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Title of extract: **The European appropriation of Indigenous things**

Name of Author: **Thomas, N.**

Title/Author of book/edition (if applicable): **Entangled Objects. Thomas, N.**

Name of Visual Creator or other acknowledgement (if applicable):

Journal details –title/Vol/Year (if applicable):

Publisher: **Harvard University Press**

Pages scanned: **125 - 184**

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Course of Study (Module name and number): **Heritage Industry AHAN7029**

Name of Designated Person authorising scanning: E.L. Harris

Date authorised: 11.09.12

Moodle/~~Powerpoint~~

# 4

# The European Appropriation of Indigenous Things

> . . . we were entertained with various new and striking objects.
>
> George Forster, A *Voyage round the World*, 1777

> All the others came empty in respect to refreshments, but brought with them some arms such as Clubs, darts, &c which they exchanged away, indeed these things generally found the best Market with us, such was the prevailing Passion for curiosities, or what appeared new. As I have had occasion to make this remark more than once before, the reader will think the Ship must be full of such articles by this time, he will be misstaken, for nothing is more Common than to give away what has been collected at one Island for any thing new at a Nother, even if it is less curious, this together with what is distroyed on board after the owners are tired with looking at them, prevents any considerable increase.
>
> James Cook, *Journals*, 1774

As socially and culturally salient entities, objects change in defiance of their material stability. The category to which a thing belongs, the emotion and judgment it prompts, and the narrative it recalls, are all historically refigured. What was English or French, in becoming Inuit, is reconstituted socially through indigenous categorization; similarly, what was Igbo or Javanese, in becoming American or Australian, now conveys something of our projects in foreign places and our aesthetics—something which effaces the intentions of the thing's producers.

Museums are crammed with indigenous artifacts: stone tools, carved bowls, clubs, spears, baskets, pots, barkcloth, mats, pipes, shell money, *preserved heads*, anthropomorphic images, fishhooks, nets,

canoes, headdresses, feather cloaks, hatchets, garments, ornaments . . . I have never quite understood why people want to look at such things (although I often look at them myself). These museum arrays are organized differently but are broadly similar from one metropolitan or Third World institution to another. But the familiarity of such displays may be misleading, if it permits us to think of these objects in stable ensembles. We must ask why these objects were acquired and what their collectors thought they were doing. And we must ask what the genealogies of European representation are.

This chapter cannot attempt to grasp all the moments and styles of Western interest. It is oriented mainly to collecting practices in the islands and discourses of collection, rather than museum histories or other primarily metropolitan developments.[1] The progression is roughly chronological, and the focus of interest the distinctions between the perceptions of certain groups of foreign visitors and settlers: explorers, missionaries, planters, colonial officials, and ethnologists.[2]

European interests in indigenous Pacific artifacts were manifest from the earliest visits and observations. The three voyages of Captain Cook are of particular interest because extended contact was made with a wide range of Pacific islanders, which initiated a comparative discourse of evolutionary assessments encompassing native physique, temperament, and to some extent material culture; these questions arose particularly for the ethnologist and natural scientist Johann Reinhold Forster, who was accompanied by his son George on the second voyage from 1772 to 1775. Interests in artifacts were also manifest in a number of other popular travel works of the time, some of which, such as Keate's *Account of the Pelew Islands* (the Micronesian islands now properly called Belau),[3] are particularly relevant to the general problem considered here: the extent to which, in this period, any unitary discursive project encompassed the interest in tools and ornaments which were being apprehended by Europeans for the first time. Later groups of colonizers were also sometimes undecided, or inconsistent, in their purposes and evaluations, but lack the singular indeterminacy of the eighteenth-century explorers.

## Curiosity: Colonialism in Its Infancy

The artifacts of non-Western peoples were known over a long period as "curiosities." Occasionally, this term, or "curios,"[4] also embraced

certain kinds of antiques and classical relics, and (in the absence of the qualifier "artificial") even natural specimens—coral, bones, and mineral samples. The connotations of such labels shifted, and in some contexts the words arguably do not tell us much about either the cultural construction of the things collected or the notion of the process of collecting. However, the literature of the famous late eighteenth-century voyages of exploration is suffused with the notion of curiosity,[5] both as a subjective attitude and as an attribute of things noticed. An attempt to map European interests in artifacts in the period could thus take seriously the idea that a collection of curiosities in some sense stood as an objectification of the culturally and historically specific form of intellectual and experiential desire which "curiosity" alluded to.

This is to express, perhaps in extreme terms, a tension between a scientifically controlled interest in further knowledge and an unstable "curiosity" which is not authorized by any methodological or theoretical discourse, and is grounded in passion rather than reason. A negative or at least ambivalent attitude to curiosity was explicitly elaborated in the opening section of Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry* (1757):

> The first and the simplest emotion which we discover in the human mind, is Curiosity. By curiosity, I mean whatever desire we have for, or whatever pleasure we take in novelty. We see children, perpetually running from place to place to hunt out something new; they catch with great eagerness, and with very little choice, at whatever comes before them; their attention is engaged by every thing, because every thing has, in that stage of life, the charm of novelty to recommend it. But as those things which engage us merely by their novelty, cannot attach us for any length of time, curiosity is the most superficial of all the affections; it changes its object perpetually; it has an appetite which is very sharp, but very easily satisfied; and it has always an appearance of giddiness, restlessness and anxiety.[6]

Although reference is made here to the active or vigorous character of curiosity, there is a more fundamental sense in which the condition places the subject in a passive relation to the diversity of the object world: a plethora of new things present themselves but are not subsumed into intellectual purposes. The curious person represented by Burke does not assert a classificatory rule or arrive at any idea of the import or origin of things; in his compelling image, curiosity is above all an infantile condition, and one which would apparently be discon-

nected from anything other than impressionistic judgment and from any analytical work upon phenomena, such as the classificatory project of natural history. The intellect is, as it were, overcome by desire, and rendered giddy by a succession of encounters with the novel.

But how could this child-like attitude figure in the context of major exploratory voyages, generally sanctioned by the state, the navy, and the Royal Society, which postulated the disclosure of the novel as a legitimate and noble endeavor? Of course, from an official perspective the project was prompted by particular scientific and practical questions, such as the existence of the great southern land; the outcomes of these inquiries took such unsentimental forms as accurate charts, coastal profiles, and tables of astronomical and meteorological observations. But Burke's observations accord closely with Cook's account of the "Passion" among sailors for novel artifacts, which was manifestly so extreme as to prompt local parody in Tonga: "It was astonishing to see with what eagerness everyone [the sailors] catched at every thing they saw, it even went so far as to become the ridicule of the Natives by offering pieces of sticks stones and what not to exchange, one waggish Boy took a piece of human excrement on a stick and hild it out to every one of our people he met with."[7]

The ambiguity of curiosity is more generally pertinent to the encounters with exotic peoples which, for everyone apart from the Admiralty, were certainly the most interesting feature of the expeditions. The introduction to George Keate's *Account of the Pelew Islands* (1788) justifies the work partly in relation to the importance and popularity of narratives such as those of Cook: "The relations of these several voyages having excited a great spirit of enquiry, and awakened an eager curiosity to every thing that can elucidate the history of mankind, I flatter myself, that no apology is necessary for my bringing forward the following work, whose *Novelty* and *Authenticity* will, I trust, insure it a favourable reception."[8]

The "double claim" is elaborated upon at some length, but there is an odd lack of specificity in the anthropological understanding that is offered:

> Nothing can be more interesting to Man than the history of Man. The navigators of different ages have pictured to us our own species in a variety of lights . . . we observe a wonderful disparity; some are found under that

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darkness and absolute barbarism, from the sight of which humanity gladly turns aside;—whilst others, unaided, unassisted, but by mere natural good sense, have not only emerged from this gloomy shade, but nearly attained that order, propriety and good conduct, which constitute the essence of *real* civilization . . . The mind of inquisitive man, too eager after knowledge which his limited faculties can never reach, often idly asks - *Wherefore all the varied gradations of human existence?* But his question will remain forever unanswered . . . He will be far more wisely employed in feeling with becoming gratitude, that he was not destined himself to be an inhabitant of TERRA DEL FUEGO, or to add one to the number of the forlorn savages of the NORTHERN POLE.[9]

Keate proceeded to suggest that a more legitimate question, which (as he accurately predicted) might in the future be successfully investigated, concerned the peopling of the numerous islands, but this topic is clearly on quite a different level from the grand question concerning human diversity with which he begins. The more abstract philosophical issue is posed, and in a sense justifies the whole presentation, but readers are then told that difference—or perhaps its specific occurrence and distribution—cannot be explained by human beings. Since the evolutionary distinctions between contemporaneous but geographically separated peoples or "nations" were taken to be virtually axiomatic, Keate could not derive any general proposition about the "history of Man" from the information obtained on voyages. Instead, previously unknown societies merely further illustrated the diversity of the species; the author in fact felt "some satisfaction in being the instrument of introducing to the world a *new people*" who he suggested were "an *ornament* to human nature."[10]

This would perhaps explain why enlightenment evaluations from both British and French[11] voyages of south Pacific societies were frequently indeterminate or qualified: observations of barbaric practices conflicted with the acknowledgment that there were elements of civilization, and an idea that a particular people were generally ugly might be offset by remarks upon their intelligence.[12] This is not to dispute that there were essentially racist features of the discourse in general. A certain distance and attribution of inferiority is intrinsic to an evolutionary understanding, however qualified and disguised by positive local observations or ironic reflection upon the faults of Europe. The discriminations made between certain populations, such as the Polynesians and Australians, seem particularly invidious. But it is

significant that customs, occurrences, and artifacts were frequently referred to by neutral terms such as "striking," "interesting," "singular," "peculiar" or "curious." In particular, such words were used to express the interest aroused by examples of indigenous material culture. As Bernard Smith noted, "to say that an object was 'curious' was to express an interest in it without passing an aesthetic judgement. Thus Parkinson speaks of New Zealand paddles as 'curiously stained,' fish-hooks and whistles as 'curiously carved,' and Maoris as 'curiously tattooed.'"[13]

There are many similar statements in the accounts of the second voyage. Cook found a Tongan coconut-fiber apron "curious," a Marquesan head ornament was "a curious fillet of shell work decorated with feathers &c";[14] for Johann Reinhold Forster, Maori wooden axes were "commonly curiously carved"; the dresses Tahitian women wore while dancing were "singular and remarkable"; the same Marquesan "diadems" remarked upon by Cook were "curious";[15] George Forster noted that bone arrowpoints at Malekula were "curiously and firmly united together by means of single coconut fibres," but he ambiguously described the Tahitian mourning costume as "whimsical."[16] Similar observations are made in what seems to be the only extant account by a common sailor: "Several of [the Marquesans] had caps very curiously wrought in shapes not inelegant, and composed of feathers interspersed with spangles of mother of pearl, that looked very gay and were very becoming."[17]

In the last case the proposition that a thing was curious could clearly drift into more definitely positive reactions. But most of the statements marked a novel or different thing which had just been observed as interesting (somewhat tautologically—only what was notable would be noted), while not characterizing in any manner the content of its significance. As Smith noted, with respect particularly to statements made on Cook's first voyage, aesthetic judgments were avoided; he adds that during the second and third voyages "comment upon the whole was more favourable."[18] This is to imply that there was a progression toward an attitude which could appreciate indigenous craftwork and art, a move away from the pattern whereby observers refrained from evaluation. This is certainly broadly discernible, but the indeterminacy may relate more to a certain inability, to a lack; for at this time there was no established anthropological discourse which actually linked propositions about artifacts to ethnological theory or

political description in a systematic way. The notion that the whole array of artifacts and goods produced or used by a particular people could be construed as their "material culture"—a sort of physical counterpart to the totality of their manners and customs or social institutions—was the product of subsequent theory. This is not to say that there was nothing to motivate interests in artifacts in the 1770s, but there was a gap in the sense that there was no developed language through which their relevance to other things observed, or the purpose of the expedition, could be specified. Hence, observers either resorted to the vague and essentially vacuous terms quoted above or restricted themselves to strictly descriptive wording which conveyed no judgment and which effected no positioning at all. Among the "trifles" brought by Tongans for sale were "clubs which are Rhomboidal Pyramids below, with round handles above, & sometimes carved over & over; little sticks which they put in their Ears, which are perforated with two holes, & these sticks are of a reed filled with a red solid Substance or of Turtle Shell, or of a white Shell . . ."[19]

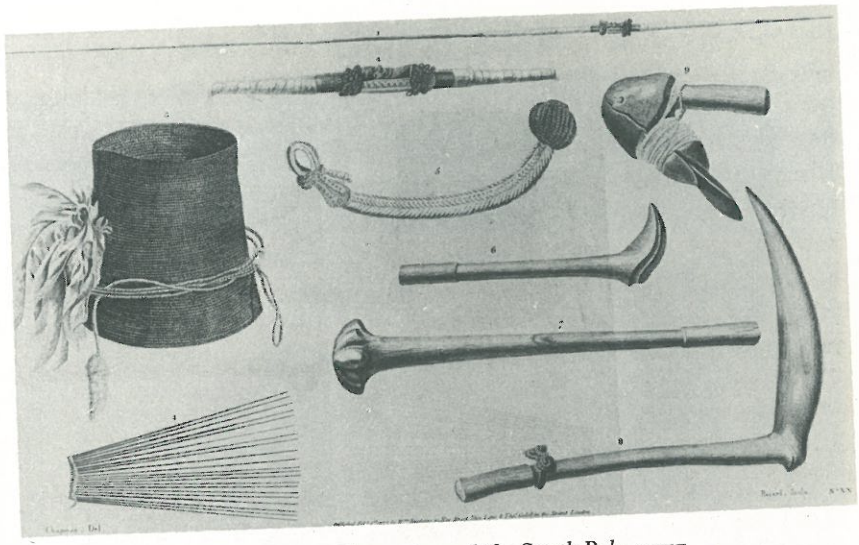
While there is a good deal of language of this sort, judgments about workmanship and the elegance or unattractiveness of items were also advanced though frequently not coherently. George Forster found Malekulan canoes "of indifferent workmanship," but the bows of the same people were "strong, elastic, and nicely polished," and their poisoned arrows "very neatly ornamented."[20] In some cases an ambivalent or ambiguous attitude toward particular pieces is manifest: "I observed a curious spear, whereon a curious face was carved in the grotesque manner"; "the heads of these canoes are commonly finely carved representing in a coarse manner a human figure, lolling out its Tongue, with Eyes of mother of pearl."[21] Reference to "the" grotesque manner almost implies that a style or form of stylization is posited, while the second quotation might be taken to separate the quality of the carving from the image carved. There is, of course, no reason why a visitor should not have had different reactions to different artifacts, or to technique and image, but the failure to arrive at any overall view underlines the extent to which the observation of manufactured articles was not subordinated to, or defined by, more general discursive projects. The point is not just that aesthetic adjudications are often absent, hesitant, or mutually uninformative, but that even when clearly expressed, they do not necessarily operate as a vehicle for the assessment of a particular people or their situation with respect to other

natives observed. There is thus a marked contrast between these observations and ethnographic remarks about the position of women in particular societies, which are elaborated upon, quite explicitly, as a direct indicator of relative social advancement. While descriptions of Maori, Marquesan, Tongan, Tahitian, New Caledonian, and Malekulan material culture all contain a certain mixture of positive and negative propositions, the treatment of women as "beasts of burden," and their postulated physical ugliness in the New Hebrides (Vanuatu) and New Caledonia separated these groups sharply and unambiguously from those to the east such as the Tongans and Tahitians.

