Introduction: Mana Anew

Matt Tomlinson and Ty P. Kāwika Tengan

Mana, like culture, is a term that once inspired anthropological theory but now lives an ambiguous half-life in scholarly discourse. The goal of this book is to refocus attention on mana for three reasons. First is the simple fact that many people in Oceania and elsewhere use the term prominently in political, religious, and artistic projects as well as everyday discourse. Although mainstream anthropological attention to mana waned at the end of the twentieth century, discourse about mana thrives in many Oceanic societies. It also circulates outside of traditional Oceanic contexts—sometimes far outside, as in New Age movements, fantasy fiction and online gaming. The second reason to focus on mana anew is that it can offer scholars fresh insights about relationships between aesthetics, ethics, and power and authority. Third, a new focus on mana has the potential to generate new forms of anthropological practice. By engaging collaboratively with Indigenous communities on this specific topic, anthropologists, Indigenous and otherwise, can actively take part in developing new understandings of mana that have practical consequences—the production of new mana, in effect. The authors of the following chapters examine mana from multiple angles that converge on a single point: the contention that thinking about mana at this historical moment is ethnographically vital and theoretically promising in new ways.
Anthropological articulations

The conventional history of western scholarship on mana begins with the Anglican missionary-anthropologist R.H. Codrington’s *The Melanesians*, published in 1891. Other missionaries had paid close attention to mana decades before this, however, as they tried to understand Oceanic ideologies of human and spiritual power. For example, Lorrin Andrews published a Hawaiian-language vocabulary in 1836 that included, among its definitions of mana, ‘power, might, supernatural power, divine power’, ‘powerful, strong’, and as the verb *ho’omana*, ‘to ascribe power, to worship, to render homage’ (Andrews 1836: 98). John Davies’ Tahitian dictionary of 1851 defined the term as ‘power, might, influence’, ‘powerful, mighty, affluent’, and ‘to be in power, possess influence’ (Davies 1991...
[1851]: 129).\(^1\) A dictionary of Samoan by George Pratt, from 1862, translated mana succinctly as ‘supernatural power’ and ‘to exert supernatural power’ (Pratt 1862: 146). Many more examples could be listed; our point is simply that mana was squarely in missionaries’ fields of view before it gained widespread scholarly visibility, and it played a vital but complex role in Bible translations in many Oceanic languages.\(^2\)

Codrington wrote a letter in 1877 to Max Müller in which he first defined mana in the way that would become classic in anthropology. Müller quoted Codrington’s letter in his second Hibbert Lecture of 1878, and it is worth quoting the quotation in turn:

Mr. R.H. Codrington, an experienced missionary and a thoughtful theologian, says in a letter, dated July 7, 1877, from Norfolk Island: ‘The religion of the Melanesians consists, as far as belief goes, in the persuasion that there is a supernatural power about, belonging to the region of the unseen; and, as far as practice goes, in the use of means of getting this power turned to their own benefit. The notion of a Supreme Being is altogether foreign to them, or indeed of any Being occupying a very elevated place in their world.’

... And again: ‘There is a belief in a force altogether distinct from physical power, which acts in all kinds of ways for good and evil, and which it is of the greatest advantage to possess or control. This is Mana. The word is common, I believe, to the whole Pacific, and people have tried very hard to describe what it is in different regions. I think I know what our people mean by it, and that meaning seems to me to cover all that I hear about it elsewhere. It is a power or influence, not physical, and in a way, supernatural; but it shows itself in physical force, or in any kind of power or excellence which a man possesses. This Mana is not fixed in anything, and can be conveyed in almost anything; but spirits, whether disembodied souls or supernatural beings, have it, and can impart it; and it essentially belongs to personal beings to originate it, though it may act through the medium of water, or a stone, or a bone. All Melanesian

\(^1\) Note the switch from ‘influence’ to ‘affluence’ in Davies’ translation, which could indicate a link of mana with prosperity—or could simply be a printer’s error.

\(^2\) Tregear’s *Maori-Polynesian Comparative Dictionary*, published in the same year as Codrington’s classic work and drawing on many previously published sources, lists definitions of mana in Māori, Samoan, Tahitian, Hawaiian, Tongan, Rarotongan, Marquesan, Mangarevan and Paumotan, with comparative references to mana in Fijian, Malagasy, Malay and Sikayana (Tregear 1891: 203).
religion, in fact, consists in getting this Mana for one’s self, or getting it used for one’s benefit—all religion, that is, as far as religious practices go, prayers and sacrifices.’ (Müller 1910 [1878]: 55–56)

After this lengthy quotation, Müller adds a brief summary of his own, describing mana as ‘one of the early, helpless expressions of what the apprehension of the infinite would be in its incipient stages, though even the Melanesian Mana shows ample traces both of development and corruption’ (Müller 1910 [1878]: 56). Thus mana, in Müller’s use of Codrington, is an index pointing toward infinity: a name for a force that transcends all names and exceeds all forces. In this paradoxical position it might seem like a mystical concept, but note how Müller attempts to historicise mana by slotting it into an evolutionary progression (it belongs to the ‘incipient stages’ of religious understanding) while commenting on the fact that it has undergone both ‘development’ and ‘corruption’. Codrington himself, in his famous 1891 publication, emphasised the fact that mana was not taken for granted, but subject to testing: ‘the presence of it is ascertained by proof … all conspicuous success is a proof that a man has mana’ (Codrington 1957 [1891]: 119–20).

Mana became an object of widespread scholarly interest because of this Codrington- and Müller-derived understanding of it as an elementary religious concept, people’s foundational attempt to understand the limits and mechanisms of power for effective action in the world (see also Golub and Peterson, this volume). The core of Codrington’s definition, still quoted often, is that mana ‘is what works to effect everything which is beyond the ordinary power of men, outside the common processes of nature’ (Codrington 1957 [1891]: 118–19). Seen in this way, it has strong associations with divinity, magic and charisma, and it is no wonder that nineteenth- and early twentieth-century missionaries and anthropologists focused on it so intensely.

