. Practice, I am sure, that was honed over many years (before I showed up) and perhaps also through the diversity of practice he must have encountered himself in

the transitions from King's College in Cambridge to the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, the University of Sydney and, finally, to The Australian National University.

More important than *how* Nic taught us is *what* he taught us. There were the practical skills, the tools-of-the-trade part where having Nic as a supervisor sometimes felt like undertaking an apprenticeship. In the same way that, say, an apprentice chef learns about knives, how to hold them and how to chop carrots, Nic would instruct us about the inner workings and specifics of how to write a proposal, an outline, a paper and a thesis. He would drill us in paper presenting etiquette ('make sure you time it perfectly', '*never* apologise at the beginning of your paper', 'have it all written out but don't read it all', and so on).¹

Nic made generous use of his extensive personal library and encouraged us to engage critically with the work of others and with his own work if this was relevant. He did not, however, as some do, insist that our work should be stretched in ways that enabled it to reference his own; he was less concerned about the theoretical direction our work took and very open to letting us experiment with approaches he might have cared little for himself (on this, cf. Barber, this volume). What was of the utmost importance to him—and what he insisted on without compromise—was the conviction that solid ethnographic data are the basis of anthropological insight and knowledge and that his students must, whatever the context and whatever their theoretical leanings, accumulate sufficient ethnographic material and base their analysis on it. When I was a PhD student, Nic's resolute and unflinching insistence on ethnographic data ('get data!', 'solid data!', 'write *everything* down', 'write your notes every day', and 'if you don't know what to do: count! Count anything and everything!') was legendary along the corridors of the A. D. Hope Building, which houses the Department of Archaeology and Anthropology of The Australian National University.

While once in a while I and other students living in Canberra might have smiled about his 'data fixation', it took very little time at Yuendumu for me to appreciate the wisdom of his advice. I had been at a complete loss trying to understand the ever changing sleeping arrangements of Warlpiri people and, frankly, the experience of participating in and observing something—nightly—that I could make no sense of gave me an acute sense of fieldwork and wider anthropological failure. The non-committal answers I received from Warlpiri people in response to my questions just added to my bewilderment and self-doubt. What lifted the confusion (and incidentally gave me my first solid anthropological insight) was

1 One of the anonymous referees doubted whether Nic Peterson's attention to teaching technical skills to his graduate students warrants mentioning to the international audience of this volume. I believe it does, simply because this practice is not at all as common as it should be. I know many more graduate students who cry out for these skills than those who have been taught them.

- documenting (nightly sleeping arrangements in maps)
- counting (how many people slept in our camp each night, who slept there and how often, and so on)
- contextualising (writing down the ethnographic context of what went on during the day).

Accumulating, contextualising and interpreting data crystallised a mystifying fieldwork experience in such a way that I began to make sense of phenomena I was observing (and participating in) while in the field, and which, subsequently, when I returned from the field, enabled me to productively analyse and communicate to others the significance arising out of those data (Musharbash 2008). The transformation of data into anthropological knowledge is the crux of what Nic teaches. He continuously strives to show his students that (rather than superimposing ‘theory’ over data) such an epistemological pathway of knowledge out of data is the basis on which we can navigate our own individual analytical paths through our chosen ‘field’. This is what he pushed us to understand when we were at that critical point—not directly engaged with the field anymore, yet not writing the thesis, when we were, as he calls it, ‘not on top of our data yet’. This creation of anthropological knowledge out of ethnography is an almost alchemical process (with apologies to Martin, this volume); something *indescribable* happens, somewhere in between the gathering of data and the publishing of anthropology. Something much more than or transcending writing, it sometimes precedes writing and often takes place during the writing process (and through the many famed ‘red-inked’ drafts). It is something you learn only by *doing* (although, one can reflect on it, but it is more easily done by reflecting on it in others’ work than in one’s own; see, for example, Rumsey 2004).