> The more debased the situation of a nation is, and of course the more remote from civilization, the more harshly we found the women treated.[22]

> In O-Taheitee, the Society, the Friendly Isles, and the Marquesas, the fair sex is already raised to a greater equality with the men; and if, from no other reason, from this alone we might be allowed to pronounce that these islanders have emerged from the state of savages, and ought to be ranked one remove from barbarians. For the more the women are esteemed in a nation, the more it appears that the original harshness of manners is softened, the more the people are capable of tender feelings, mutual attachment, and social virtues, which naturally lead them toward the blessings of civilization.[23]

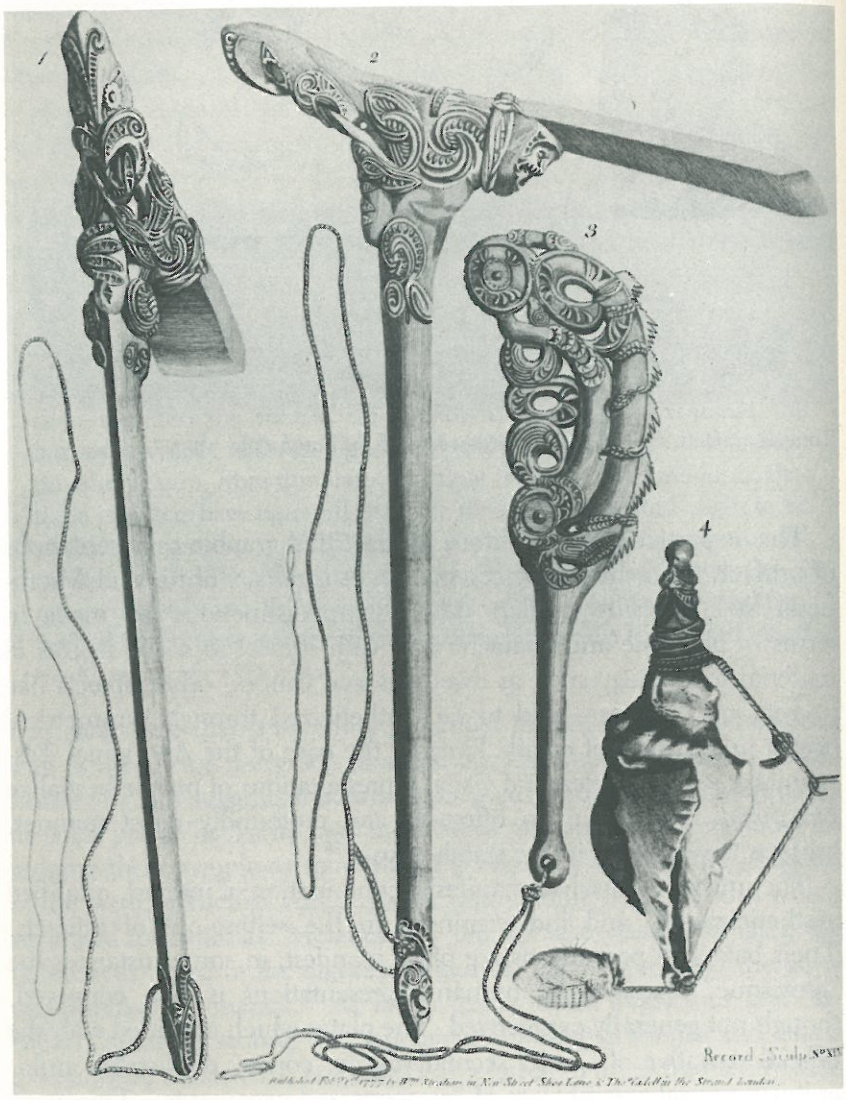
It is clear here that perceptions of gender operated in a very powerful way as a sign for the grade of social advancement: Johann Reinhold Forster in fact suggests that what was seen as relative sexual equality in such places as Tahiti was the central and sufficient condition for judging those people as standing on a higher level than the islanders of the western Pacific. Although the formulation of distinctions which separated the latter as "Melanesians" did not take place until later, the differences noted in the eighteenth century carried precisely the same evolutionary resonance.[24] As far as questions of migrations and "familial" relations among the populations of various islands and island groups were concerned, language was referred to more frequently than physique, and both more frequently and systematically than similarities or differences in material artifacts.[25] Hence, although there was great emerging interest in the classification and hierarchization of islanders, technology and material culture played a weak and minor role in this major work of European representation.



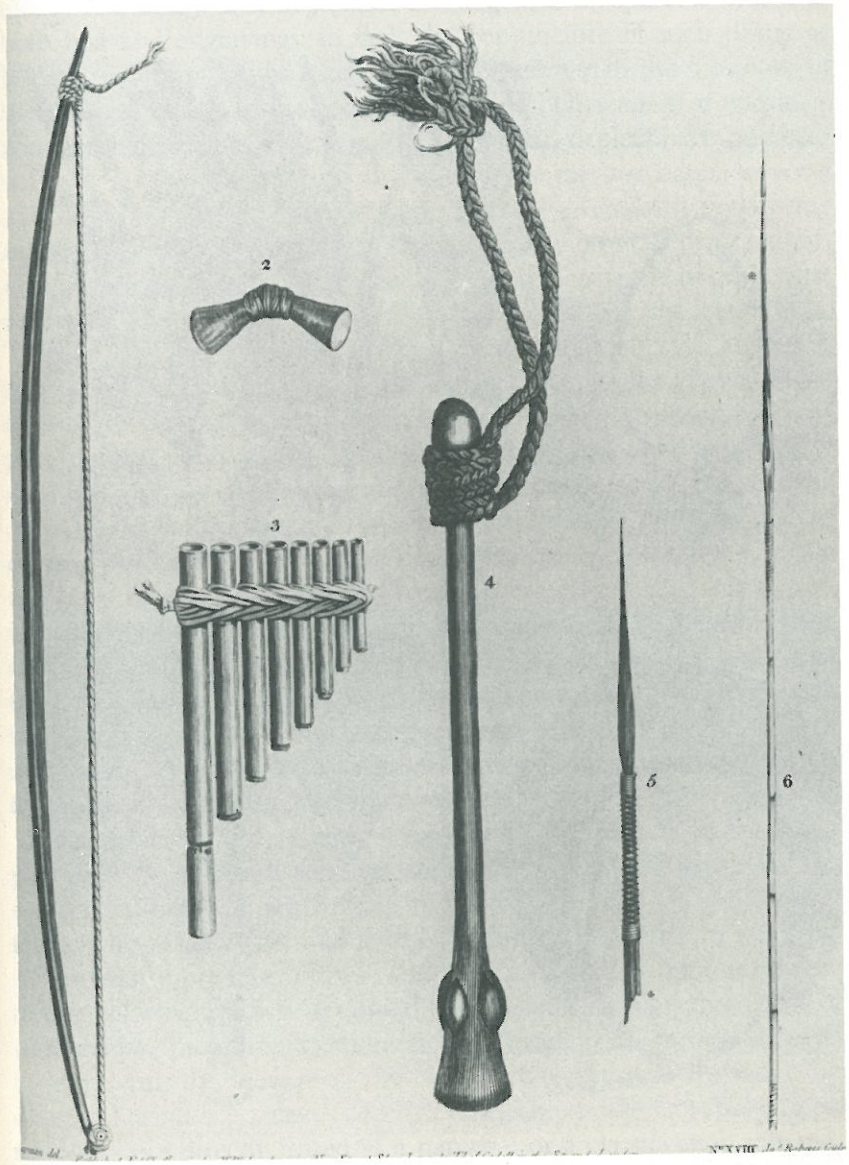
Tongan artifacts, from Cook, A *Voyage toward the South Pole*, 1777.

This is particularly clear from the fact that graphic representations of artifacts from diverse places such as Australia, Tahiti, and Micronesia look basically similar. While sharp distinctions are made in terms of physique and character and with respect to some aspects of material technology such as dwellings and canoes, other objects like baskets and weapons tend to be aestheticized through symmetrical layout and display of detail. Even in the case of the Aboriginal Tasmanians, where written and visual representations of people bestialize or convey ugliness in an offensive and profoundly racist manner, artifacts are depicted in the standard way.[26]

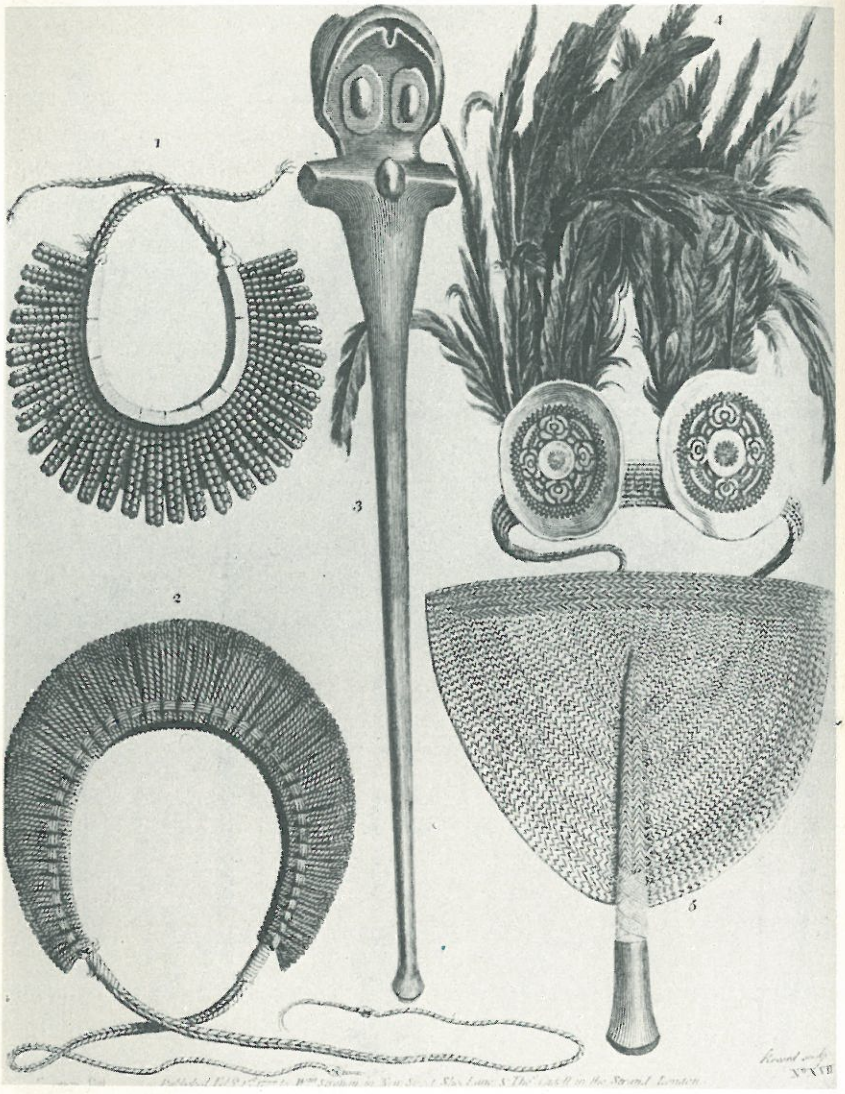
The images themselves manifest a combination of interest, qualified aestheticization, and indeterminacy in the setting-out of artifacts. Their balanced proportions are often manifest; in some instances the "grotesque" character of human representations is also conveyed, though not generally exaggerated. The plates which appeared with the official narrative of Cook's second voyage, convey predictable ambiguity in several assemblages of "weapons and ornaments." This combination of objects itself suggests a lack of specification about what particular vision is invited: ornaments are surely to be seen as more or less attractive decorations, while it might be expected that clubs and spears would connote savagery through the association with warfare




Maori artifacts, from Cook, A *Voyage toward the South Pole*, 1777.