Focusing on mana, for that era’s anthropology, largely meant identifying its role in the evolution of religious thought and practice. Émile Durkheim, for example, identified mana as the ‘totemic principle’, the foundational concept (found under many names) through which the collective consciousness symbolises itself to itself. Describing totemism as ‘the religion … of an anonymous and impersonal force’, he wrote that mana was one name for this force, and thus the same elementary idea denoted by Australian Aboriginal totems, Algonquin manitou, Siouan wakan, Iroquois orenda, and so forth (1965 [1915]: 217, 222–223; after
making these comparisons, he duly quotes Codrington). Durkheim’s nephew, Marcel Mauss, credited Codrington’s work as ‘admirably observed and described’, then followed his uncle in comparing mana with analogous terms from different languages, and defined mana in part as ‘power, par excellence, the genuine effectiveness of things which corroborates their practical actions without annihilating them … It is the spirit which contains all efficacy and all life’ (Mauss 1972 [1950]: 109, 111). R.R. Marett paired mana with *tabu* (taboo), proposing that the former was ‘the positive aspect of the supernatural’ and the latter was the negative one: ‘negatively, the supernatural is *tabu*, not to be lightly approached, because, positively, it is *mana*, instinct with a power above the ordinary’ (Marett 1929: 99). Taken together as the *tabu-mana* formula, Marett suggested, they offered a better minimal definition of religion than E.B. Tylor’s ‘animism’ did.3

A critical backlash against these universalist and evolutionary tendencies began to develop before long. Ian Hogbin compared Guadalcanal, Malaita and Ontong Java (in the Solomon Islands) and Wogeo (in Papua New Guinea) and concluded that mana was an Indigenous concept in the first two places but not in the latter two; thus mana cannot be considered a universal concept, and any attempt to theorise ‘primitive’ religion in terms of mana is inherently flawed (Hogbin 1936: 274; see also Eliade 1958: 21; Smith 2002). Raymond Firth noted that in the hands of scholars such as Durkheim, Mauss, and Marett, ‘the word *mana* becomes something of a technical term describing a specialized abstraction of the theoretical anthropologist and, as such, may have little in common with the same term as used in native phraseology’ (Firth 1940: 487; see also Evans-Pritchard 1965). In pointed contrast, Firth went on to provide a densely detailed description of what mana and the partly synonymous *manu* meant in Tikopia.4

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3 When Sigmund Freud drew on the term ‘taboo’ to theorise the repression of desire, he adopted the understanding of mana as a kind of contagious force, or ‘[a] peculiar power inherent in persons and ghosts, which can be transmitted from them to inanimate objects, [and] is regarded as a source of the taboo’ (Freud 1918 [1913]: 29). He also quoted Northcote W. Thomas’ article on taboo from the eleventh edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, which characterised *mana* as electricity which charges people and things: ‘They are the seat of tremendous power which is transmissible by contact, and may be liberated with destructive effect if the organisms which provoke its discharge are too weak to resist it’ (quoted in Freud 1918 [1913]: 29).

4 R.R. Marett, however, had explicitly dismissed this kind of criticism decades earlier, writing that ‘[w]hen the science of Comparative Religion employs a native expression such as *mana*, or *tabu*, as a general category, it is obliged to disregard to some extent its original or local meaning’ (Marett 1929: 99).
It was Claude Lévi-Strauss who pushed the anthropological critique furthest when he argued that mana serves as a ‘floating signifier’, a sign that arises from a gap between knowledge and symbolism. Concepts like mana, he wrote, are ‘somewhat like algebraic symbols, [and] occur to represent an indeterminate value of signification, in itself devoid of meaning and thus susceptible of receiving any meaning at all’ (1987 [1950]: 55, 63). Agreeing with Mauss that mana is a universal type, but developing the analysis according to his own structuralist model, Lévi-Strauss wrote that ‘conceptions of the mana type’ are likely ‘a universal and permanent form of thought’:

I see in mana, wakan, orenda, and other notions of the same type, the conscious expression of a semantic function, whose role is to enable symbolic thinking to operate despite the contradiction inherent in it. That explains the apparently insoluble antinomies attaching to the notion of mana, which struck ethnographers so forcibly, and on which Mauss shed light: force and action; quality and state; substantive, adjective and verb all at once; abstract and concrete; omnipresent and localised. And, indeed, mana is all those things together; but is that not precisely because it is none of those things, but a simple form, or to be more accurate, a symbol in its pure state, therefore liable to take on any symbolic content whatever? (Lévi-Strauss 1987 [1950]: 53, 63–64; emphasis in original)

Mana means diverse things, according to Lévi-Strauss, because it floats in a sea of semiotic overload. He slyly placed mana alongside the divine at the limits of signification, writing that mana’s mediation of knowledge and symbolism always involves a non-fit and overspill which divine understanding alone can soak up (Lévi-Strauss 1987 [1950]: 62). In this way, mana keeps structures coherent partly by exceeding them.5

5 See also James Faubion (2010: 93), who notes that floating signifiers are ‘especially effective carrier[s] of conceptions of the transcendent and the absolute’ but also, in their proliferation of possibilities—their ‘omnipotentiality’, as Faubion puts it—they are ‘also auratic, atmospheric, ineffable, beyond articulation. The floating signifier is thus made for the mystic as the semiotic abyss that is also a plenitude and thus a topos of the excess that can only be experienced, never pinned down or spelled out.’ A resonant instance of this gesturing toward ineffability and transcendence comes in the work of the Samoan theologian Ama’amalele Tofaeono, who writes that mana ‘cannot be clearly explained in words, but must be experienced’ (Tofaeono 2000: 169; see also Oroi, this volume).
Christopher Bracken presents the Lévi-Strauss moment as a definitive ending: ‘From 1891, when Codrington started the craze, until 1950, when Lévi-Strauss brought it abruptly to a close, the discourse of anthropology could not stop speaking of mana’ (Bracken 2007: 134). Indeed, since Lévi-Strauss’ critique, it is difficult to think of mana without thinking of anthropological projects that assign meaning presumptively rather than trace articulations carefully. And yet, pace Bracken, mainstream anthropology (crazed or otherwise) continued to attend to mana in the late twentieth century, although not with the same field-defining prominence as before. Three notable examples are found in the work of Roger Keesing, Valerio Valeri, and Bradd Shore.

