

Sir Anthony Caro, the eminent British sculptor, was on hand to comment on the statue's "marvelous mass and strength and power." He felt that the sculptor had invested the stone with some sort of emotive power, some sort of presence: "What the Easter Island sculpture does, it gives just the essence of a person. Every sculptor since Rodin has looked to primitive sculpture because all the unnecessary elements are removed. Anything that is left in is what stresses the power of the stone. We are down to the essence - its size, its simplicity, its monumentality and its placement - those are all things that matter."

MacGregor himself described the statue's "rare combination of physical mass and evocative potency". He briefly presented the history of the island culture's rise and decline, and the radical change in its religious and social system, which led to the carvings on the back of Hoa Hakananai'a. Referring to the motifs on the back, he commented that "this carving could never have been very legible as sculpture; we know it was originally painted in bright colors, so that this cluster of very potent symbols could be easily recognized and understood. Now, without its color, the carving looks to my eyes feeble, fussy, diminished, a confused and timid postscript to the confident vigor of the front".

His conclusion was eloquent: "It's not often that you see ecological change recorded in stone; there is, I think, something very poignant in this dialogue between the two sides of Hoa Hakananai'a, a sculpted lesson that no way of living or thinking can endure forever. His face speaks of the hope that we all have of unchanging certainty, his back of the shifting expedients that have always been the reality of life. He is everyman, and everyman is usually a survivor..... He's a supremely powerful statement of the fact that all societies keep looking for new ways to make sense of their changing world and to ensure that they survive in it."

Articulating Rapa Nui: Polynesian Cultural Politics in a Latin American Nation-State

Riet Delsing. Ph.D. Dissertation,
University of California, Santa Cruz. 2009. 450 pp.
(Available from UMI, ProQuest. Dissertations and Theses).

Review by Steven Roger Fischer

Doctoral dissertations are very much a double-edged sword. Over two millennia ago the Roman poet and satirist Horace entreated every serious author to *prodesse et delectare* ('teach and entertain'). Yet while that is perennially the goal, so very few of us successfully accomplish it.

How refreshing then – and how immensely profitable for everyone concerned with the deeper story of Easter Island – to encounter a tome of such scholarly substance and energy. Even as we glean countless sheaves of insight from this instructive opus, we cannot help but delight at the same time in Delsing's polished prose.

Born and raised in Holland, Riet Delsing emigrated to

Chile in 1973. Fascinated by her adoptive country and its vibrant palette of peoples, she eventually chose anthropology as her vocation, and in 1996 was finally able to undertake her first protracted study-visit to Rapa Nui. The magical isle captivated her, and over the next decade Delsing became a frequent – and best informed – European visitor to the island.

In the end, she has penned Pascua's most erudite paean. As "Articulating Rapa Nui" is the ultimate distillation of an almost unprecedented scholarly commitment, so, too, is it a legacy to a people Delsing has come to regard as her own.

It is a weighty work, its 450 pages investigating, illuminating, and exposing the often troubled, and always complex, relationship between the Rapanui people and the powerful, paternal, daunting, Chilean nation-state. The study emphasizes the Rapanui people's ever-increasing sense of a special cultural difference. In this regard Delsing minces no words: "My main contention is that cultural politics, together with simultaneously occurring global phenomena, are shaping the (re)construction of a Rapanui identity, in discourse and in practice, and a growing desire for self-determination." She shares this heroic "*J'accuse*" with lucidity, crystalline composition, and a prose that occasionally approaches poetry.

The dissertation is in two parts, the first diachronic (historical) and the second synchronic (contemporary). Part One, "Challenging the Nation-state," elucidates Chile's ambivalent relationship to Rapa Nui, from 1888 up to the present day, and makes such copious use of rare Chilean archival material that a seasoned historiographer of Easter Island must quietly bow in admiration. Part Two, "Polynesian Cultural Politics and Global Imaginaries," treats of a variety of contemporary forms of what Delsing terms "cultural politics." It is in this latter part of the dissertation that Delsing's passion takes wing, for long enough has she witnessed – indeed even participated in – those cultural performances, Tāpati festivals, political free-for-alls, even loud demonstrations in Hangarōa's streets, and so cannot refute the obvious. "This emphasis on cultural politics," she writes, "reveals the existence of ambivalences and tensions between the Rapanui – who wish to live their difference as a people – and the Chilean nation-state, which rather stresses its relationship with the island in terms of sovereignty."

The sheer breadth of Delsing's scholarship overwhelms any trivial critique. Her advantages of maturity, European background, decades of residency in Chile, and obvious personal flair for making herself an active part of the local Hangarōa community, have all contributed to rendering her vantage point unique, one that has permitted a particularly cogent verity. Delsing thus transcends the Eurocentric eyrie by acknowledging – and in many ways becoming an advocate for – the Rapa Nui mandate. She does not shy from calling a *mata'a a mata'a*: particularly in her political analyses and judgments, her frankness and integrity are praiseworthy. She stands in fact between both worlds, interpreting Rapa Nui with the mind of an educated European but with the spirit of one who knows, intimately and profoundly, the Rapa Nui psyche and ways, both the *roro henua* and the *huru henua*.