Malekulan, Tannese, and New Caledonian artifacts, from Cook, *A Voyage toward the South Pole*, 1777.



Marquesan artifacts, from Cook, *A Voyage toward the South Pole*, 1777.

and killing. However, the arousal of horror which is a systematic element of many later depictions of indigenous weapons is muted in both text and engravings: in fact, the conjuncture of such things as baskets, caps, and clubs marginalizes any interest in the functions of these things and is instead conducive to aestheticization or consideration of the lack of aesthetic merit. In general, depiction is consistent with the judgments expressed in the text. On the one hand, weaving and baskettry attract particular praise, and the representations bring out the intricacy and regularity of work; on the other, representations of human faces, which are routinely referred to as crude or grotesque, do seem to convey a sense of distortion, partly—in the case of the Tongan spear—through being seen from a difficult side angle. In another contrast, the nonrepresentational carving on the New Zealand adz suggests a high level of fineness, but it makes this intricacy complex and not easily apprehended: the effect of the succession of twists is in fact visually disorienting and perhaps manifests most directly the ambivalence of "curiosity." Adjudications of the relative quality of carving from one place to another also emerge, and the coarseness of weapons in New Caledonia and New Hebrides (Malekula and Tanna) is underlined by the thickness and the ragged ends of fiber and rope attached to a bow and a club, respectively. It might also be noted that the aesthetic properties of the Marquesan pieces are emphasized through the composition of the engraving—where both left and right and upper and lower halves are balanced—while in most other cases the eye is drawn to the individual artifacts.

The debatable character of these reactions springs from the complexity of the images themselves and the fact of their extreme objectification. What Norman Bryson says about still life—"it is the genre farthest from language, and so the hardest for discourse to reach"—seems even more true of these abstracted arrays that suppress proportion by placing artifacts of quite different sizes together; the engraved implements, moreover, seem to offer an "insult to the human subject" by depriving the viewer of any "bond of continuous life with the objects that fill the scene."[27] In this case, despite the fact that what is set out is not directly linked to a narrative or a classificatory scheme, the rationale for this evacuation of signification can be taken to be political, in the sense that a privileged investigative vision is implied by the analogies with the depiction of natural specimens. Artifacts are not tokens of a particular social condition, such as the heathenism

created in missionary images, and are not used to mark social boundaries between populations;[28] instead, this decontextualized and—to be anachronistic—clinical form of presentation evokes the authority, precision, and disinterest of science.

A lack of specified interest is also apparent from the actual practices of collecting, in that the explorers did not make systematic effort to acquire either representative samples of a totality or artifacts of particular kinds. Although efforts were sometimes made to acquire ornaments which were striking and valuable, what was received was instead determined in most cases by the islanders, who (especially during brief visits) only brought certain kinds of goods forward. Examination of Cook voyage collections might lead one to suppose that the assessments of the savagery of the New Caledonians, Malekulans, and southern New Hebrides people were reflected in the marked predominance of weapons in material from these places, but in fact it is clear from the voyage journals that very little apart from arrows, bows, and clubs was ever offered to the visitors.

It was not long, however, before material culture was drawn more directly into an evolutionary hierarchization of the differences noted between western and eastern Pacific peoples. D'Entrecasteaux's voyage in search of La Pérouse followed Cook in visiting both Tonga and New Caledonia and sharpened the contrasts already noted between these populations. It was not suggested that artifacts were noticeably cruder or more primitive in New Caledonia than in the central Pacific, but artifacts were linked to narratives which established that, unbeknownst to Cook, the New Caledonians were cannibals. An "instrument which they call *nbouet*" was used to cut up those killed in battle:

> One of them demonstrated its use on a man belonging to our ship, who lay down on his back at the other's request. He first represented a battle . . . he shewed us that they began by opening the belly of the vanquished with the *nbouet* . . . He shewed us that they then cut off the organs of generation, which fall to the lot of the victor . . . It is difficult to depict the ferocious avidity with which he expressed to us that the flesh of the unfortunate victim was devoured by them after they had broiled it on the coals.[29]

The material illustrated in a series of plates effected a more definite contrast between a diverse array of Tongan things—bowls, baskets,

bags, fans, skirts, combs, and weapons, which were described as "Effets des habitans des Iles des Amis"—and the "Effets des sauvages de la Nouvelle Calédonie,"[30] which were almost exclusively weapons. Another figure depicted "Deux cubitus humains taillés et bien polis, destinés à arracher les intestins des malheureuses victimes que ces peuples dévorent" (Two human ulna, cut and well polished, designed to extract the intestines of the unfortunate victims these people devour).[31] While the Cook voyage representations made New Caledonian and New Hebridean weapons conspicuous, they were not articulated to the quintessentially savage practice of cannibalism in this way. In each case, the fact that weapons were acquired was probably determined more by the islanders than by those on ships, but the later voyage recreated the material as a marker for what separated the New Caledonians from the more civilized Tongans in a much more decisive way. The still unnamed Melanesia/Polynesia division was taking firmer shape.

There is thus a progression discernible within the corpus of exploratory voyages: in the later accounts, artifacts and narratives associated with artifacts sustain sharper judgments and the imputation of hierarchical difference.[32] The argument here, which applies in a stronger form to the early encounters, is essentially that there was a tension between an unstructured apprehension of diverse things and a scientific and imperialist project which affirmed certain relationships between Europeans and indigenous people and made it possible to classify and differentiate those who might become the objects of colonization. It is not surprising, of course, that a literature which rendered indigenous populations visible and legible developed only to a limited extent in the writings associated with the voyages. The type of practical project which the voyages represented was not an interventionist one in any immediate sense; although various goods and supplies were demanded, there was no attempt to reshape local social relations, no attempt to draw on organized labor in any significant or extended manner. What was demanded of indigenous populations was thus limited, and a combination of ethical precepts and practical constraints largely precluded exploratory ships from forcing unwilling people to work or surrender goods.

Just as later colonial engagement took quite a different form, depictions of people, customs, ethnological discriminations, and artifacts were subsequently much more burdened by adjudications and larger

political projects, as is discussed in later sections of this chapter. While the categorical separations which emerged from the French voyages and the more expository discourse exemplified by Johann Reinhold Forster's *Observations Made during a Voyage Round the World* (1778) did make artifacts carry something of the burden of ethnological discriminations,[33] the lack of elaboration of this exercise is notable.

Such investigations might be taken to mark a discontinuity between distinct interests in the material goods of Pacific islanders. On one side there was curiosity: an infantile attitude which was excited and aroused by things but which had no assertive intellectual framework within which the objects could be classified or hierarchized; on the other, there was a more theoretical discourse which sought to define objects as scientific specimens and set up a way of discussing them that was authorized by rational criteria of some kind. In the activities of particular collectors on the voyages, this was expressed in a rather complex way. The natural scientists and philosophers, though often manifestly merely curious themselves, asserted the privilege of their own interests in specimens and regarded the acquisitive and commercially motivated behavior of common sailors as illegitimate. The issue arose in several disputes among those on board the *Resolution*, and Johann Reinhold Forster was quite bitter about the manner in which his trade for both artifacts and natural specimens was inhibited and prices forced up, by others.

> Today a Saylor offered me 6 Shells to sale, all of which were not quite compleat, & he asked half a Gallon brandy for them, which is now worth more than half a Guinea. This shews however what these people think to get for their Curiosities when they come home, & how difficult it must be for a Man like me, sent out on purpose by Government to collect Natural Curiosities, to get these things from the Natives in the Isles, as every Sailor whatsoever buys vast Quantities of Shells, birds, fish, etc. so that the things get dearer & scarcer than one would believe, & often they go to such people, who have made vast Collections, especially of Shells, viz. the Gunner & Carpenter, who have several 1000 Shells; some of these Curiosities are neglected, broke, thrown over board, or lost.[34]

Forster invoked the authority of the state in establishing the consequential and legitimate character of his own interest. There was an effort to define specimens of various kinds as something other than mere articles of traffic, which any European had a right to deal in,

simply on the basis of an ability to purchase; the control and handling of material was thus colonized by those who would not capriciously neglect objects or throw them overboard. It is notable, though, that back in Europe the scientists also sold artifacts and did not, in any case, do much with the material collected, apart from making occasional presentations to museums. Hence the naturalist Anders Sparrman donated a collection to the Swedish national institution, and Forster presented material to the Pitt Rivers and Gottingen museums; but published catalogues of specimens or other forms of scientific evidence all dealt with botanical or faunal material, and such things as astronomical observations.[35]

These points suggest that what was important about collecting, was not so much what could be said about or done with the specimens collected but the way that collected material attested to the fact of having visited remote places and observed novel phenomena. In itself, the practice substantiated relations of knowledge and power that were distinctive to the period of exploratory voyages, although there are parallels with later academic disciplines such as anthropology, which privilege the primary fieldwork experience. In this context, sources of information for the study of the human species were placed at a considerable remove and accessible only to the very restricted number who had made extended travels; those who speculated without having engaged in direct observation were rendered unreliable by the special claim of a few to direct knowledge. Hence, in the prefatory rationalization for the discussion of the human species in Forster's *Observations,* he criticized those who studied "mankind only in their cabinets" and who relied upon untrustworthy secondary accounts.[36] The evolutionary temporalization of space not only made it possible for certain populations to be equated with the more or less distant ancestors of Europeans but also permitted a new claim to descriptive authority on the part of those who had actually witnessed the "anterior" groups. Just as the establishment of modern anthropology much later entailed the dismissal of amateur ethnology, the argument for empirical ethnography in this period entailed a claim to write about the real, a claim which excluded, or aimed to exclude, both those who had not traveled and those who had traveled but who lacked a philosophical interest in natural history. The interests of the common sailors in specimens—whether shells or artifacts—were motivated merely by capricious passions and a base desire for financial advantage.



Joseph Banks.

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Curiosities brought home could also represent the accomplishment of the voyage in more personal and diffuse terms. Just as the knowledge of Europe and of the sites of classical literature obtained through a grand tour was sometimes expressed in the acquisition and display of classical relics, indigenous artifacts virtually became trophies which reflected the broader experience and mastery of a passage around the world on the part of a traveler. This use of material is typified in a portrait of Joseph Banks in which the subject is surrounded by a variety of weapons and ornaments: a comb and an adz are on the floor, and his own garment seems to be a modified Polynesian barkcloth cape. A sense that these are not mere ornaments, but the products of a scientific voyage, arises from the folio of botanical drawings behind the adz: the man depicted is associated with the cataloging of nature, rather than mere personal entertainment. The picture exhibits a conjuncture of things which were often represented but usually separate: peculiar and different "curiosities" normally appeared in larger scenes, around or in the hands of natives in some ethnographic vignette, or otherwise as decontextualized specimens; and, at the same time, the portrait typically conveys the attitudes of composure, refinement, and learning. If there is also a suggestion of excessive ornamentation, or feminine vanity, the enduring impression is of assurance with respect to the periphery of an expanding world, a world not familiar to most viewers of the picture, which hence separates the breadth of Banks's knowledge and command from their own. "The riches of Banks's collection, drawn from a dispersed variety of cultures, are organised to display his cosmopolitanism, their exotically random incoherence, as well as to indicate authenticity, the first hand and intimate experience that informs knowledge."[37]

This exemplifies the point made in the Introduction, that objects can have singular personal meanings at odds with their systemic significance. From the latter perspective, what Banks owned were commodities, things which were often bought and sold and were no less *recherché* among the bourgeoisie at the time than antiques and tribal art are today; but for him the things performed the more particular operation of standing for a voyage and the work of science.

This is of course a matter of prestige and social status, a point which occasions comment upon an analogy that might be made between this aristocratic display of material wealth and the tribal "prestige" which is often seen as the aim of Melanesian exchange. From Malinowski's

text to the present, the preoccupation of transactors, and the accomplishment of acquiring certain shells or effecting certain presentations, is understood in terms such as "renown," "prestige," and "status."[38] I do not dispute that this is an indigenous model: informants from the Massim, in particular, are frequently quoted insisting upon the centrality and worth of names, fame, and renown,[39] but perhaps it needs to be made clearer that in both European and Pacific societies these words do not refer to entities—one cannot point to a thing called prestige which both Banks and the kula operator has—but are instead moments in a political process. In each case, the dual or multiple character of wealth items permits them at once to function as commodities and as "valuables," expressions of relationships, artifacts of a biography, or elements of some other singular fashion. Shell valuables in the Massim and in New Georgia could be alienated to acquire canoes, the assistance of warriors, heads, women's services, pigs, and a range of other things: their use was above all *a technique of power.* Similarly, Banks's material was not only expressive but also convertible into wealth, and although his collections seem mostly to have entered national museums—augmenting the cultural capital of the state—others made a great deal of money out of the trade in these commodities. Paradoxically, artifacts collected in the course of eighteenth-century voyages would now realize very high prices on the basis of their "original" character, yet this value is actually proportionate to their distance from their indigenous origins and measures a succession and duration of recontextualizations.

Descriptions of other people always embody some commentary—which might be approving or critical—on social circumstances at home, although the extent to which debate concerning dominant values or political questions actually motivate particular images and moral evaluations clearly varies considerably. Melville's *Typee* is, for instance, far more determined by the critique of metropolitan society than missionary publications, even though reflection upon immorality at home, and the need for domestic evangelism, amounted to a significant undercurrent in missionary works; by contrast, more "practical" texts such as official colonial reports were obviously oriented toward the circumstances they immediately described and purported to master.