Keesing decried Codrington’s influence on studies of mana and followed Firth in criticising scholars who turned mana into a thing onto which they could project their own metaphysical ideas. He tried to identify shared characteristics of mana across Oceania, and wrote that the term ‘in Oceanic languages [is] canonically a stative verb, not a noun: things and human enterprises and efforts are mana’ (Keesing 1984: 138; see also Keesing 1985, 1988, 1992). Valeri, examining the use of mana in nineteenth-century Hawaiian texts, noted that the term does not appear especially often but that the concept of mana was evidently central to traditional religious practices. It was based on ‘fellowship’, or reciprocal relations in which gods, the source of mana, are made mana by human worship (Valeri 1985: 103; see also Valeri 1990). Shore (1989) has offered the most recent comprehensive overview of mana, focusing on Polynesia, and concludes that it is always associated with ‘generative potency’ and vitality which comes from the gods. He also argues persuasively for a distinction between western Polynesian conceptions of power keyed to sacred but ‘desexualized’ relationships between brothers and sisters and eastern Polynesian conceptions of power keyed to sexual relationships between husbands and wives.6

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6 Other notable recent studies situate mana in relation to headhunting and the nurturance of blessing-bestowing ancestors (Dureau 2000) and ecology, seasonality and production (Mondragón 2004). Outside of anthropology, however, social-evolutionary presuppositions live on in the work of scholars who treat mana as an ur-power, a label for spiritual efficacy that is not only (ab)original but is also prototypical. For example, in her History of God, Karen Armstrong initially identifies mana as a Pacific Islands concept, but then goes on to apply the term to the religious understandings of the Babylonians, Israelites and ‘the ancient Middle East’ in general (see Armstrong 1993: 4, 7, 13, 15).
Indigenous scholars, artists, and activists have expressed and taken up concepts of mana in ways that sometimes resonate with classical anthropological representations and sometimes do not. Meanwhile, mana has become a feature of various forms of deterritorialised global culture including the New Age movement and the virtual worlds of gaming. We now turn to new uses of mana in order to ground ourselves ethnographically as we ask: what is going on with mana right now?

Now in effect

One of the main reasons to refocus on mana, as mentioned above, is its prominence outside of academic anthropology. In Oceania, discourse about mana has flourished in political, religious and artistic fields, with especially strong contributions from activists, theologians, poets and novelists.

In places like Aotearoa New Zealand and Hawai‘i, connections between mana and political power are frequently made explicit. Indeed, several scholars have characterised the acquisition of mana as historically the major aim of Māori politics (e.g. Bowden 1979; Parsonson 1981; Salmond 1975; see also Lian 1987). The Māori Declaration of Independence, from 1835, invoked both mana and the neologism Kingitanga (from ‘king’) in referring to ‘sovereign power and authority’, prompting Māori author Sir Mason Durie to write that ‘Mana has both worldly and ethereal meanings, but … as used in the Declaration of Independence it spells out authority and control’ (Durie 1998: 2, 247, 248). Critics of the translation of the Treaty of Waitangi from 1840 have noted that the neologism kawanatanga was used in translating ‘sovereignty’, whereas ‘had the word mana been used, then the purpose of the treaty as an instrument ceding sovereignty would have been absolutely clear’ (Walker 1984: 268). In the past few decades, several political parties have given themselves names that draw on mana as an emblem, including Mana Motuhake (translated as ‘separate sovereignty’ by Walker 1984: 280) in the late 1970s, the evanescent Mana Wahine Te Ira Tangata in the late 1990s, and the Mana Party, created by Hone Harawira in April 2011 (see, respectively, Walker 1984: 278–80; Catt 2000; New Zealand Herald 2011). Beyond political parties, the terms
mana motuhake and mana wahine are in wider circulation as labels for movements and approaches focused on Māori interests (see e.g. Pihama 2001; Smith 1992).

Valeri, writing of the eighteenth-century Hawaiian chiefly class, described ‘god-given mana’ as ‘the true source of legitimacy’ in claiming rank (1990: 168). Lilikalā Kame‘elehiwa (1992: 49) characterised Kauikeaouli Kamehameha III, who authored the Hawaiian Kingdom’s first set of modern laws beginning in 1839, as a king ‘in a constant … search of the mana that protects and empowers’. Contemporary Kanaka ‘Ōiwi (Indigenous Hawaiians) continue to articulate mana with sovereignty projects and aspirations in numerous ways (Trask 1999: 91–92; Tengan 2008: 158–59). Efforts to reclaim individual and collective mana, believed to reside in bones (iwi), have been mapped onto struggles to protect burial sites from developments and to repatriate Native Hawaiian ancestral remains from museums over the past 25 years; these experiences have also, in part, led to the reclaiming of the term Kanaka ‘Ōiwi (literally ‘People of the Bone’).
as an identity marker (Ayau and Tengan 2002: 177–79). Since 2007–08, the organisation Movement for Aloha No ka ‘Āina (MANA) has been advocating a platform of independence and social justice that includes the protection of burials ‘in hopes to increase the reciprocal flow of mana within relationships spiritual and physical’ (MANA 2013). At the same time, the Office of Hawaiian Affairs (OHA), a state agency established in 1978 to administer funds and programs for Native Hawaiians, has recently unveiled as their new slogan ‘Mana is our Legacy’ (Crabbe 2013). In short, mana is used as an emblem, a defining element which activists and officials use to both represent and generate a sense of political effectiveness.

In modern Oceania, mana is often linked to Christianity. The historian Malama Meleisea, observing how Christianity ‘transformed the nature of chiefly authority’ in Samoa, writes that missionaries and Samoan church leaders who replaced traditional priests were characterised as bearers of a new kind of mana: ‘Their mana was God’s “grace”, which is the contemporary meaning of mana in the Samoan language’ (Meleisea 1987: 13; see also Hardin this volume; Shore 1982: 248). Theologians have drawn upon mana to articulate their visions of modern Oceania and the relationship between divine power and human agency in Indigenous Christianity.7 For example, the Methodist theologian Ilaitia Tuwere, writing from an explicitly Fijian cultural context, argues that mana ‘bridges the gulf’ between land and people (called the vanua) and the church (Tuwere 2002: 136). This makes it central to Indigenous Fijian social relations, uniting markedly political and religious realms of authority, especially the chiefly system and the Methodist Church. But Tuwere, with admirable scholarly caution, writes that ‘The concept of mana poses an immediate problem for a sustained theological reflection because of its ambiguity’ (2002: 135).

7 Keesing, curiously, had invoked theology to explain why mana is often characterised as a substance in eastern Polynesia—the kind of characterisation he accused anthropologists of making so recklessly elsewhere. Whereas anthropologists had turned mana into a substance because of ‘their own folk metaphors of power and the theories of nineteenth-century physics’, according to Keesing, eastern Polynesians did so because their societies developed aristocracies who depended on ‘a class of theologians’ to validate and celebrate their sacred power (Keesing 1984: 148, 152; emphasis removed). Regarding Christian influence on conceptions of mana, however, Keesing had no interest. Indeed, he analytically separated (real, true, pre-Christian) mana from whatever modern Oceanic Christians might say about it, writing that ‘despite the wholesale destruction of Oceania religions by Christianity, we have … ethnographic evidence on mana’ (Keesing 1984: 138). This kind of analysis misses the point that Oceanic Christianities incorporated and transformed other religious beliefs and practices and vice versa.
Rather than fight this ambiguity by offering a new definition, he uses this ambiguity as a theological tool, writing that mana ‘does not exhaust the nature of God but … is the only meaningful way of describing God and what his power may mean in the Fijian context’ (165).