Ethnography and the Production of Anthropological Knowledge

In 2008, this primary fieldwork lesson—and gratitude to and respect for the teacher—led Professor Françoise Dussart, another of Professor Peterson’s former students, and I to organise a session in his honour at the joint conference of the Australian, New Zealand and British anthropology associations in Auckland, New Zealand. Following his dictum that anthropological knowledge must arise out of the realities encountered in the field, we sent out an open call for papers as well as a personal call to all of his numerous former and then current graduate students, inviting contributions building on the dialogical relationship between

ethnography and theory. Françoise and I focused the panel's attention on the range of issues critical to larger anthropological debates, which Professor Peterson has explored since his original fieldwork in Arnhem Land, such as

- Indigenous and cultural rights
- the history of Aboriginal Studies and the production of social theory
- matters of indigeneity and citizenship
- photographs of Aboriginal peoples and cultural appropriation
- myths, songs and ritual organisation in Arnhem Land and central Australia
- the politics of Fourth-World peoples and the nation-state
- the interplay between culture and economic factors (including theoretical deliberations on demand sharing and the moral domestic economy).

Called 'Ethnography and the production of anthropological knowledge', the panel celebrated Professor Peterson's achievements to date and the multiple ways in which he advocated the intimate connection between ethnographic data and anthropological knowledge since his very first publication in an anthropology journal. Delightfully, this is titled 'A note on the use of the Polaroid land camera in the field' (Peterson and Sebag-Motefiore 1963) and is proof, if such was needed, that his interest in photography predated his and Pinney's (2003) edited book, *Photography's Other Histories*. I am highlighting his interest in photography here because this, as well as Professor Peterson's contributions to archaeology and material culture, especially the Thomson Collection, and his interest and participation in ethnographic filmmaking are sometimes seen as 'sidelines' or peripheral interests to his core work in the anthropology of Aboriginal/Indigenous Australia. A quick glance at the collated list of his publications (provided in Appendix 2) shows, rather, that these are strands he pursued and interwove with his other work from the start. Undoubtedly, one reason for that former view is that the greater part of Nicolas Peterson's work does intersect with (and most likely had significant influence on) the broad developments and the ebb and flow of topics de jour in the anthropology of Aboriginal Australia: from a focus on ritual to his work on local organisation, residential composition and relations to land, from there to land rights (followed by native title and marine tenure), demand sharing and on to citizenship rights and issues of indigeneity (cf. Austin-Broos, this volume).

The overwhelming response of paper givers saw a special request to the New Zealand conference organisers to allow the panel to run over four sessions—effectively an entire day. The vagaries of workloads and of academic and professional duties meant that not all of these contributors were able to convert

their presentations into contributions to the current volume, but we hope and believe that it nevertheless reflects both the sentiment and the intellectual substance displayed during that day in Auckland.

Essays in honour of Nicolas Peterson

In putting this volume together, Marcus and I have been working towards a threefold aim: 1) providing a vibrant and representative sample of contemporary anthropology that reflects both Professor Peterson's direct contributions to the ethnographic insights of generations of Australian and international scholars and his indirect impact on their theoretical perspectives; 2) fostering understanding of the complementarities and contrasts existing between regions and between theoretical themes associated with Professor Peterson's interests and research; and 3) honouring and illuminating Professor Peterson's important role as a generous mentor, promoting thorough ethnography, strong anthropology and a vigorous critical engagement with ideas—both his own and those of others.

The volume honours Professor Peterson's multifaceted contributions to anthropology in a number of ways: Professor Fred Myers and Professor Emeritus Diane Austin-Broos, peers of Nic Peterson and, like him, leading scholars in the anthropology of Indigenous Australia, present essays that chart his scholarly achievements and influences in the Foreword and Afterword respectively. The chapters in between—written largely by current and former students of Professor Peterson—honour his legacy by offering ethnographically based engagements with his anthropological corpus. Those contributions that do not come from current or former students of Nic include the Foreword and Afterword, by Fred Myers and Diane Austin-Broos respectively, the analysis of spearheads from Harry Allen, who is part of Nic's own cohort and brings an interdisciplinary perspective to the volume, and the contribution from Sachiko Kubota, who describes a less well-known but highly important aspect of Professor Peterson's international impact: his longstanding collaboration with and mentoring of Japanese anthropologists. This contact stimulated and then facilitated a substantial reorientation within the discipline in that country towards applied anthropological questions following decades of neglect in the period immediately after World War II. Ten of the chapters in this volume came out of presentations made at the original conference, while the additions are from scholars who could not be present but would have liked to attend.