The voyage literature of the late eighteenth century at once affirms

the distance between European civilization and the social condition of Pacific islanders and—to a varying degree—relativizes the advancement of the former. As Johann Reinhold Forster wrote:

> We think ourselves much superior to these Nations in regard to Arts & Trades, & what is still more than all this, in regard to our sublime Sciences, & the use of letters. I will by no means say they are as far as we in regard to all these things, or even as far as any of the least civilized nations, but let us only give them their due, let us consider the difficulties they are under, let us examine their Ingenuity, their contrivances, the Simplicity of their tools, their Arts, their manufactures, their cultivation, their fishing, their Navigation, their Shipbuilding, their knowledge of the Stars, & all this I believe must convince us, that they have more civilization than we at first outset think. Our Poetry, Music, Dramatic Performances, make a vast addition to the refinement of Civilization: but these Nations are not without their Songs, which seem to be well measured & adapted to their Music, & allways accompanied by Dances, the most of which are of the Dramatic kind. The civilized Greeks were Musicians, & had a Flute of several Pipes of reed, which we found again in the Isles of *Middleburg* and *Amsterdam* [Eua and Tongatapu].[40]

Forster's demand here was for a fuller contextual appreciation of the achievements of islanders such as Tongans and Tahitians and recognition of the parallels between their customs and practices and those of the ancient civilizations. Such analogies were frequently made in travelers' accounts of various parts of the world but here drew specifically upon the observation of material artifacts, which moreover could be brought home to be witnessed. The similarity of accomplishment between Greek and Tongan music was attested to by the instrument itself, while in other areas manufactured things were to be compared favorably: "The fine fish-hooks made of Mother of Pearl, & sometimes with hooks of TortoiseShell, are really the proofs of an ingenious nation. The Nets they make are no doubt most excellent in their kind & far superior to such as we make, both for materials and workmanship. The structure of their Canoes, both of the common & those intended for war, are Monuments of their Skill, & ingenious contrivance."[41]

In this rhetorical passage, the relative uncertainty which often characterized adjudications was set aside, and the degree of taste and elegance evident in various artifacts was emphasized. But this relativist assertion of the merits of the islanders was by no means the only

message of these texts, and was in fact associated with a contrary proposition. One of the points constantly made was that wood carving (in particular) was especially fine and regular *given* the lack of iron; this at the same time reinforced the significance of the distinction between those who used, and those who lacked, metal tools.

Voyagers generally made the assumption that there was an intense indigenous desire for iron, as if the people perceived this to be their most crucial lack. Keate asserted that for the Belau people "the *English* possessed what was in their estimation of the highest value—iron and arms."[42] Although there is, indisputably, an objective difference between the effectiveness of iron and stone tools, such a difference is not necessarily recognized by, or relevant to, every social group. The European observation was often made even when it is apparent from specific accounts of barter that islanders did not in fact value iron to such an extent that they would surrender their own valuable property for it. Such a discrepancy was noted above (Chapter 3) in the Russians' rendering of Marquesan interests: while it was asserted that iron was seen to be "beyond all price," the unwillingness of the Marquesans to exchange anything substantial of their own for it was constantly manifest. The statement often prompted by the sight of islanders at work expresses the difficulty of various tasks such as cutting and clearing in the absence of metal tools: "We heard one of the men at work cutting down a tree with his hatchet of stone, and observed him through the bushes a long time. The tree was not so thick as a man's thigh, and yet it was a very laborious undertaking, with such a tool as this hatchet, to cut it in two."[43]

Apart from the occasional lack of indigenous interest in iron,[44] remarks of this type were often inconsistent with other observations—"Uncouth as their hatchets might appear to our people, it was a matter of surprize, to observe in how little a time the natives were able to fell a tree with them."[45] These inconsistencies, however, reveal the broader discursive significance of references to the limitations of so-called neolithic technologies. The symbolic burden of burdensome labor is most apparent in a remarkable reflection of George Forster's upon the small camp set up from the *Resolution* in Dusky Bay, in the far south of New Zealand:

> The superiority of a state of civilization over that of barbarism could not be more clearly stated, than by the alterations and improvements we had

made in this place. In the course of a few days, a small part of us had cleared away the woods from a surface of more than an acre, which fifty New Zeelanders, with their tools of stone, could not have performed in three months. This spot, where immense numbers of plants lived and decayed by turns, in one confused inanimated heap; this spot, we had converted into an active scene, where a hundred and twenty men pursued various branches of employment with unremitted ardour . . . We felled tall timber-trees, which, but for ourselves, had crumbled to dust with age . . . Already the polite arts began to flourish in this new settlement; the various tribes of animals and vegetables, which dwelt in the unfrequented woods, were imitated by an artist . . . the romantic prospects of this shaggy country, lived on the canvas in the glowing tints of nature, who was amazed to see herself so closely copied. Nor had science disdained to visit us in this solitary spot: an observatory arose in the centre of our works, filled with the most accurate instruments . . . In a word, all around us we perceived the rise of arts, and the dawn of science, in a country which had hitherto lain plunged in one long night of ignorance and barbarism![46]

Here the distinction turns upon the transformative power of a Western presence: the manner in which a whole array of forms of industry are embarked upon is contrasted with a condition of stasis, neglect, and nonproduction which is associated with barbarism. Such observations could not have been made in Tahiti and Tonga, where evidence for human use and modification of the landscape was far more immediate than in the cold, sparsely inhabited far south of New Zealand; and the remarks made on the basis of Tongan and Tahitian circumstances were generally different. Here the connection between the basic work of clearing and remaking the landscape as an area around a "settlement" and the arts and sciences that were diagnostic of civilization indicated also that the absence of adequate tools, and hence the lack of any means of transforming what was assumed to be virgin forest, precluded the development of these expressions of refinement. The comment upon technology thus made the gulf between the Maori and Europeans absolute: it suggested that there was no basis in the native inhabitants' relationship with the surrounding world for advancement and denied the kind of continuity elsewhere asserted (for instance by Forster senior with respect to the Tongans and Tahitians).[47] In emphasizing the failure of the Maori to carve any social or economic accomplishment out of the landscape, George Forster also prefigured the representations which were later significant in discourses of disposses-

sion: the "parasitic" character of (for instance) Australian Aboriginal hunting and gathering was unfavorably contrasted with the constructive and transformative work of white settlers.

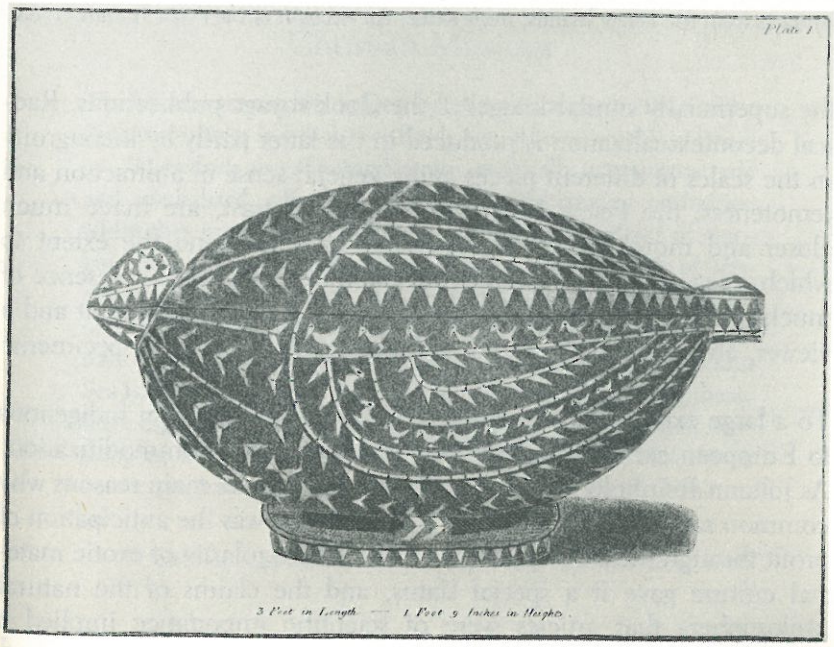
But at this stage this was less a systematic historical narrative than one of a number of figures in enlightenment workings of the exotic. Johann Reinhold Forster's discussion of the need to appreciate Tongan civilization on its own terms included a familiar reflexive criticism of Europe—that civilized or pious people often acted in an uncivilized or unchristian manner: "Let a foreigner, or only a Stranger, try our civilized European countries, let him experience what charity can do for him . . . We reckon these people among the Gentiles; but their Charity is preferable & more warm, more sanguine than that of the professors of Christianity."[48]

Keate's work on Belau—which was in no sense an official account—takes this ironic comparison much further. Most of the remarks made about both the islanders and their artifacts are positive, and he suggests that the only fault of the people is their propensity for theft. Here, again, the absence of iron plays a crucial explanatory role. Keate implies that the want for it is so acute that leaving a nail or bolt around is like dropping a diamond before a European peasant: in such circumstances no one would expect the peasant to refrain from taking what was of such overwhelming value. But Keate's principal suggestion is that such a criticism is in any case foolishly advanced, given that stealing and dissimulation prevail so widely in civilized society and cannot be prevented by the police and that an elaborate legal apparatus is lacking in Belau. The inhabitants of civilized society had to acknowledge that "all which prudence can resolve, wisdom plan, or power enforce, is frequently unable to protect their *Property* by night, or their *Persons*, at all times, even under meridian suns.—They will reflect, that every bolt and bar is a *satire* on society . . ."[49]

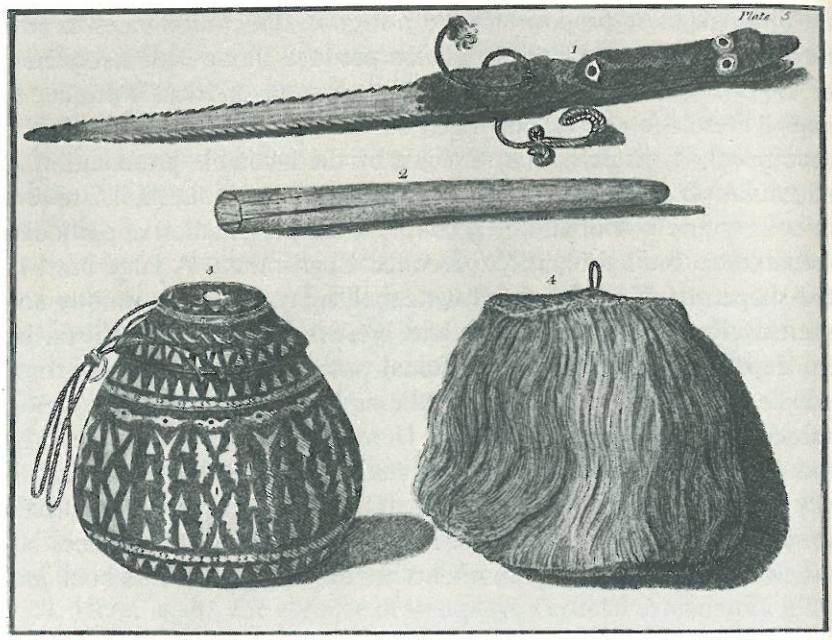
The point is thus not merely that "it becomes us to view with charity those errors in others, which we have not as yet been able to correct in ourselves"[50] but rather that the Other was an ironic, destabilizing force. The example of a people in one sense savage and in other respects an attractive "ornament to nature," characterized by social harmony in the absence of a repressive state, draws attention to the faults of Europe, to the absurdity of a system which establishes so much and rests upon such a long process of evolution and yet cannot accomplish elementary security of people and property.[51]

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Although these propositions did not make direct references to artifacts, positive descriptions of Belauan products along with a sequence of engravings constitute an important element of Keate's project to depict these islanders as an ingenious and generous people. This is accomplished, in particular, not just by the favorable presentation of particular objects—some of which, carved from tortoiseshell, are said to be very fine[52]—but also by accounts of the presentation of particular valuables to the temporarily marooned Englishmen. A large bowl in the shape of a bird, decorated with shell inlay, although unique and exclusively for ceremonial use, was presented to Captain Wilson on his departure; this "was an additional proof of the liberality of these people, who were ready to divest themselves even of what they most valued, to give to their friends."[53] Here, the fact that a thing can be brought away, exhibited, and illustrated may be seen to attest materially to the claims made in writing. The sentimental and manifestly unscientific character of interest is also apparent from differences between the ways in which ornaments are engraved in Keate's book and



"A large tureen, made of wood, in the shape of a bird," from Keate, *An Account of the Pelew Islands*, 1788.




Artifacts from the Pelew Islands, from Keate, *An Account of the Pelew Islands*, 1788.

the superficially similar images of the Cook voyage publications. Radical decontextualization is produced in the latter partly by incongruity in the scales of different pieces and a general sense of abstraction and remoteness; the Pelew Islands pieces, by contrast, are made much closer and more tangible by attention to texture and the extent to which a few, rather than many, fill the framed space; the presence of much clearer toning and shadow also implies a source of light and a viewer, absent from the vacuous object world of scientific specimens.

To a large extent, the movement of all these articles from indigenous to European exchange circuits was a movement of commoditization. As Johann Reinhold Forster complained, one of the main reasons why common sailors were anxious to acquire things was the anticipation of profit through the curiosity market. But the singularity of exotic material culture gave it a special status, and the claims of the natural philosophers that articles were of scientific importance implied a broader movement that restricted their circulation. There was an attempt on the part of official scientists to monopolize the legitimate ownership of such rarities, although subsequently these claims have

generally been more ignored than respected. On the part of some, such as the Banks of the portrait, there was certainly an appropriation of objects which manifested the breadth and command of the person. From his own perspective the thing did not so much become a commodity as a marker of personal history, an expression of the person's accomplishments.