Mana has also received vigorous attention in the arts. At the bare level of titles, several periodicals have taken Mana as their name, including a literary journal published in Suva, Fiji, beginning in the mid-1970s; a multicultural and multilingual newspaper in Auckland in the late 1970s; and two glossy popular magazines, one Māori-oriented and one Hawaiian-oriented. For that matter, Mana has also been the title of a historical novel (Jackson 1969), an illustrated inspirational booklet (Zambucka 1974), a Hawaiian slack-key guitar album (Pahinui 1997), and the evening show performed for several years at the Polynesian Cultural Center (PCC), the Mormon theme park in La‘ie, Hawai‘i. But beyond mere titles, mana has been the theme and subject matter for novels and poems. A key theme of Alan Duff’s controversial Once Were Warriors is the loss and recovery of mana, with the brawling, alcoholic Jake Heke able to demonstrate his strength only by annihilating himself and his family while his wife, Beth, turns to Māori tradition for new hope. In a key passage, Beth imagines herself addressing a large audience, lamenting:

And we used to war all the time, us Maoris. Against each other. True. It’s true, honest to God, audience. Hated each other. Tribe against tribe. Savages. We were savages. But warriors, eh. It’s very important to remember that. Warriors. Because, you see, it was what we lost when you, the white audience out there, defeated us. Conquered us. Took our land, our mana, left us with nothing. But the warriors thing got handed down, see. Well, sort of handed down; in a mixed-up sense it did. (Duff 1990: 41)

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9 The current show at the PCC is titled ‘Hā: Breath of Life’, and its main character is named Mana (Polynesian Cultural Center 2013).
Beth’s lament, in the novel, becomes a defiantly triumphant speech in the film version, where she tells Jake, ‘Our people once were warriors. But not like you, Jake. They were people with mana, pride. People with spirit. If my spirit can survive living with you for eighteen years, then I can survive anything’ (Tamahori 1994).
The double movement of mana’s loss and recuperation, seen so starkly in *Once Were Warriors*, was characterised by Albert Wendt as integral to emerging creative arts in Oceania. Wendt wrote that colonialism had destroyed sources of mana (which he equated with ‘artistic and imaginative energy’) but also created the possibility of a new kind of artist, free to explore his or her ‘own mana unfettered by accepted conventions’ (1980a: xiv, xvi; see also Pao 2014). Mana is said to be manifest in diverse types of performance, such as music, dance and oratory. The revitalisation of the Hawaiian language has
been simultaneously framed as a revival of the mana of words, which find their fullest expression and effectiveness when spoken, sung or chanted. In the case of the Hawaiian/R&B/Reggae artist Mana Kaleilani Caceres, the combination of musical genres and the English and Hawaiian languages in his widely popular song allowed him to assert that the US ‘couldn’t take the mana’ of the Hawaiian people (Caceres 2001). The 2010 Hawai‘i International Film Festival’s ‘Audience Favorite’ was Mana i ka Leo: Power of the Voice (Carrillo et al. 2010), a 30-minute documentary on Hawaiian chant (oli) that successfully aimed to immerse the audience in an experience of power, beauty and emotion of the art. In her poem ‘He Mana Kō ka Leo’, national slam poet champion Jamaica Osorio reflects on the multiple ways that this generation of artists has given voice to the Hawaiian Nation and ‘made mana a tangible performance to be called upon’ (2013).

In the newest of mana’s new iterations, the term has become detached from Oceania in deterritorialised global culture, as described by the concluding chapters in this volume: Rachel Morgain’s on New Age mana and Alex Golub’s and Jon Peterson’s on mana in fantasy fiction and games such as World of Warcraft. In such locations, mana’s potential universalism is pushed to its furthest limit as a thing detachable from place, not dependent on ethnic, political or religious identity, and able to be gathered up and spent in new ways.

The New Age case is an especially vivid example of mana’s transformation in appropriation. New Age beliefs about mana were developed prominently in the work of Max Freedom Long, a mid-twentieth-century American author who claimed to have rediscovered ancient Hawaiian religious principles. Long claimed that the former curator of Honolulu’s Bishop Museum, William Tufts Brigham, had spent decades collecting information from Hawaiian experts (kāhuna). Brigham then supposedly passed this knowledge onto Long: ‘Dr. Brigham, knowing that the end of his life was approaching, and having found a young man with a consuming interest and desire to dig deeper into the mystery, made ready to lay his robe on my shoulders. He trained me in the proper approach, and gave me all the information he had gathered over the long period’ (Long 1953: 7). Long established a group called Huna Research (the Hawaiian term huna connotes secrecy, and Long used it as a label for his own metaphysical system)
and spent the next several decades publishing his ‘discoveries’ in books and bulletins. A posthumously published collection of some of his short writings was devoted specifically to mana (Long 1981).\footnote{The author of a recent article on the relationship between William Tufts Brigham and Max Freedom Long argues that the men could not have known each other well and might not even have met (Chai 2011).}

In Long’s pseudo-Hawaiian framework, mana is a universal life force and can be used to heal. It can also be used for more mundane tasks like sharpening razor blades. One of Long’s followers, Serge King, claimed to have invented several mana-generating and channelling machines, including the Manaplate—‘a sheet of metal between two sheets of plastic’—and the Manabox—‘a small, copper-lined plastic box 3” x 3” x ½” [7.62cm x 7.62cm x 1.27cm] … A razor blade can be sharpened by merely aligning it properly and laying it on top of the cover. Twenty-five to fifty shaves with a [Gillette] Blue Blade are common, and over one hundred shaves have been reported’ (King 1978: 59, 60). King referred to the well-known works of Wilhelm Reich and Franz Mesmer in justifying his claims about harnessing vital energy, and he experimented with razor blades (among other things) because other advocates of psychic power had already argued that placing them inside pyramid-shaped containers would keep them sharp.

