

In the Forest



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There are always at least two 'histories' of encounter or contact, as each party would tell the story differently, but where and when is it really the 'first contact' and for whom? This book deploys an analytical framework developed from Semiotics to have both sides of the story address each other. It is ethnography of dialogue, emerging from textual representation by outsiders and its relationship to visual response and presentations by the Andaman Islanders that this book aims to present as the critical 'ethnography of history.' The section on Visuality looks at how the "Other" is incorporated into an organized knowledge-system, including Ongee myths and songs about outsiders and the early photographs of tribal people by British settlers and ethnographers. The section on Materiality concerns the investment in things made, to influence natural processes or to distinguish the human body, and discusses how they are transacted between cultures that come into contact. The concluding section on history addresses encounters and developments in which the experiences of both tribal and settler are implicated more thoroughly than in the transaction of objects. Thus juxtaposing alternative perspectives on change indicates areas of experience unaccounted for in the dominant discourse and shows the provisionality of images.

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