In general, however, the explorers took artifacts to express something about the people who collectively produced them; they did not attach much importance to the singular histories of particular articles. The use of things to signify narratives, which was more important for some islanders and other sorts of later colonizers, was manifest in Keate's story about the drinking bowl: what remained important about the vessel was the fact that it had been a gift. It retained the name of the king and was a reference point for an assertion about the good relations established between the English and the Belauan people. The gift produced a social relationship, for Keate; and who knows?—perhaps the high chief himself saw it that way.

## Converted Artifacts: The Material Culture of Christian Missions

> The Missionaries rightly judged that the natural productions of the distant countries in which they reside would be acceptable at home . . . The efforts also of natural genius, especially in countries rude and uncivilized, afford another class of interesting curiosities; whilst they prove how capable even the most uncivilized of mankind are of receiving that instruction which it is the study of Missionaries to communicate. But the most valuable and impressive objects in this Collection are the numerous, and (in some instances) *horrible*, IDOLS, which have been imported from the South Sea Islands, from India, from China, and Africa; and among these, those especially which were actually given up by their former worshippers, from *a full conviction of the folly and sin of idolatry*—a conviction derived from the ministry of the Gospel by the Missionaries.
>
> *Catalogue of the Missionary Museum, Austin Friars*, 1826

In George Forster's imagination, the sojourn of the *Resolution* in Dusky Bay was a moment of enlightenment. The work of clearing the forest and the exercise of polite arts and sciences were displayed in

contradistinction to "one long night of barbarism." But the contrast is poignantly brief: it was as if the spot was illuminated by a shaft of sunlight which broke momentarily through heavy cloud. In observing that the visible space of the settlement would soon revert to chaotic forest, Forster affirmed the great distance between southern New Zealand and civilized Europe: the progressive development of the former place seemed remote to the point of being impossible.

The evangelical missionaries who began work in the Pacific in 1797 were dedicated to a kind of enlightenment which they understood in very different terms.[54] The argument with respect to the voyagers was that their interest in artifacts derived from a conjuncture of "curiosity" and the lack of a project to intervene in or restructure islands societies. There could hardly be a greater contrast than with most missionary efforts. The mission was not merely to change religion, to substitute Christianity for paganism, for it was conceived in broader social and moral terms: customs which were barbaric or inconsistent with Christian life were to be abolished. Both in campaigns in the field and in domestic propaganda missionaries dwelt on practices which seemed manifestly abhorrent: infanticide, human sacrifice, widow-strangling, and cannibalism; but there was also an interest in suppressing polygamy and sexual irregularities and modifying numerous features of social and domestic organization. As in missions to India, sexual segregation was regarded as a form of oppression from which women could be liberated by Christianity. The extent to which mission agendas were compromised in practice, or thwarted and appropriated by indigenous "converts," was of course considerable, but the interest in intervention was certainly in theory very broad.

What collecting practices and attitudes toward indigenous material culture did missionary projects engender? Those who regard missionaries as the worst disrupters of aboriginal Pacific societies might expect a nasty and pejorative attitude toward all elements of local culture to be exhibited, but this would ignore essential presuppositions of the missionary endeavor. Although hostility to heathenism was central, missionaries also believed, of course, that South Sea islanders, Australian Aborigines, and other tribal peoples were worth saving. It would not be correct to claim that missionaries genuinely regard Polynesians or Melanesians as their equals; evangelism did, however, presume a shared humanity and entail an interest in the incorporation of the other, rather than the imagination of a savage condition which was necessarily separate and distant. The concern to convert also imputed

a certain instability and mutability in islanders: they were dissociable from the darkness which shrouded them.

The heathen condition was characterized in various ways; particular ritual observances or customs were represented as being central to it, and the adoption of Christianity was expressed through the dual step of repudiating these emblematic customs and professing adherence.[55] It particularly suited missionary discourse when the local religion could be characterized as idolatry, because this meant that "idols," as objectifications of the false religion, could be abstracted from their context in native worship and destroyed or displayed. The implication, of course, was that the removal of these artifacts, or even the abandonment of the particular spirits associated with them, reflected a broader repudiation of the underlying beliefs.[56] The ancestor or deity images which were described as "idols" also served the useful purpose of exhibiting the absurdity of pagan ideas: the fact that a figure which was small, crude, or grotesque could be equated with a spirit or supreme being was held up to ridicule. Although such arguments were especially prominent in publications associated with the zealous missionary colonialism of the first half of the nineteenth century—the period when Christianity was being established in the Society Islands and elsewhere in Polynesia—the theme was perpetuated in the more ethnographic accounts which missionaries later in the century (operating mainly in a secure Christian environment) could engage in. In 1885 William Wyatt Gill published an engraving captioned "Native worshipping a Post." "The god (will it be credited?) is *the central side post*, stouter than the rest, and crooked! Like the other posts, this god helps to sustain the roof, and yet is an object of daily worship! To the crooked post—utterly destitute of ornament—three green cocoa-nuts and a sacred leaflet were offered morning and evening."[57]

In earlier mission work in Tahiti and the Austral Islands there were several occasions when the conversions of chiefs or whole populations were marked by the surrendering or destruction of "idols." John Williams recounted that a boat returned from the inaugural mission to Rurutu "laden with the trophies of victory, the gods of the heathen taken in this bloodless war and won by the power of the Prince of Peace. On reading the letters which accompanied them, and seeing with our own eyes the rejected idols, we felt a measure of that sacred joy which the angels of God will experience when they shout, 'The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our God and his Christ.'"[58]

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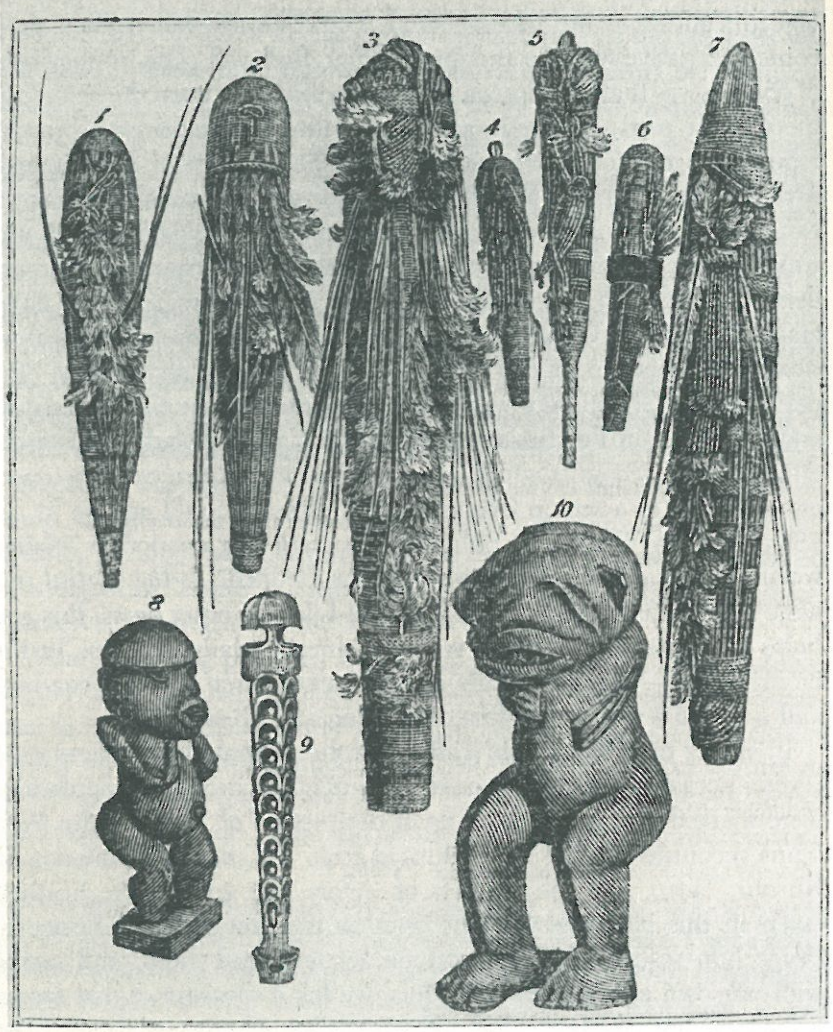
**Missionary Sketches, No. III.**

For the use of the Weekly and Monthly Contributors to the Missionary Society.

# THE FAMILY IDOLS OF POMARE,

*Which he relinquished, and sent to the Missionaries at Eimeo,*

EITHER TO BE BURNT, OR SENT TO THE SOCIETY.




Pomare's family idols, from *Missionary Sketches*, 1818. This type of image was reproduced in popular missionary works as late as the 1890s.

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Figures were thus recontextualized as tangible evidence of their repudiation: the evening that this vessel came back to Tahiti a special service was held at which "the rejected idols were publicly exhibited from the pulpit." The trophies of success were similarly used to arouse the sentiments of Christians back in Europe. They were displayed in the Missionary Museum in London[59] and extensively depicted in the popular *Missionary Sketches*.[60] One issue covered a set of "idols" presented to the London Missionary Society by King Pomare in 1818. The names of these, where known, were listed: one was "the son of the great god Oro," another "Temeharo, the principal god of Pomare's family."[61] Appended was a letter from Pomare, in which he affirmed his faith in the Savior and dissociated himself from his former deities: "If you think proper, you may burn them all in the fire; or, if you like, send them to your country, for the inspection of the people of Europe, that they may satisfy their curiosity, and know Tahiti's foolish gods!"[62]

This point was made central in the heading over the engraving: the idols had been relinquished; their recontextualization made them the relics of a great transformation. Some images were preserved so that they could attest to the former state of idolatry; others facilitated a more definite expression of its rejection in being burnt. Depiction of the moment of incineration similarly expressed the historic event of enlightenment.

As Bernard Smith has noted,[63] this particular picture, others of the



Burning idols, from *Missionary Sketches*, 1819.

genre, and engravings of the period made from earlier sources usually depict "idols" in a particularly distorted form, as is manifest in the huge eyes and star-shaped hands of the central figure about to burn. The representation of Pomare's "family idols" is less notably grotesque but instead conveys a threatening complexity and obscurity in the figures. They are composed of long spines or feathers and wicker or coir work and are visually perplexing in that the relation of different elements suggests no manifest form. The images thus imply a rather insidious and unknowable false god or spirit which presumably aroused disquiet and fear in the viewer. The accompanying text at once deprecated the figures and emphasized their strangeness:

> The public will no doubt feel much disappointed on the view of these despicable idols, and especially of this representation of them, as they certainly form a very insignificant picture. The idols themselves, except the *Tiis*,[64] Nos. 8 and 10, bear no resemblance whatever to the human form, and differ from any thing we remember to have seen or read of, which has been used by idolaters for the purpose of worship. In general the idols of the heathen, however rude, have been designed to bear a resemblance to something, "in heaven above, or in the earth beneath, or in the waters under the earth;" [cf. Exodus 20:4] but these convey no idea whatever of an animated being, and we are totally at a loss to account for their form.[65]

"Idols" thus provided an extremely powerful mechanism through which the fact of conversion could be materially expressed and displayed. An indigenous object became an artifact of history for missionary discourse, an artifact made to speak at once of its original purpose and the transaction through which it had been detached from that purpose. But in some islands such as Fiji and Samoa religion was not regarded as idolatrous;[66] artifacts which materially condensed the beliefs, practices, and objects of heathen worship were thus not available for appropriation and depiction. In these cases, the burden of heathenism was displaced to other savage practices such as widow-strangling and warfare. Accounts of "exceedingly cruel" native wars were often illustrated with fearsome pictures or written descriptions of clubs and spears,[67] and Fijian forks allegedly used for the consumption of human flesh attested materially to this emblem of barbarism. Richard Burdsall Lyth, a prominent Methodist in Tonga and Fiji, made a "List of Curiosities" which linked these general associations with biographical incidents: "No 5 *Tui Viti's club*—presented me by himself—he is without doubt the most powerful and influential chief

in Feejee. No 15 Tanoa's Yangona cup—presented to RBL by Tanoa."[68]

The fact that the missionary had been presented with weapons and other items by warrior-chiefs or priests said something both about the changing attitude of those individuals and attested to his own accomplishments in what was perceived as a difficult mission field—that the confidence and friendship of powerful savage chiefs could in fact be gained.[69] The focus upon idols thus gave way to a more generalized account which might refer to a variety of types of artifacts; any ritual object, however, could stand in the first place for the foolishness of indigenous beliefs and secondly for the islanders' willingness to abandon them. Thomas Baker, a Methodist in Fiji, noted in his diary in 1864 that he had

> purchased a small shell that had been with them for many generations, its use was singular. The priest of the town said "In time of strong winds we build a scaffold some sixty or a hundred feet high, and I ascend with this shell hung round my neck . . ." the wind was evidently the object of worship or fear. His prayer was that he, the wind, would retire into this said shell and rest there, and not blow, lest their houses and bananas should fall, and, of course, he assured me that it was always effectual. He however believed a butcher's knife to be of more value to him than the shell and accepted the offer.[70]

In this case, the disposal of the thing does not reflect the Fijian's passage to a Christian state but instead denigrates the priest's capricious subordination of his faith to desire for an article of trade.[71] Baker did not mention the scarcity of iron in the period and thus obscured the issue of precisely how valuable the knife actually was. It is also entirely possible that the Fijian man had previous experience of barter with missionaries and realized that the attachment of such a history to an ordinary ornament might dramatically enhance its value.