New Age understandings of mana veer sharply from traditional Oceanic ones, to say the least. To many readers, King’s Manaplates and Manaboxes will seem like comical hybrids of spirit and science, distant cousins of Victorian parlour photographs showing ghostly faces hovering above the faces of the living. But to dismiss New Age understandings as false and fanciful would be to miss the key point that uptake creates its own meanings in new contexts. Long’s and King’s mana is not, ultimately, the mana described by Hawaiian kāhuna, and it is vulnerable to the charge of being a form of ‘disrespect, exploitation, and cultural distortion and appropriation’, as Lisa Kahaleole Hall (2005: 412) characterises Huna work. But this take on mana has now been around for decades, both shaping and fitting into a global philosophy of the power of positive thinking and the cultivation of individual spirituality. And this global philosophy continues to manifest itself in unexpected places: divinatory ‘mana cards’, for example, or the ingredients list for a plastic container of shredded pork.
In considering treatments of mana in such contexts as New Age discourse and fantasy games, scholars must be careful not to critique them by homogenising Oceanic mana in order to use it as a foil. If a single fact was well established by the mid and late twentieth-century critiques in anthropology, it is that mana has diverse meanings across the cultural, historical, religious, and political contexts spanning the Pacific. Understanding the divergent uses of the term ‘mana’ does not require endorsing any of them; rather, it demands close attention to the chains of transmission and transformation that have shaped and reshaped what mana signifies and the values it both absorbs and manifests, including silence as well as speech, loss as well as gain, novelty as well as tradition.

Aesthetics and ethics

In this volume, we argue that the analysis of mana, which is typically framed in terms of power, authority and efficacy, can benefit by breaking this frame to ask first about aesthetic and ethical dimensions,
letting questions of power emerge as they are relevant. This is a tactic on our part, a strategy for developing new insights. We acknowledge that in order to understand the pragmatics of mana, one needs to understand ideologies of power. But if one begins with power, it is too easy to relegate aesthetics and ethics to secondary importance, whereas the latter may decisively shape the possible expressions of the former.

In writing about the aesthetics of mana, we are referring to the ways in which mana is understood in terms like repetition, balance and complementarity. For example, writing of Hawai‘i, Herman Pi’ikea Clark explains that ‘the repetitive features carved onto a temple idol … contribut[ed] to the aesthetic quality and appearance [and] also served as a mnemonic feature to aid in the recall of information to those who had the capacity to read its design’ (2006: 12). As these images were among the most important vessels for channelling the mana of the divine into the world of the living, such patterns established and maintained the genealogical linkages between gods and people. Adrienne Kaeppler makes a similar argument for tattoo designs when she writes that the ‘primarily linear … rows of triangles, chevrons, and crescents/arches’, the last of which are also found on drums, ‘may be symbolic of human beings joined together as lineal and collateral descendants who trace their relationships back to the gods’ (1988: 168). Chants, which Valeri calls ‘total works of art’, similarly use repetition to symbolise and effect relations of mana (Valeri 1990: 177). As Stokes (1930: 12–13) puts it:

The mere recitation of names forms a chain along which the accumulated mana of ages untold may be moved into the recipient shell … The chain then becomes a verbal tube, the leaks of which are closed by the repetition of the innumerable name variations. (Cited in Valeri 1990: 178)

Significantly, contemporary Kanaka ‘Ōiwi artists and performers continue to draw on these ancestral patterns in projects meant to channel mana to future generations (Clark 2011; Goodyear-Ka’ōpua 2013; see also Tamaira 2015).

Another way to analyse mana through aesthetics is to take a linguistic approach focused on poetics in performance. Such an approach can draw on, among other resources, Roman Jakobson’s description of the ‘poetic function’ of language. Jakobson argued that language has
several basic functions, each keyed to an element in a speech event. One of these is the poetic function, manifest in a ‘focus on the message for its own sake’ (Jakobson 1960: 356). With the poetic function, a message’s meaning or force depends less on speakers’ intentions and the context of speaking than on features inherent to the message itself. Jakobson argued that the standard structural-linguistic model of meaning as the intersection of selection and combination is skewed for poetic purposes. In structural linguistics, following Ferdinand de Saussure, a phrase such as ‘mana deserves attention’ is meaningful because of (1) the selection of these particular terms from a universe of alternatives (one could replace ‘mana’ in this phrase with tabu, or culture, or power, or discourse, etc.), and (2) the grammatical combination of selected terms. Jakobson argues that the poetic function, in contrast, ‘projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination’ (Jakobson 1960: 358). That is, the axis of equivalence is mapped onto the syntagmatic connections between terms. In Tomlinson’s (2006) argument about mana in Fijian ceremonial language, mana is analysed in this way as it serves poetically to make a ritual effective by drawing out relationships of equivalence into formulaic ritual sequences.

We hasten to add that we do not see structural linguistics as the only, or even the most useful, way to rethink mana—and not only because it was the matrix within which Lévi-Strauss developed his argument about mana being ‘liable to take on any symbolic content whatever’. The main problem is that the explanatory power of structural linguistics has been surpassed by that of Peircean semiotics; it is more useful to examine mana’s iconic, indexical and symbolic significance than to get caught up in contrasts between selection and combination, or, for that matter, to place too much emphasis on whether mana is a verb or a noun, à la Keesing. In referring to Jakobson, we simply mean to emphasise that it is possible to analyse mana primarily in terms of poetics just as it can be analysed fruitfully in terms of aesthetics more broadly.

Ethics is another key area in which anthropologists can develop and sharpen analyses of mana. In a recent volume on ethics in everyday speech and action, Michael Lambek writes that attention to the ethical can help anthropologists avoid falling into the trap of reducing everything to the self-interested pursuit of power. ‘Ethnographers commonly find that the people they encounter are trying to do what
they consider right or good, are being evaluated according to criteria of what is right and good, or are in some debate about what constitutes the human good’, he writes. ‘Yet anthropological theory tends to overlook all this in favor of analyses that emphasize structure, power, and interest’ (2010a: 1). Although mana is typically associated in the scholarly literature with power—and power, aesthetics and ethics are not neatly separated domains—we want to ground the analysis of mana in aesthetics and ethics so that power emerges as an object of investigation when relevant but does not shape investigations through presupposition.