In geographic terms, and purely as a result of the panel and subsequent contributions, this volume contains papers from Peterson's primary regions of fieldwork in central Australia (Curran, Morton, Saethre), Arnhem Land (Allen, Altman, Barber, Keen) and south-eastern Australia (Kwok, Ono). There are

also analyses from international locales (Gomes working with Orang Asli in Malaysia, Kubota analysing anthropology in Japan, Van Meijl with Maori in New Zealand). A last 'locale' of sorts, which has clearly crystallised in Nic Peterson's work, is also evident in the contributions—namely, the relationship between anthropology and the policy/applied domain (Altman, Kubota, Martin, Saethre, Van Meijl). This volume does *not* contain any contributions focused primarily on land rights, native title or customary marine tenure. A gross oversight, one might argue, considering a significant portion of Peterson's career has been dedicated to Indigenous rights to land (and sea) and his highly influential role in some notably successful developments. His engagement is both practical, through his direct involvement in the development of the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976* and participation as researcher in a great many land rights and native title claims, and academic, through his extensive publications on questions of rights and tenure (see in Appendix 2). As editors, Marcus and I are confident that Professor Peterson's role in this area is so well known and influential, and the existing literature on the subject is so large, that the topic really deserved separate and independent treatment, and this volume serves its purpose well by focusing on the other strands of his work. For those who know of Nicolas Peterson primarily through his academic and applied engagement in Indigenous rights to land and sea, we hope that this volume provides an insight into the diversity and richness of his other interests as well as his exemplary and productive mentoring of junior scholars.

Although the chapters can be grouped regionally, Marcus and I decided to arrange the contributions around two broad thematic clusters: land, ecology, ritual and material culture in Part 1, and demand sharing, the moral domestic economy, policy and applied anthropology in Part 2. While I draw out the interconnections between the chapters in the descriptions of the two thematic clusters below, as editors, we do not wish to overemphasise interconnectivity and the thematic coherence of this volume. In contradistinction with most (or with *ideal*) edited volumes, this one achieves its coherence *not* through a shared theme or approach but exactly through its eclectic nature. What holds the volume together is that each chapter addresses an aspect of Professor Peterson's anthropological corpus, and the diversity of themes in this volume thus directly reflects his wide-ranging interests. The diversity of approaches, in turn, reflects Nic's strategies as a mentor, assisting, rather than directing, his students to find their own (theoretical) ways in the world of anthropology.

Part 1: Land, ritual, material culture

We have grouped the papers most clearly focused on ritual (Curran, Morton), on material culture (Allen, Ono) and on land ownership and ecology (Keen,