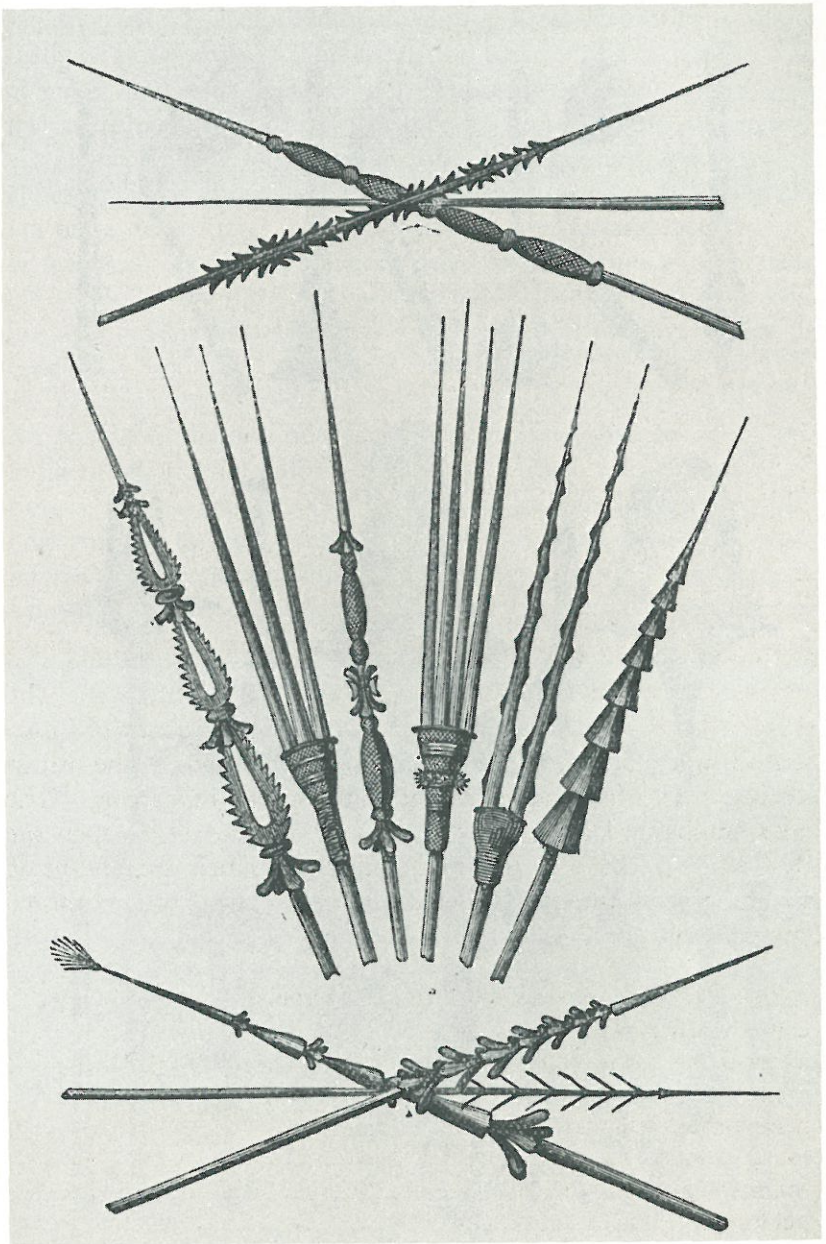
I suggested earlier that the missionary project needed to postulate a certain instability and ambivalence in indigenous society and character. On one side, it was essential for fund-raising propaganda and the overall rationale that barbarism and the darkness of paganism appeared to be shocking and arbitrary; on the other, the indigenous character was not totally repugnant, not totally devoid of the seeds of improvement, and indeed already had commendable features. The need for positive imagery generates a discourse quite at odds with that of the "disappointing idols." Other forms of material culture, such as

baskets, cloth, pottery, and wood carving are adduced in the sympathetic constitution of indigenous aesthetics and creativity. The discontinuity between the meaning of these crafts and the shock value of savage practices was not disguised but explicitly invoked as the point of a descriptive rupture. Lengthy accounts of indigenous politics and war in Thomas Williams's *Fiji and the Fijians* were followed by a chapter on "industrial produce," which commenced with direct reference to the disjunction: "It is pleasing to turn from the horrible scenes of barbarous war, to the gentler and more profitable occupations of peace . . . At this point there is observable one of the strange and almost anomalous blendings of opposite traits in the Fijian character. Side by side with the wildest savageism, we find among the natives of this group an attention to agriculture, and a variety of cultivated produce, not to be found among any other of the numerous islands of the western Pacific."[72]

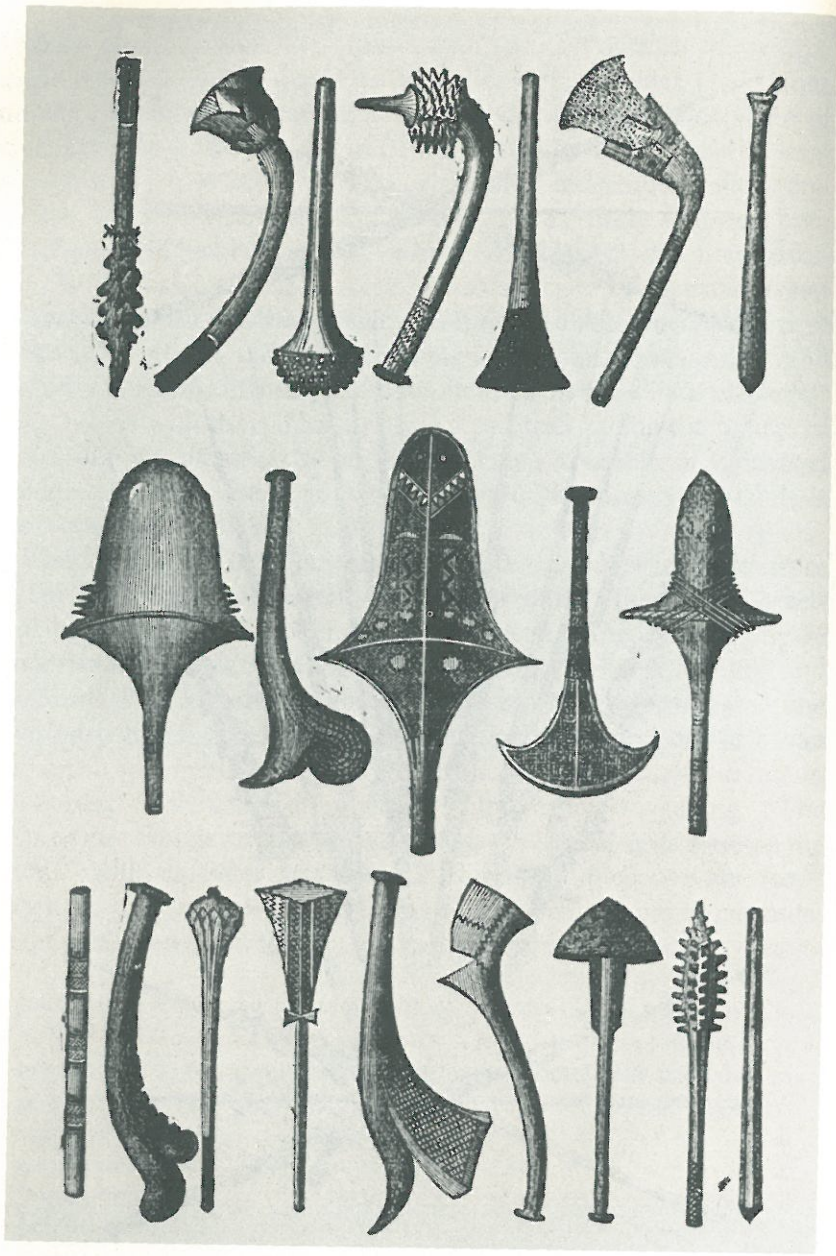
The forty-page chapter proceeded to appreciate the various forms of Fijian horticulture, barkcloth, mats, grass skirts, "the art of basket-making," nets, sennit, pottery, salt, canoe building, the carving of wooden vessels such as "fancy oil dishes," house building, fishing, and the forms of trade through which these articles were distributed.[73] The division between the discussion and the preceding account of Fijian barbarism was manifested in two discussions of weapons—the first in the context of warfare and the second in the section on carving.[74] The former emphasized the effect of various clubs and spears upon the body,[75] while the latter abstracted the things from their uses and made them the objects of aesthetic evaluation and ethnographic curiosity. Some clubs were said to be

> the result of days and weeks of patient toil. The handles of some, and the entire surface of others, are covered with fine and elaborate carving; a few are inlaid with ivory and shell. A very fine and beautifully plaited braid of white and black is made for wrapping some of the clubs, scarlet feathers being worked in with it . . . The knob of the small *ula* is often cut with exact symmetry, and the projections sometimes inlaid with ivory or human teeth. Some clubs are made merely for scenes of amusement, and not for war.[76]

The mention of the use of human teeth preserves an undercurrent of negative characterization, but this passage otherwise destabilizes the fabrication of the savage. This is conspicuously effected in the last



Spearheads, from Williams, *Fiji and the Fijians*, 1858.



Clubs, from Williams, *Fiji and the Fijians*, 1858.

sentence, which asserts that many of these handsome artifacts were not really weapons anyway. The distinction between the earlier discussion of spears and that of clubs as manifestations of creative and skilled workmanship seems also to be expressed graphically.[77] An engraving accompanying the former emphasizes the sharpness and destructive effect of "Spear Heads"—as it is captioned—while the picture of clubs sets out a much larger number of pieces. Their balance and repetition of shapes and curves overshadows detail and the implication of violent effect. Both illustrations, however, tend to aestheticize the objects through symmetrical layout and call attention to form rather than function.

An analogous division between positive and negative constructions of indigenous material culture appears in a much later corpus of missionary representations. The propaganda produced about the Methodist mission to the western Solomons in the early twentieth century referred to a number of faults of heathenism, such as the treatment of women as beasts of burden, but placed great emphasis upon headhunting. A film concerning the passage from barbarism to Christi-



"A study in black and white"; Australasian Methodist Missionary Society postcard, ca. 1910.

anity, *The Transformed Isle*, juxtaposed a long sequence of a staged headhunting raid with the images of an orderly, industrious, properly clothed, and sincerely Christian people, rhetorically asking, "Was it worth while?"[78]

Weapons such as clubs, hatchets, and shields are prominent in the headhunting footage, which is then succeeded by scenes of a domesticated life. The same transformation is reflected in the inclusion of weapons in photographs which are obviously not of heathen natives but of occupants of the new Christian social order. As with the Tahitian "idols," the shield and the paddle-shaped club are *converted artifacts* which express the distance of the people from their former uses. In these instances the weapons are not paraded as ugly or frightening things but are instead domesticated as mere ornaments, as innocuous relics of a former epoch which are now—but only now—available for aesthetic appreciation.

Other types of material culture express the constructive and artistic side which indigenous life is shown to have always had. Certain ornaments of tortoise and pearl shell are "marvels of patience and design"[79]; other products reflect not so much the native sense of beauty as simple industriousness. The popular Methodist magazine illustrated a "Solomon Island Paddle Maker, showing the various stages of production. The second on the right shows the thickness of the wood."[80] While different missions had suggested that other heathens, such as the Tahitians, were "indolent,"[81] in this case, and in Fiji, the prior dedication to work of various kinds marked the ambivalence of native character—an instability amenable to conversion and rebirth under missionary guidance. In the early twentieth century the Methodists placed great emphasis upon the doctrine of the "industrial mission"—whereby religious improvement and character formation were associated closely with disciplined work and the development of commercial activities such as the production of copra. In each case, particular features of the indigenous way of life came to figure as markers of—on one side—a barbarism which could be superseded, and—on the other—the underlying humanity and potential of the people being evangelized.

## Murder Stories: Settlers' Curios

Theories of material culture have often privileged the issue of group identity and the process through which particular artifacts or arrays of

styles are appropriated as badges by cultures or subcultures. In transcultural and colonial contexts, this identification can also be made by outsiders: things to which people attach no particular importance themselves can be regarded as locally distinctive or as resonant of national character by others. As I have stressed in the previous sections, it is also possible for artifacts to be associated in a much more singular way with events and transactions. These identifications may manifest a kind of inversion of the inalienability of the gift: in some formulations the donor is said to retain a lien over the thing, or the outcome of the gift is the relationship between transactors. But a commodity transaction does not predict future mutations of an object. A former owner may have no further interest in either the article transacted or the relationship, but a subsequent user can regard the thing as being interesting and valuable primarily because of its exotic source or because of the renown of the producer. There is thus a retrospective construction of the thing as something definitely connected with a name of a place or person. It was noted that Marquesans and some other Polynesians generally treated guns, whether received through purchase, through barter, or as gifts, as though they conveyed elements of the person and the power of foreign warriors. In a similar way George Keate regarded the bird-shaped vessel as important primarily because it attested to the generosity of spirit of the Belauan "king"; and Pomare's repudiation of heathenism was manifested in the exhibition of his "family idols." In all these cases artifacts were the visible and tangible proof of certain events or dispositions rather than signs of some part or whole culture.