Classic scholarship on mana did in fact pose the question of whether mana was ethically marked. In identifying mana as the totemic principle, Durkheim linked it firmly with moral responsibility: ‘while the totemic principle is a totemic force, it is also a moral power’ (Durkheim 1965 [1915]: 219). Indeed, for Durkheim, the morality of mana is grounded in a way that power and effectiveness are not. Members of a clan, including the totemic figure itself, ‘are morally bound to one another; they have definite duties of assistance, vendetta, etc., towards each other; and it is these duties which constitute kinship’, whereas in terms of power, mana ‘is located nowhere definitely and it is everywhere’ (Durkheim 1965 [1915]: 219, 223). Other scholars, including Codrington, explicitly denied any moral or ethical dimension to mana (see Kolshus, this volume). Marett, for example, wrote that mana and taboo are existential concepts with an ‘absence of moral significance. The mystic potentiality is alike for good and evil’ (Marett 1929: 113).11

Without endorsing an encompassing Durkheimian model of collective consciousness, we suggest that Durkheim’s insight about the fundamentally social nature of mana—a point emphasised by later scholars such as Valeri (1985, 1990) and Wende Elizabeth Marshall (2011)—makes more sense of much Oceanic mana than Codrington’s and Marett’s models of mana as amoral power. As a scholar of Māori philosophy puts it, ‘an important element of mana is the ethical element. In many contexts, when the word mana is used there is not only a claim about what is going on in the world but also some value

11 See also Aletta Biersack (1996: 90–91) for an analysis of mana as knowledge for the Paiela of Papua New Guinea, with the observation that purposeful action, good and bad alike, conjoins bodies with mana-in-minds.
judgment’ (Patterson 2000: 232). There is a value judgment because mana is not a disembodied term but an ethical mediation. Whether it is a mediation between the divine and the human, the demonic and the human, good humans and bad ones, or signs and referents is a dynamic that many Oceanic citizens continue to explore in belief and practice.12

Mary Kawena Pukui, E.W. Haertig and Catherine A. Lee (1972: 152) note that Kanaka ‘Ōiwi believe that ‘mana, abused or misused, could be diminished or even lost’. Thus the proper management of mana entails kuuleana—responsibilities and rights defined in relation to others. Goodyear-Kaʻōpua characterises the anticolonial ‘cultural/political work’ of the Native Hawaiian Charter School Hālau Kū Māna as a process of hoʻomana (‘creating mana’), which she suggests ‘communicate[s] the idea of practices that open the mutual flow of mana within a relationship—cultural practices that work toward pono (justice/balance)’ (2013: 207–08). Speaking with students who walked barefoot and chanted in protest marches in the mid-2000s, she relates how they ‘talked about the importance of being able to see, hear, and feel the mana of a living nation’ and arrived at a ‘sense of kuuleana to add their leo [voice] and mana to that collective Hawaiian voice’ (2013: 209). Goodyear-Kaʻōpua’s kuuleana as an educator and activist extends to her scholarship, which she uses to further hoʻomana the voices and the people with whom she has worked collaboratively.13

Following the lead of Indigenous and other scholars whose research emerges from and contributes to processes of hoʻomana, we suggest that mana offers our field a new way of imagining the aesthetics, ethics and power of anthropological analysis and practice. A reorientation might begin with a genealogical exploration of mana’s transformations in particular locales. Understanding the conditions for the generation of mana would suggest avenues for investigating and theorising the potency of differently mediated relations. One crucial set of anthropological relations to remediate would be with the Indigenous communities whose day-to-day struggles over mana necessitate a stance of engaged collaboration. The implications for this range from

12 For a critique of the view that mana can be equated with truth, put forth most notably by A.M. Hocart (1914) and Marshall Sahlins (1985), see Matt Tomlinson (2009).
13 Goodyear-Ka’ōpua is a co-founder of both the Hālau Kū Māna Charter School and the MANA (Movement for Aloha No ka ‘Āina) political organisation.
research design to dissemination. The first collaborative publication of Indigenous anthropologists in Oceania, which came from a set of redefined meeting spaces, was explicit on this: ‘The most important goal of our sessions and this collection has been the making and maintaining of relationships that create the context for sharing aloha (affection and empathy) and producing mana, a spiritual power and potency that has marked our interactions’ (Tengan, Ka’ili and Fonoiti 2010: 161). So too might this volume, and the dialogues it is meant to engender, find mana anew.

Plan of the book

The volume begins with Noenoe K. Silva’s chapter on transformations in the use of ‘mana’ as a term in Hawaiian political discourse. Drawing on nineteenth-century Hawaiian-language sources, Silva shows that mana was mentioned in early newspapers for purposes of Christian evangelism: it denoted God’s power manifest in performative speech. The Hawaiian kingdom’s first Constitution (1840) did not use the term ‘mana’, but instead used ‘ōlelo’ (meaning ‘speech, language, word, statement, as well as to say, to tell, etc.’) in discussing governmental power(s). However, the Constitution of 1852 did employ mana, bringing together its meaning as power/authority and another meaning, ‘branch’ (here, for branches of government). ‘Hawaiian speakers, readers, and listeners’, Silva argues, ‘would … expect such language play and ambiguity’. Next, she examines the writings of the historian Samuel Mānaiaikalani Kamakau on the Hawaiian ali`i (rulers), including his analysis of the mana of Kamehameha I and the famous Law of the Splintered Paddle. Silva observes how ‘Kamehameha’s pronouncement of the law, or his performance of it, constitutes his mana’. She concludes her chapter by turning to the situation of contemporary Kanaka Hawai`i/Kanaka ʻŌiwi (Native Hawaiians), urging that ‘mana should be revived as a keyword’ for the collective good.

In the following chapter, Ty P. Kāwika Tengan’s examination of ‘the mana of Kū’ remains in Hawai`i and moves the focus to a museum exhibition. The event, held at the Bishop Museum in 2010, reunited three carved figures of Kū for the first time in almost 200 years. (One of the figures is permanently at the Bishop, but the others are at the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem and the British Museum.) Kū is
the short-form name of the Hawaiian god who embodies masculine generative power and is often referred to (reductively, Tengan points out) as ‘the god of war’. Tengan worked with the museum as a consultant and scholar, and thus had direct experience of how people thought and talked about the mana of Kū on this historic occasion. Discussing the exhibition, and people’s experiences of seeing the three figures reunited, he observes how ethical and aesthetic criteria informed people’s expectations of the potential for Kū’s masculine power to be made manifest. Ethically speaking, was it safe to bring the three figures together? After all, the project director, Noelle Kahanu, observed that some older Hawaiians were anxious about ‘the mana … that might be re-animated’. A different perspective was offered by Keone Nunes, a tattoo and hula master, who described the mana as ‘very welcoming … very heartfelt’. In terms of aesthetics, modern-day Hawaiians worked ‘to “read” the designs that were unfamiliar to many’, realising that patterns and motifs were not just decorative but spiritually potent and practically useful. Tengan writes that the creative work of attempting to understand the mana of Kū aesthetically can be ‘viewed as an opportunity for reconnection and recreation of culture and mana’, and he proposes that close engagement of the sort seen at the exhibition can, in the future, foster more productive and trusting ties between Indigenous communities, museums and anthropologists.