Barber) together in the first half of the volume. The first two chapters (Morton, Curran) are concerned with the Warlpiri of central Australia—a people who have been central to Professor Peterson’s anthropology. These chapters focus on the ritual domain—one of his earliest and longest-standing research interests. Morton and Curran engage with Peterson’s analyses of fire and initiation ceremonies respectively, by recalibrating his theoretical approach (Morton) and contributing new fieldwork material (Curran). The next two chapters (Allen, Ono) pay homage to Professor Peterson’s interest in material culture. Ono does so by taking him at his word and analysing the agency of old photographs as instigators of new research insights during her research with Bundjalung people in New South Wales. Allen engages with Professor Peterson’s work in a two-pronged way, as he combines insights from a very early Peterson paper about change in Aboriginal Australia with a reanalysis of the spears in the Thomson Collection. The result is not only a reinterpretation but an ‘upgrade’ of Peterson’s postulations about change and innovation—and a fantastic example of how material culture (spears in a museum collection, in this case) can provide invaluable insights into social processes. The next chapter, by Barber, approaches change from a different angle, acknowledging Nic Peterson’s personal and professional role in shaping (and in choosing not to shape) Barber’s theoretical perspectives as a student, before taking Peterson’s general interest in human ecology as the basis for an ethnographic exploration of Yolngu people’s engagements with the central human ecological questions of the twenty-first century: environmental and climate change. Keen’s chapter follows Barber’s interest in human ecology with an analysis of concepts of ownership and property, connecting two of the major and most influential strands of Professor Peterson’s early work. Keen illustrates how returning to first principles and then re-examining them in ethnographic contexts can challenge old anthropological truths and provide new insights—in this case, by combining analyses from legal discourse, anthropology and field ethnography from Arnhem Land. Ownership—of land, resources, material culture, spirituality and ritual—is thus one thematic strand that underpins and intersects with the key subject matter of the land, ritual, material culture cluster. A further interconnecting thematic strand is that the six chapters reflect on issues of identity; Morton does so psychoanalytically, Curran by considering the effects of intergenerational change, and Ono by comparing coastal and hinterland Bundjalung notions of Aboriginal Christianity now and in the past. Allen’s chapter reveals something rather significant about Aboriginal ways of being in the world, while Barber’s and Keen’s contributions—in very different ways—discuss the intersections and interrelationships between physical and material matters of resources, their distribution and their continuing sustainability, with matters of attachment, sentiment and identity.

Part 2: Demand sharing, the moral domestic economy and policy

The seven contributions to Part 2 share markedly overt commonalities. First and foremost here is that they all—more or less directly—inhabit terrain that is concerned primarily with policy or the applied domain *or* they contain material that is relevant to the policy domain. Kubota presents an overview of Peterson's influence on Japanese anthropology and how his early generosity towards his Japanese colleagues contributed to a revitalisation of applied orientations within the Japanese discipline. The differences between applied anthropology in Australia and Japan and the political context surrounding the discipline in both countries are enlightening. Van Meijl continues considerations of applied questions outside Peterson's own primary domain within Australia in the second contribution. He pays homage to Peterson as the recipient for 1999 of the Lucy Mair Medal for Applied Anthropology from the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland by engaging in 'his longstanding interest in the intersection between legal, political, socio-cultural and economic development issues amongst indigenous communities in Oceania'. Similar to Keen's chapter, Van Meijl's contribution is an ethnographically based deconstruction—in this case, of the term 'community' and of the implications poorly conceived notions of community can have on development projects.

The ensuing chapters revolve around demand sharing—the concept Professor Peterson deservedly is most famous for (as Altman points out, Peterson's 1993 paper 'Demand sharing: reciprocity and the pressure for generosity among foragers' is his most cited work). Nic Peterson coined the term and defined the concept in response to specific questions raging in debates about generosity, sharing and demanding in the hunter and gatherer literature generally, which he applied to the Australian Aboriginal ethnographic context specifically. Gomes translates this concept from its original context to two Orang Asli populations in Malaysia: Menraq, who were once nomadic foragers, and Semai, who used to be subsistence-focused swidden horticulturalists. Gomes uses demand sharing as the lens through which to examine the intersection between these traditional economies and the cash economy. In an eerie inversion, Kwok, in turn, examines demand sharing in a small Koori community on the South Coast of New South Wales, concluding that there, today, practices related to demand sharing test not only relationships but one's commitment to Aboriginality. Given the 'shame and stigma that cling to Aboriginality and the multiple disadvantages that accrue as a result of membership of that minority', this commitment is borne at heavy cost, according to Kwok. Her chapter goes right to the heart—albeit in a different way than is usual—of the 'dilemma' of Indigenous policy: why things are the way they are and what can be done about it. The following three