Missionaries made weapons the evidence for both the barbaric past and the disconnection between it and a new Christian society. The ambiguity of their interests has no counterpart in the subculture of another group of Europeans resident among Pacific islanders, whose concern was not to reform indigenous people. Insofar as they wanted to do anything with natives, they conceived of them as a market or a source for articles of trade, but in general their own capitalist agricultural projects conflicted directly with indigenous interests.[82] Before 1860 the number of settlers permanently resident in Fiji was small—perhaps less than fifty—and most were involved in trading rather than activities which required land alienation. In the early 1860s, however, there was a surge of interest in the cultivation of cotton, and prospective planters, mostly from Australia, poured in, with the result that there were about three thousand whites in the group by 1871.[83]

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For those interested in establishing plantations, native Fijians were an obstacle. Their attachment to their land created difficulties, and labor could generally only be obtained with the cooperation of chiefs, which had a variety of unsatisfactory consequences. It was also found that Fijians mostly wanted only to do "short jobs" at comparatively high wages. The prosperity of planters in the 1860s gave some room for mutual accommodation, but by 1869 it was generally believed that the problem of labor could only be resolved by importing workers from the Solomon Islands and the New Hebrides.[84] The fact that Fijians did not even represent a labor supply, and a steep decline in cotton prices in the early 1870s, led to the development of trenchantly racist attitudes, along with a bitter sense that the protectionist colonial administration placed native interests before those of white men.[85] Far from recognizing the more "civilized" features of Fijian society, such as its elaborate chiefly hierarchy and aristocratic etiquette, planters instead saw the Fijians merely as unattractive obstacles to development. The gap between this perception and that of others was symptomatic: the first governor, Sir Arthur Hamilton Gordon, noted that contrary to the desires of the settlers, he did not "mean to clear out the 'damn niggers' who by the way are not niggers at all, but of a warm light bronze colour."[86] The different camps of European opinion were in fact reflected in this usage: the word "nigger" was virtually never used by either missionaries or administrators but was the standard term among settlers and some traders.

The account of Anatole Von Hügel, a traveler who arrived in the group shortly before Gordon took up his commission, indicated how a certain view of artifacts accorded with the planters' attitude:

> Many of the planters . . . showed a rational interest in the plants and animals of their districts, but as to the human inhabitants of the islands no-one appeared to have any information to bestow. As soon as conversation turned upon them everyone's interest flagged, indeed many seemed to feel that "a set of lazy niggers" covered all that could possibly be said on the subject. What struck me as stranger still—no-one had thought of making a local ethnological collection. A few scattered native weapons or implements might certainly be found in the settlers' houses, but they were kept as "curios," often for the sake of some sentimental history which the owner could attach to them. Every dish was a cannibal dish, every club had been the instrument of some atrocious murder, and every stain on either was caused by blood.[87]

**

Under the circumstances, it would have been strange if anyone had attempted to assemble an "ethnological collection." While the attitudes of individual planters no doubt varied considerably, their overall situational interest was in denying the worth of the indigenous Fijians in every possible way. That material evidence for barbaric proclivities should have been the only form in which artifacts were appropriated was entirely consistent with the conflict of interests inherent in frontier settlement. The indifference and hostility of settlers has had the effect that their own extant observations on the matter are virtually absent, and indirect documentation, such as Von Hügel's unsympathetic description, provides our only view. However, a number of travelers with commercial interests seem to have shared the planters' perspective. W. C. Gardenhire, the author of one of many polemical pamphlets of the period in favor of development in Fiji and critical of government policy, went on from the islands to organize a "Fiji Cannibal Exhibition" on the American West Coast. This included not only Fijian weapons and "cannibal forks," but also the "Hand of the late Lovoni rebel king, killed in battle with Thakombau, present King of Fiji," and three live exhibits who were to perform war dances and sham fights. The emphasis here hardly requires elaboration.

The articles which were singled out by this interest in appropriation were the wooden forks termed *iculunibakola*, which have always been known as "cannibal forks" and supposed to have been used because the flesh of victims was sacred or *tabu*. Fergus Clunie, following A. M. Hocart, has pointed out that those killed were not *tabu*, and that confusion has arisen because the personal *tabu* of persons of high rank prevented them from touching food at all. Apparently they were usually hand-fed by servants, or used forks; commoner people, in contrast, ate human flesh without using any implements.[88] The cannibal fork "misnomer" corrected by Hocart was not, however, an unmotivated misinterpretation or contingent error. The transformation from a partial connection to a complete identification between the artifact and the practice best suited the European fascination with anthropophagy: it provided objects which could be appropriated and handled, which did not merely represent cannibalism but which had actually been used to consume flesh. As a later visitor to the Fiji Museum observed: "A group of cannibal forks interested me very much. Here was 'the real thing,' used over and over again to eat



THE

# Fiji Cannibal Exhibition

WILL VISIT ALL THE

**Principal Cities on the Pacific Slope**

## During the Fairs,

Then Proceeding East, via Virginia City and Salt Lake.

## Two Celebrated Fijian Chiefs,

KO RATU MASI MOA, KI NA BOSE YACO, and

## General Ra Biau, the Dwarf,

Thirty-five years of age, and only 3 feet 4 inches high, all regular Man Eaters. They will perform National War Dances, Sham Fights and Songs in Native War Costumes, with Fijian Weapons, consisting of Spears, Clubs, &c.

Also, a great variety of

## FIJIAN AND NEW ZEALAND CURIOSITIES,

CONSISTING OF

Cannibal Knives and Forks, used for eating human flesh; 50 kinds of Wood, including the celebrated Sandal wood, used for burning before Chinese Idols; 50 different sorts of Clubs, Spears, Bows and Arrows, and other Implements of War.

Malay War Mask and Creese, Fiji Shark's-teeth Swords, Model of War Canoe, Fishhooks made of human bone; Tapa, or native Cloth, made from the bark of tree; Head Dresses and Mats; Native Ladies' Powder Boxes, Necklaces of whales' teeth, Fans, Bracelets, Combs; Spirit Houses, where they suppose the spirits go after death, Idols, Crockery, Baskets, Kava Bowls, used for making the grog from kava root.

Vampire or Flying Fox, all the tropical species of Fish, Snakes, Lizards, Tortoise-shell Turtle, one half eel and half snake (Babirrussa), and a large collection of Lava Formations from the Hawaiian Islands, and 200 different varieties of Ferns.

ALSO THE

## HAND OF THE LATE LOVONI REBEL KING,

Killed in battle with Thakombau, present King of Fiji, and presented to W. C. Gardenhire on the day before sailing, June 17th 1871.

Some superior specimens of Fiji Sea Island Cotton (the best grown in the world) and Tobacco.

**Photographs of Kings and Chiefs, &c., on Sale at the Exhibition.**

Back page of W. C. Gardenhire's pamphlet *Fiji and the Fijians*, 1873.

humans, for in all other feasts they ate with their fingers . . . To be actually looking at these carved cannibal forks and to possess at the same time a vivid imagination—really I felt I must be about to attend one of these horrible, loathsome functions."[89]

The demand for these utensils was such that the ethnological collector J. Edge-Partington, writing of the late 1880s, warned that "special care" needed to be exercised in buying forks "as when I was in Fiji they were being made by white men for sale to travellers."[90] The preoccupation has endured: passing reference to forks is made in many travelers' books, and even now they are conspicuous in Fijian handicraft stalls. Though tourists no longer imagine that the items they purchase have actually facilitated the consumption of human flesh, the persistence of interest in the cannibalism of the "other" reminds us of the extent to which modern perceptions resemble the partial, racist vision of the nineteenth century.

Not all travelers interested in weapons and forks had the same attitude to Fijian material culture as the planters. The planters' view represents an extreme point, characterized by highly motivated hostility, which produced a restricted and unambiguous interest in a particular class of things. The artifacts of murder stories simply betokened the relative inhumanity of the Fijians and were not, for the planters who told the stories, polysemic objects.

## Ethnology and the Vision of the State

Let us return to Von Hügel's surprise that "no-one had thought of making a local ethnological collection"—which of course prefaced his own intention to do precisely that. Anatole Von Hügel was, in 1875, a twenty-one-year-old of Austrian and Scottish parentage who had undertaken a South Seas voyage for his health, and who had, as a result of a quarrel with the missionary-anthropologist Lorimer Fison, been ejected from the Methodist ship in which he had been traveling and found himself in Fiji. His father had been a traveler and a collector of natural and ethnological specimens, and this background had obviously impressed itself upon the son.[91] His arrival in Fiji coincided with the crucial moment of the formal establishment of colonial state power: seven months earlier, in October 1874, the islands had been ceded to Britain by a group of leading chiefs. Governor Gordon arrived just after Von Hügel to establish the administration

which was initially based on Levuka on the island of Ovalau, for many years the center of European settlement in Fiji.

Von Hügel was preoccupied almost from the start with indigenous artifacts and proceeded to make several trips into the more remote parts of Viti Levu. Although he was interested in seeing the countryside, encountering Fijians he took to be less acculturated, and collecting ornithological specimens, the principal purpose of these journeys seems rapidly to have become the collection of Fijian artifacts.

Von Hügel's approach to collecting was obviously quite different from that of any previous visitors, missionaries or settlers, because it was self-consciously scientific: Von Hügel made note of native names, raw materials, and the significance of some articles in indigenous trade. The formation of "a local ethnological collection" was something definitely removed from the *ad hoc* acquisition of pieces grounded in narrative, and although Von Hügel never expounded a theory of collecting in an abstract way, it is clear that he attempted to obtain a wide range of material: from mundane items to ornaments and weapons, in standard forms as well as unusual or bizarre variants. It would be going too far to claim that the assemblages of things he acquired were actually representative of the totality of Fijian material culture in a strict sense, and there was certainly some bias toward things which were obviously indigenous valuables. However, because he found that barter proceeded best if he accepted everything that was offered, he inevitably received a broad range of objects:

> So as to encourage trade I bought everything, consequently a good deal of trash, that was offered to me tonight . . .[92]
>
> Trade now came in fast, *yaqona* [kava] bowls, some fine combs, whale tooth ear ornaments, etc. and prices were not ruinous, as for one pretty bowl the owner asked a fish-hook . . . The best thing I got was a fine black wig, which I took off a fellow's head, giving him a fathom of cloth for it at his own request.[93]

Von Hügel made adjudications apparently based on aesthetic criteria: some clubs were "good," others "very fine" but a few ornaments merely "indifferent." Initially he also ranked categories of things and was much more interested in ivory ornaments of the kind discussed in Chapter 2 and carved wooden items such as clubs and spears, than in pots or baskets (which happened to be women's products). Early on, he noted with regret that on one occasion he could obtain "only"

women's fiber skirts (*liku*).[94] But as this first collecting trip proceeded up the Wainimala valley and its tributaries in the eastern interior of Viti Levu, he rapidly modified this attitude, especially as he became aware that different types of *liku* were worn by women at different stages of their lives (as is, or at least was, broadly the case in Melanesia): "This variety . . . seems to be the distinguishing dress of girls from the time they have obtained womanhood till they become mothers."[95] He also began to recognize variation from place to place and later expresses not disappointment at being offered nothing other than skirts but satisfaction in having obtained some "good" *liku*.[96]

Von Hügel happened to travel into the area at a particularly fortuitous moment from the perspective of acquiring these skirts, since the people had just adopted Christianity, a change which was expressed—by both men and women—in the wearing of European fabric rather than local clothes. In oral histories conversion to Christianity is still referred to by the phrase "taking the *sulu*," that is, wearing a sarong-like strip of cloth (in the case of women, so as to cover the breasts) rather than local clothing. In fact, since Von Hügel was exchanging fabric for a variety of indigenous artifacts including skirts, the transactions were central to the consolidation of local conversion—although Von Hügel himself was Catholic not Methodist and, far from having an active interest in assisting mission work, he seems to have been concerned to seek out less "acculturated" Fijians. The most significant point, though, is that although the acquired skirts marked a moment of social transformation, and could have been read as artifacts of the history of conversion, Von Hügel had no interest in associating them with the events of the moment. Unlike the missionaries, who often grounded "idols" and other things in narratives of social change, and unlike the planters and travelers, who made clubs and cannibal forks the material expressions of murder stories and savagery, Von Hügel had no interest in singularizing the things he collected in such a manner. The historical context is mentioned only in passing in Von Hügel's journal, and when, as the founding curator of the Cambridge University Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, he labeled and catalogued the Fijian specimens, he mentioned various ethnological points but not the context of acquisition (although I restored this myself when I prepared captions for new displays there).

Another kind of context was important, however: the development of Von Hügel's interest set up a relationship between objects and

ethnographic facts whereby the latter could enhance the interest of the former: an article of clothing came to express distinctions in a domain which was seen to be more complex and significant than that of simple material entities. Tribal life and locally peculiar customs were of interest and their attributes surfaced in the differentiation of material items. There was an extension of the tangibility of the objects to the social facts that they were taken to stand for. Just as the casual visitor might want a "cannibal fork" because it attested to the factuality of the key symbol of savagery, someone with a more scientific and less immediately pejorative interest in indigenous life might seek out the things which embodied customs and social differences of various kinds. The scientized approach produced not just an ethnographic context but a wide array, an array which could be regarded as a totality and turned to the purposes of the state.