The dissertation is a fine anthropological summary of the current Rapa Nui situation, the disciplinary pendant to María Eugenia Santa Coloma's sociological study *Guardianes de la Tradición*. Steeped in all the relevant theoretical literature, especially in that which concerns the Pacific, it is imbued with the Rapa Nui perspective, too; indeed, the very Rapa Nui essence. Exhaustive without ever becoming exhausting, this work will doubtless stand as the definitive cultural-political analysis of Rapa Nui for a generation. It is essential reading for every Easter Island scholar, regardless of her or his respective discipline.

"Articulating Rapa Nui" deserves the immediate attention of a major publishing house. For vital at this juncture in Easter Island's troubled history are both edges of this particular scholarly sword – the one to teach, the other to inspire.

COMMENT: New Claims for the Moai Roads

Britton L. Shepardson

For more than a century, the "mystery of Easter Island" has persisted – mostly because tourists and archaeologists alike continue to ask questions that may never be answered by scientific research. How were the statues moved? How were the statues erected? Why did islanders carve these statues in the first place?

In 1981, *The Denver Post* detailed one hypothesis suggesting that the statues were actually transported by Asian war elephants that had arrived on the island as a result of a misguided expedition under the rule of Kublai Khan (seriously!)¹. Erich von Däniken proposed another alluring hypothesis including extraterrestrials².

To this day, archaeologists cannot completely rule out these seemingly far-fetched ideas because we cannot and likely will not (ever) find evidence that indicates exactly how the statues were moved. Wooden sleds, log rollers, and ropes woven from island plants would have long ago disintegrated and been blown about for hundreds of years.

Archaeological research, and most archaeologists, have begun to ask more astute questions – questions that can be tested definitively (or nearly so) by excavation and other higher-technology archaeological research methods. The endless debate on statue transport techniques and statue symbolism might drive the tourist economy on the island (and surface in almost every television special), but for archaeologists concerned with cumulative knowledge, this debate has become little more than a cheap shot at fifteen minutes of fame.

Dr. Colin Richards of the University of Manchester and Dr. Sue Hamilton of University College London currently lead a British archaeological research project on Rapa Nui. Recently, Richards' and Hamilton's work was touted to "have disproved the fifty-year-old theory underpinning our understanding of how the famous stone statues were moved around Easter Island,"³ but Dr. Richards was savvy enough to point out that, "The truth of the matter is, we will never know how the statues were moved."⁴

To be fair to Richards and Hamilton, the press probably framed the research in the wrong light—the investigation was never meant to focus on how the statues were moved. Rather, what the British team found through geophysical survey is that some inland statues have stone platforms nearby (now buried) upon which they presumably once stood.

Their use of geophysical survey, a relatively non-invasive technology that uses electrical currents and measurements of resistivity, in this fragile island environment is praiseworthy. Reports by the University of Manchester website⁵, *The Independent* website⁶, and several other websites^{7, 8, 9, 10, 11} claim that the British archaeological team's find somehow disproves a fifty-year-old theory of Thor Heyerdahl and confirms an even older theory of Katherine Routledge are less praiseworthy.

Heyerdahl, like many archaeologists, believed that the inland *moai* (statues) had been abandoned in transport. But, to claim that the recent remote-sensing of platforms near statues disproves Heyerdahl's belief is a stretch for a couple of reasons. First, archaeologists have known for several

¹ Borst, B. 1981. Unraveling one of archaeology's greatest riddles. *The Sunday Denver Post*, December 20.

² Von Däniken, E. 1973. *Chariots of the Gods*. New York: Bantam.

³ The University of Manchester. 12 May 2010. Easter Island discovery sends archaeologists back to drawing board. <<http://www.manchester.ac.uk/aboutus/news/display/?id=5722>>

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Milmo, C. 24 May 2010. Scientists reveal the secrets of Easter Island's fallen idols. *The Independent*. <<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/australasia/scientists-reveal-the-secrets-of-easter-islands-fallen-idols-1981131.html>>

⁷ CBC News. 12 May 2010. Easter Island statue transport questioned. <<http://www.cbc.ca/technology/story/2010/05/12/easter-island-statues.html>>

⁸ Lamar, C. 12 May 2010. Easter Island continues to baffle the heck out of archaeologists. <<http://io9.com/5537436/easter-island-continues-to-baffle-the-heck-out-of-archaeologists>>

⁹ EurekAlert! 12 May 2010. Easter Island discovery sends archaeologists back to drawing board. <http://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2010-05/uom-eid051210.php>

¹⁰ The Week. 26 May 2010. Easter Island: Mystery solved? <<http://theweek.com/article/index/203362/easter-island-mystery-solved>>

¹¹ The Daily Galaxy. 13 May 2010. New Easter Island discovery upends prior theories. <http://www.dailygalaxy.com/my_weblog/2010/05/new-easter-island-discovery-upends-prior-theories.html>