chapters address these two questions from a number of angles. Saethre explores the dilemma of why Warlpiri people continue to live on a diet that includes many takeaway meals while being fully aware that this impacts significantly on their (already) poor health. His analysis is grounded in the intersection of welfare colonialism and demand sharing at the Lajamanu (Northern Territory) tuckshop and the fact that, in the end, for socio-cultural as much as for regional and colonial reasons, there is *no* choice. Altman's approach to demand sharing lies in analysing the ways in which the concept since its original coining by Peterson has been bent to mean more than Peterson intended it to. Demonstrating that it has become a gloss for *all* distributive measures in Aboriginal Australia, Altman illuminates the dangers of lifting terminology out of the anthropological domain by showing how recent popular and conservatively oriented publications conflate demand sharing with practices called 'humbugging'. The resultant policies emanating from this error seek to eliminate demand-sharing practices entirely as they are mistakenly believed to be the primary cause of continuing socioeconomic disadvantage within Indigenous communities. Martin calls this 'alchemical' thinking. In his chapter, he counters the assumptions underlying writings of development economist Helen Hughes from the Centre for Independent Studies and Gary Johns, President of the Bennelong Society, with his own extensive experience at Aurukun, Queensland. Through his analysis, he argues for anthropologically informed policy that pursues realistic avenues and against current policy formulas, which, as he demonstrates, are akin to magical thinking.

These 13 chapters are bookended and complemented by pieces written by two of Nic Peterson's eminent colleagues and contemporaries. In the Foreword, Fred Myers pays homage to Nic Peterson's academic achievements and their friendship of more than three decades, by painting a picture of a scholar characterised in equal parts by his fearlessness, intellectual curiosity and generosity. Myers appositely sets the scene, as his sentiments about Nic Peterson as colleague, friend and mentor echo across the pages of this volume. In the Afterword, Diane Austin-Broos, in turn, brings together the many strands of this volume and, in an evocative image, sums up Nic Peterson's '*Impartye*', or tracks, across the discipline of anthropology and across wider Indigenous Australia.

Conclusion: Nic's gift

In opening this volume, I took the difficulty Nic presented us with in deciding what to call him within its pages and his personal technique for giving speeches (of which I have had numerous firsthand experiences) as primary orienting points for the volume itself. He is both a careful ethnographer and an engaging dinner companion, a long-term and influential member of a substantial anthropology

department and a dear friend. My hope is that by following his speech-giving practice of presenting some ethnographic observations, weaving them together in a new configuration and developing an analysis from that exercise, I have begun to sketch a picture both of the man and of the volume that follows.

When we set out to edit this volume, we thought that Nic's passion about the link between data, or ethnography, and anthropological knowledge would bring the contributions together and constitute an appropriate way of honouring his tireless work as mentor, colleague and scholar. Writing this Introduction as I see the volume before me, it is strikingly clear that what holds this volume together and what honours Nic is something that goes beyond his passion about ethnography and anthropology; the gift Nic has given us lies in valuing (and teaching us to value) this epistemological process without directing its theoretical orientation. Nic Peterson's most outstanding contribution to anthropology is a paradox, it comes about through what he has *declined* to do; despite his own deep convictions, despite his own profound and extensive anthropological interests and despite the impressive number of students he has supervised, he has *not* founded a school, nor has he established a dogma for others to follow. Instead, he has fostered the pursuit of anthropological knowledge through the analysis of ethnographic findings and thus promoted a grounded, ethnographically based, reflexive anthropology irrespective of topic, region or theoretical inclination. This is a notable and, considering the discipline itself and academia more generally, a highly unusual and gracious achievement. The gift is a testament to Nic's generosity, and to Professor Peterson's standing.

Acknowledgments

I am grateful for the advice of one of the anonymous reviewers, which helped me reformulate my ideas for this Introduction, and to Marcus Barber and John Carty for generous helpings of red ink.

References

- Musharbash, Y. 2008. *Yuendumu Everyday. Contemporary Life in Remote Aboriginal Australia*. Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press.
- Peterson, N. 1993. Demand sharing: reciprocity and the pressure for generosity among foragers. *American Anthropologist* 95 (4): 860–74.
- Peterson, J. N. and N. Sebag-Montefiore, 1963. A note on the use of the Polaroid land camera in the field. *Man* 63: 58.

Pinney, C. and N. Peterson (eds), 2003. *Photography's Other Histories*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Rumsey, A. 2004. Ethnographic macro-tropes and anthropological theory. *Anthropological Theory* 4 (3): 267–98.