

# Preface

In the Sepik Basin, which was the ethnographic crucible for everything Donald F. Tuzin wrote, ritual culture was dominated by what became known in Tokpisia as the *Tambaran*—a (male) tutelary spirit that anchors the ritual life of many lowland New Guinea societies. Incarnated in a particular location, geographic feature or item of ritual patrimony, its voice might be heard in the cry of bamboo flutes or the boom of water trumpets. In return for gifts, the *Tambaran* spirit would serve as the guardian or patron upon whom groups of people under his aegis might rely as they made their way through life. To those of us who knew him, Donald Tuzin was a decidedly generous—rather than a punitive or misogynistic—*Tambaran* and this book can be seen as a ritual prestation, or at least a piece of one, to his abiding spirit and voice.

Tuzin passed away unexpectedly in 2007 (see Chapter 1), so our gift is a mortuary-related prestation. It is a commemorative volume rather than a *festschrift* in honour of a living scholar. Although the essays commissioned for and collected herein are partly intended to answer our grief, we do not offer them by way of ending our mourning and so return to daily life. Nor are they a symptom of melancholia by which we cling ambivalently to the memory of our colleague, teacher and friend in order to avoid doing so. We recognise this kind of project cannot replace the man, intellectually or personally. Indeed, though the volume responds creatively to central ethnographic and theoretical themes as well as to stylistic motifs in Tuzin's work—to masculinity in Melanesia, to the relationship of culture to the subject, to his ethos *qua* author and fieldworker—we readily concede that it does not address the entire career of his interests.

At the same time that the gaps in this volume must signify his irrevocable absence (particularly to we who knew him), it does succeed in another way. It responds to the implicit threat that premature death poses to our sense of mortality and intellectual vitality by asserting that coherent, critical dialogue and collegiality not only remain possible in the face of shocking loss, but also perhaps become more precious.

With regard to this latter sentiment, we are grateful to acknowledge the biographical help we received from Beverly Tuzin, his widow; a reading of our introductory essay by Melford Spiro, his senior colleague in the Anthropology Department at the University of California, San Diego; the support provided by Kathryn Creely, the librarian who worked with him in the Melanesian Archive there; advice from Elfriede Hermann, Wolfgang Kempf and Margaret Jolly, who pointed us to the ANU E Press as an ideal outlet for the volume; and excellent comments on a previous draught from two anonymous reviewers.