Following Tengan’s contribution, Andy Mills turns to pre-Christian Tonga to examine mana’s relationship to tapu (tabu) and chiefliness. Mills develops his argument by focusing on what he calls the ‘manava system’, a complex of bodily relationships based on processes of intake (such as inhaling, drinking, eating and insemination) and outflow (such as exhaling, eliminating, menstruating and giving birth). Although mana and manava are not related linguistically, Mills describes how they seem to intersect conceptually because ‘the performative qualities of mana and chiefliness were also those of great manava’. He examines pre-Christian practices related to different kinds of tabu, which he categorises as ‘episodic’ (a tabu state, eventually fatal, caused by transgression), ‘relational’ (an intrinsically tabu state, such as a commoner’s relationship to a chief), and ‘regulatory’ (the restriction of activities or the consumption of particular foods). Mills presents historical accounts of ritual practices such as genital bloodletting, tattooing and mass ceremonial defecation on the Tu’i Tonga’s tomb as material enactments of metaphysical transformations,
part of a religious system in which articulations of divinity, society and the body ultimately depended on mana’s articulation with tabu in the hierarchy of chiefliness.

Next, Katerina Martina Teaiwa reflects on the possibilities of generating new mana in diaspora, focusing on the situation of Pacific Islanders living in Australia. She observes that those Islanders who achieve social prominence in Australia often do so either as athletes or popular artists, setting up a dynamic in which they may come to be seen as responsible for their communities’ collective mana. This creates significant pressure, but Teaiwa notes that there are also significant opportunities: ‘When Pacific players don’t just play as brown bodies, when they draw media attention to their Pacific heritage and the centrality of “family, faith and culture” … the effect can be powerful.’ She describes her experiences working with the National Rugby League’s Education and Welfare Office as well as its Pacific Council, contributing to projects such as the exhibitions, performances and displays at the celebrated ‘Body Pacifica’ event in western Sydney in 2010 and a leadership camp meant to educate professional rugby players more deeply about their heritage.

The following three chapters explore the history of anthropological scholarship on mana. Alan Rumsey begins his contribution by discussing work on mana from Codrington to Firth and Keesing, and then critiques a recent argument by the linguist Juliette Blevins in which she attempts to trace the term ‘mana’ back to Proto Malayo-Polynesian as well as to locate forms of it in non-Austronesian languages within New Guinea. Next, Rumsey turns to his fieldsite in the Western Highlands of Papua New Guinea and describes how the Tok Pisin loanword pawa (power) is used in ways similar to Firth’s and Keesing’s portrayals of mana. He concludes his chapter with a useful comparison of methods of comparison (‘a meta-level comparison’), focusing on the work of Raymond Williams and Marilyn Strathern. Rumsey observes that this volume’s attention to new mana is close to Williams’ ‘key words’ treatment, and he urges readers to approach ‘the comparative exercise … as one that takes place within a single intercultural field within which terms and multiple forms of understanding circulate and interact with each other’.
Thorgeir Kolshus directly addresses Codrington’s legacy and argues that, despite Keesing’s criticism of his influence, Codrington was well-informed and accurate in his observations and descriptions of mana gleaned from his two years’ experience on Mota Island in northern Vanuatu. Kolshus recognises Codrington’s model of mana in present-day Motese discourse and practice, including its lack of intrinsic moral evaluation. He adds a crucial historical dimension by noting that Motese concepts of mana are shaped by Polynesian influences and have, in turn, affected much of Melanesia due to Motese serving as the *lingua franca* of the Melanesian Mission. Mana, as Kolshus shows, is ‘on the move’, not only within Melanesia and Oceania more widely but also across church denominations in present-day Mota: when the Assemblies of God arrived on the island around a decade earlier, he observes, they did not speak of mana; but now, likely influenced by the Anglicans and more general understandings of power’s operation, they speak of mana in reference to the Holy Spirit. Kolshus concludes that mana ‘bridges central Melanesian notions of agency and efficacy—not as a substitute for pre-Christian versions, but rather as an extension of the old principles, introducing a common cosmological theme that provides a comparative axis through an otherwise culturally and linguistically diverse area’. A close ethnographic and historical focus is necessary for any comparison of mana and similar concepts, Kolshus argues, and he is critical of recent anthropological writing on ontology which (counterintuitively, considering the ontologists’ stated aims) generalises mana to the point where it loses all social grounding and analytic sharpness, mashed ‘into ethnographic pulp’.

The following chapter, by Anglican priest and theologian Aram Oroi analyses anthropological scholarship in light of Oroi’s personal experiences as a clergyman whom people ask to ‘press the button’ to activate mana in the world. As Oroi explains, for Arosi speakers of Makira, Solomon Islands, mana is part of God’s Christian creation. It is used in linguistically versatile ways and is manifest in its effects—it is lived and engaged, rather than extensively theorised. And, crucially, it ‘is associated with relationships and connections’. He reviews the anthropological scholarship on mana and, while revisiting the criticisms of Codrington, observes that Codrington’s scholarship resonates with that of the Solomon Islands theologian Esau Tuza, who writes that a person can ‘direct’ mana through ‘a living relationship’. The activation of mana, expressed metaphorically as pressing a button,
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is something in which a priest such as Oroi plays a crucial role. As he describes in several vivid stories, Anglican priests are asked both to hurt people and heal them by activating mana. A key theological voice in this volume, Oroi points out that ‘it is one thing to observe mana at work. It is another thing to actually become an instrument of mana to direct and manifest mana.’

The book’s eighth chapter, by Alexander Mawyer, resonates with Oroi’s discussion of the mana of institutions but moves from the church to the state. At the heart of Mawyer’s discussion is the remarkable story of Warren, a man born on Pitcairn Island and living on Mangareva, who asks Mawyer to get an official birth certificate made for him so that he will legally exist as a citizen. In making his request, Warren uses forms of the term ‘mana’ several times, referring to the action of ‘stamping’ his identity and authorising and empowering his citizenship. Discussing the case, Mawyer draws on Agamben’s writings on homo sacer to observe the tensions between expressions of power at different levels, from the state to the individual struggling for recognition, and he argues that mana ‘might be seen to be a culturally specific working out of issues of authority, power, and social force elsewhere worked out in terms of imperium and auctoritas (the authority of sovereigns, states, political regimes, collectives, or their agents)’. Mana is therefore central to political subjectivity—but, Mawyer notes, it is not always the object of great discursive attention. In older Mangarevan texts and in his own fieldwork experience on Mangareva, mana was not often mentioned; in older Tahitian texts it was not often mentioned either. Mawyer notes, however, that there is now a popular commercial efflorescence of the term in Tahiti. Indeed, he writes of ‘mana-saturated shopping’ and similar contexts of use which complexly complement potent political uses of the term in the region.

Matt Tomlinson and Sekove Bigitibau then offer a close reading of new Indigenous Fijian theologies of mana and its local counterpart, sau. They observe that in older Fijian language texts, mana is often associated with the act of speaking, but that in Methodist missionaries’ translations of the Bible mana became readily conceptualisable as an object—a thing, detachable from contexts of use and hence useful as an emblem of Indigenous spirituality, an object of philosophical analysis, and something whose aesthetic and ethical qualities can matter in new ways. Although many Fijians continue to use the term
'mana' in performative ritual speech to make the words spoken earlier effective and truthful, Tomlinson and Bigitibau note that not all Indigenous Fijians have considered ‘mana’ to be a genuinely local term. One group that does focus strongly on mana and its implications for understanding Fijian society and spirituality, however, is Methodist theologians, who attend to mana in order to negotiate a careful balance between honouring chiefly authority and displacing it in the name of divine authority.

In the following chapter, Jessica Hardin describes the ‘ordinary ethics’ by which Pentecostals in Samoa seek to channel divine mana. Like Tomlinson and Bigitibau, she analyses the relationship between a pair of terms, here, mana and pule (authority). Hardin observes that prayer and fasting are two techniques by which Samoan Pentecostals attempt to ‘establish a connection to the divine’, serving as conduits for God’s mana while deemphasising their own individual agency. Analysing the discourse of mana and pule that she recorded in church sermons and prayers at a hospital and a diabetes clinic, Hardin argues that healing is thought to be made possible through performative language that invokes God’s ultimate power. In this way, humans cannot act effectively themselves, but can have God act effectively on their behalf: ‘Speaking of [human] ineffectiveness’, she observes, ‘is essential to bringing about effective action.’

The volume then offers chapters by Rachel Morgain and Alex Golub and Jon Peterson that examine deterritorialised, global mana. Morgain examines the history of New Age movements’ use of mana as a term and concept and situates this uptake in the context of alternative metaphysical philosophies of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, such as Madame Blavatsky’s Theosophy and Franz Mesmer’s theory of universal ‘animal magnetism’. The system of spiritual teachings and practices known as Huna, created by Max Freedom Long and developed further by his student Serge King, drew on Hawaiian terminology to articulate an understanding of humans’ power to tap into cosmic forces for healing and wholeness. Huna-esque mana filters into modern New Age movements like Feri and Reclaiming, whose practitioners, Morgain writes, understand mana as ‘a key component of a cosmic system to which all people potentially have access as individuals, regardless of their social context’. Criticisms of New Age mana as inauthentic, Morgain argues, correctly note the ways global spiritual practices are radically decontextualised in New Age
borrowing, but they also run the risk of misinterpreting New Age practitioners’ motives and sincerity. Huna’s mana, she observes, may not really be Hawaiian, but this does not mean that those who embrace it are faking their commitment.

Golub and Peterson, in their contribution, trace the complex history of ‘how mana left the Pacific’ to become widely known in the contemporary world through fantasy games. As they observe, more people have encountered mana through fantasy games than through Pacific Islands history or ethnography, and ‘[i]f there is a hegemonic definition of mana today, it is that used in [the videogame] World of Warcraft’. Golub and Peterson begin by relating how mana was discussed in the massively influential works of Carl Jung (and, following him, Joseph Campbell) and Mircea Eliade. Popular interest in these authors meshed with American baby boomers’ desires for new kinds of liberation, which also motivated interest in the literature on millennialism; Larry Niven, a renowned science fiction writer, first heard of mana when he read Peter Worsley’s *The Trumpet Shall Sound* (1968). Mana then metamorphosed into something new when it became a ‘game mechanic’ (part of a game’s structure) in fantasy games on the model of ‘spell points’, or quanta of expendable energy. Golub and Peterson suggest that understanding mana’s diffusion in gaming is a key task, even—or especially—for those interested in the Pacific who are keen in participating in a ‘global conversation’.

The volume concludes with an epilogue by Niko Besnier and Margaret Jolly in which they consider mana in terms of its ‘shape-shifting’ qualities interwoven with its regional spread and historical durability. They address the themes of the preceding chapters and emphasise the need to go beyond false ideals of translation for a fuller engagement with the practices that shape the concept of mana. As part of this engagement, they urge scholars to consider mana’s semiotic properties and performative aspects, and to look to moments such as Christianity’s arrival and local uptake as ‘contexts in which to explore the interdigitation of mana with changing ideologies of language, the truth, and humans’ relationships to it’.

* * *
In encouraging fresh attention to mana, this volume will hopefully encourage both new thinking and new engagement: mana matters, in Oceania and beyond, to a wide range of people in a dazzling constellation of projects that invite anthropological attention and commitment. To conclude this introduction in an appropriate way, we would like to pair statements by two former scholarly antagonists whose views on mana, we submit, might be reconciled in the chapters that follow. Roger Keesing, in an archived set of handwritten notes on mana prepared for a conference at King’s College in Cambridge, pleaded with his audience ‘to set aside everything you know about the Oceanic concept of mana … imagine, if you can, that the concept I’m talking about is not mana, but one you never heard of’ (1988: 4a).14 His text reads like a call to intellectual salvation: escape the (linguistic, historical) bonds that drag down understandings of mana, forgetting mana in order to learn about it anew. We agree with his impulse to approach mana in new ways, although whereas Keesing hoped to go back to an origin point—the goal of his talk was to reconstruct mana’s meanings in Proto-Oceanic, 4,000 years ago—in this volume we attend to more recent pasts as well as unfolding presents and imagined futures. In this spirit, we turn to Haunani-Kay Trask, who concludes her poetry collection Night Is a Sharkskin Drum with the work ‘Into Our Light I Will Go Forever’. In chantlike verse, Trask moves through the Hawaiian landscape in an eroticised celebration of its beauty, life, pungency and power. Into the great canoe of Kanaloa, the Hawaiian deity, she takes readers onto the open ocean and then concludes the poem’s journey: ‘Into our sovereign suns, / drunk on the mana / of Hawai’i’ (Trask 2002: 62). Although our consideration of mana in this book is not limited to Hawai’i, nor even limited to Oceania, who can resist Trask’s urgent call to launch ourselves outward and look for mana in the future?

14 Material from these notes was later published in Keesing (1992).
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Books, journal articles and chapters


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