Von Hügel returned to Levuka at the beginning of August 1875 and found the new governor to be intensely interested in what he had seen on his trip into the eastern interior. Gordon invited Von Hügel to stay at the Government House (called Nasova), which he did; the main topics of discussion at dinner on the first evening included "Fiji and collecting."[97] In fact a number of those at the governor's establishment became deeply preoccupied with Fijian artifacts, as is clear from Von Hügel's general account of life at Nasova:

> Sir Arthur keenly appreciated the scientific value of ethnological collections, and interest of this kind being contagious, it was not long before fresh centres of attraction were formed, around which samples of native art amassed themselves. Soon, every room at Nasova had something of the Museum look about it, and the trade in "curios" became so flourishing that one small general business at the farther end of town expanded its premises and blossomed forth as a "curiosity shop" of fashionable resort.[98]

The obsessive character of interest was described by another of Gordon's guests, the typically Victorian "lady traveler" Constance Frederica Gordon Cumming, who noted on her return from a tour around Rewa and other localities:

> Great was the excitement of unpacking my canoe-load of curiosities; for we are each trying who can make the very best collection—Sir Arthur, Mr. Gordon, Captain Knollys, Mr. Maudslay, Baron von Hügel, and myself. Our daily delight is to ransack the stores in Levuka, where the natives may have bartered old things for new, and great is the triumph of whoever

succeeds in capturing some new form of bowl or quaint bit of carving. All our rooms are like museums, adorned with savage implements, and draped with native cloth of beautifully rich patterns, all hand-painted.[99]

In some respects, this enthusiasm was motivated by the singularity of things and aesthetic interests, but it was distinctly rapacious, and this feature linked it with the singular colonial project of the British in Fiji.

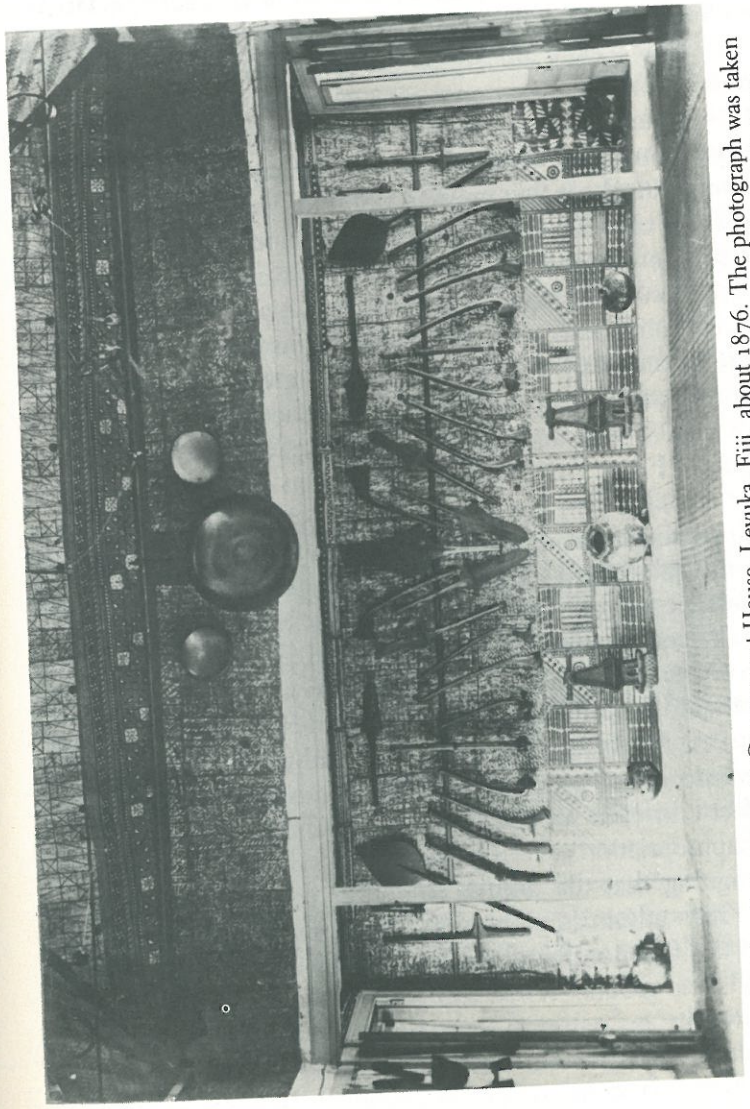
For colonial forces it was of course always possible to act or attempt to act without regard for indigenous relations, to ignore or pension off local leaders, and to deny indigenous sovereignty (as the British did in Australia, the French in New Caledonia, and the Americans in Hawaii). Gordon's approach was different: it depended upon hegemony, consent, and the fabrication of shared meanings rather than violence and the denial of identity between colonizers and colonized. Of course, the Crown Colony of Fiji was not a theater state, like Geertz's Balinese *negara*, oriented to symbolic display rather than government, or a persuasive expression of imperialist ritual that lacked violence—there were many forms of intrusive regulation and harassment, and an 1876 rebellion in the Viti Levu highlands was forcibly suppressed. The logic of colonial expansion makes it almost inevitable that collaboration and compromise with an indigenous elite, or with the population of one region within a colonized country, will engender resistance and hostility on the part of subaltern groups or traditional enemies in other regions. Gordon, however, went as far as he could in co-opting not just high chiefs but village chiefs throughout Fiji into the new elitism and bureaucracy of colonial society; and since the local roots of indigenous hierarchy had mostly endured warfare and turbulence of the kind described in the previous chapter, this was an effective strategy that mostly made the extent of resistance and disaffection among common people invisible.

The system of indirect rule celebrated Fijian chieftainship and chiefly customs but also established the Crown and the Crown's representative as the apex of the hierarchy. The project demanded more than the establishment of certain political and administrative mechanisms; it had a cultural dimension because of the status it ascribed to what was recognized as Fijian custom and customary government. Ethnological interests expressed not only the need to understand a system which was being reified and stabilized but the more general approbation of Fijian folklore, craft, and custom. As was appropriate

to those who placed themselves at the top of an indigenous hierarchy, there was an enthusiastic and self-conscious but only partial "Fijianization" of the British administrative elite. Local people of high rank were frequently admired or appreciated: Lady Gordon described King Cakobau as "a fine dignified old man, with a most commanding manner, and perfectly at his ease."[100] She virtually acknowledged that this positive attitude reflected cross-cultural class solidarity: "One has a curious feeling of equality with the ladies of *rank*, they are so different from the common people—such an undoubted aristocracy. Their manners are so perfectly easy and well-bred . . . Nurse can't understand it all, she thinks we are all *silly* about natives, and looks down on them as an inferior race. I don't like to tell her that these ladies are my equals, which she is not!"[101]

Gordon identified himself as the paramount chief, and the high Fijian chiefs seem to have acquiesced and actively supported this identification. Although the concepts of permanent allegiance and the absolutism of the state were quite inconsistent with the fluid and contested character of Fijian hierarchical polities, those in power at any particular time were naturally in favor of rigidification of the relationships which privileged them: it is now very difficult to establish what divergences might have existed between the chiefs' affirmations and their unreported perceptions and motivations. But if the transformation of the governor into the paramount chief was founded upon mutual co-optation and mystification, the new order rapidly acquired a life of its own through practice. Gordon was frequently welcomed and respected with modified or transposed versions of Fijian ceremonies; he even received "symbolical first-fruits—ten yams from each province."[102] At Government House a kava ceremony took place every evening; those present were served in order of rank, and the native constabulary often performed chants and dances. Gordon found the ceremony "always picturesque and in its way solemn."[103] These words express the duality of the vision of the state: Gordon appreciated a spectacle of which he had a detached view, but he also participated in, and felt moved by, a ritual in which he was a privileged figure.

In September and October 1875 Lady Gordon, with the help of others, made an elaborate display of artifacts in the dining room at Nasova.[104] Lady Gordon herself said little about the rationale of the exercise but did mention in one letter that "such beautiful and artistic patterns can be made with clubs, spears, bowls, arrows, axes, paddles,



End wall of the dining room in Government House, Levuka, Fiji, about 1876. The photograph was taken by W. A. Dufty, a notable photographer of islanders who also worked from a studio in New Caledonia.

etc.," a remark which locates artistry as much in the ordering of the indigenous products as in the artifacts themselves. A photograph of the exhibit shows only one end of the room: all that we know of the rest of the display is that the room had nine doors, above each of which a large kava bowl three or four feet across was hung with a club on either side.[105]

The motivations in the arrangement perhaps did little more than play with morphology: shapes took on complementary relationships to produce symmetry and variation. Aestheticizing a spear or club is inevitably a political act that presupposes some denial of former context and of the capacity of indigenous producers to perpetuate their own uses and construction of things. That is true of all of the cases I have so far discussed: appreciation entailed appropriation. But this array differed from earlier aesthetic arrangements of Pacific artifacts in the volume of material, the context, and the great emphasis on balance and order which is not apparent, for instance, in eighteenth-century engravings. The assemblage in this case reflects a setting-out and rigidification of Fijian culture: the manipulation of the diverse objects implies the apprehension and ordering of the totality they represented, that is, Fijian society in its parts and aspects. The apical position of the governing elite gave them the vantage point from which the totality could be recognized. Fijians "at cross purposes" could never stand as subjects in relation to the detached object of their whole society. But the laying-out of clubs and other articles expressed the duality of the administration's stance. The interest in, and common appreciation of, the things expressed the empathy of one moment, the sense of culture shared with the Fijian aristocrats and "ladies of rank," but the effect conveyed something different—a moment of privileged vision and appropriation.

It is intriguing that the anthropologist A. M. Hocart later questioned the Fijian administration's use of Fijians in the inquiries which determined the functioning of the landholding system in the various parts of the island group: "When will govts. realize that a native is not the best authority on native customs? He is the worst for he knows nothing outside his tribe and sees everything in the light of his own customs."[106]

Hocart was in part advancing well-founded criticism of an inquiry which imposed models from parts of Fiji upon the rest, but he also revealed a sense that the detachment of Europeans from custom en-

abled them to transcend any locally inflected vision and instead apprehend the totality. Hocart was in no sense a government anthropologist, but this sense of ways of knowing is precisely what the setting-out of the array of variants in the dining room expressed. The assemblage did not merely imply a perception which transcended that of those seen as culturally bound natives; it also set out the aspects of the entity to be acted upon. The initial moment embodied curiosity and empathy, but this enabled the fixture of a totality which one was then in a position to alter, disarticulate, and adapt. And although much was made of preserving Fijian institutions, Gordon made it apparent from the start that certain features of Fijian society were to be changed. State power was to be pervasive, like "a net of very fine meshes" which covered the land; Gordon also emphasized that indigenous district and provincial officials were to write to him frequently, "at all seasons and at all times."[107] The omniscience of official vision with respect to the objectification of Fijian culture was thus expressed in the space which, more than any other, symbolized British colonial control in Fiji.

## Artifacts as Tokens of Industry

Gordon's setting-out of Fijian material culture was not an isolated occurrence but reflected a broader trend in the organization of ethnological specimens in museums: these expressed the imperial state's vision of other parts of the world in a more generalized way. They also documented the technical advancement of the West through contrast with the rudimentary tools of various savage cultures and expressed, in particular cases, many other things. These representations did not, however, exclude differently motivated uses of tribal artifacts.

Gordon's policies of perpetuating the authority of chiefs and maintaining what was seen as the communal native system were adhered to and developed, and settlers continued to protest against this approach on various grounds. Traditional landholding and chiefly requisitions were said to stifle native enterprise, and it was claimed that the administration did nothing to train the Fijians industrially: they "are not taught to produce anything," wrote one colonist.[108] The cynical view of some of those in the administration—that settlers were really interested in cheap land and freeing up Fijian labor which they could then exploit—is entirely plausible, but it is interesting in the context of these complaints that native Fijian products were included in displays

representing the "Resources and Progress of Fiji" at International Exhibitions in Sydney and Melbourne in 1879 and 1880. European products such as timber samples, cotton seed, cigars, bricks, and nut oil formed the bulk of what was displayed, but space was also devoted to exhibitions of Fijian cloth, mats, bowls, pottery, and fishing nets.[109] Expositions of this type, which often included dwellings, fake streets, and live specimen natives, made an entire colonial world visible and tangible:

> The Colonial Exhibition of 1886 has impressed many useful lessons on the public mind. The concrete and palpable realities connected with the English Empire have appealed to every type of mind, among colonists as well as among the untravelled population of Great Britain and Ireland, and the value of our Colonial Empire is realised to-day as it never has been before. One cannot help feeling that the thought and power which conceived and successfully carried out the magnificent idea of the Exhibition are capable of greater and higher work. The bringing together of articles from the various colonies for exhibition, inspection, and comparison, implies healthy and effective co-operation throughout the whole empire for one specified object.[110]

This is to remind us, once again, of the crucial role of material culture and of the optical illusion that it constantly offers us: we take the "concrete and palpable" presence of a thing to attest to the reality of that which we have made it signify; our fantasies find confirmation in the materiality of things that are composed more of objectified fantasy than physical stuff. Not that this mystification is a veneer of falsehood; the dialectic of reification and consumption is as necessary and fundamental as anything else constitutive of human sociality,[111] but the truths are truths of seduction rather than presence. The plausibility or justice of inferences derived from specific cultural objectifications are, however, available for assessment; I need add nothing to the view of the writer quoted, that the Colonial Exhibition demonstrated the feasibility and desirability of unified imperial federation governed through an imperial parliament.

While much can be said about the effects of these expositions and world's fairs as total displays, and their assumptions about audiences,[112] it is also important to consider the ways in which the products of particular countries are presented. The striking feature of the selection of the Fijian material in these cases was that, out of dozens

of items, there were very few weapons in Sydney and none at all in Melbourne. The difference between what was presented on these occasions and Gardenhire's "Fiji Cannibal Exhibition" was thus vast: the array of native material culture had been wholly reformulated, and the central element of cannibalism replaced by an innocuous and commendable propensity for craftsmanship. This meant that Fijians might be drawn into economic enterprise and the colony's advancement and (for those aware of the politics at the time) implied the government's neglect in the area. The differences between these displays was of course as much contextual as historical: only eight years separated the Sydney exhibition from Gardenhire's show, and the discourse of cannibalism was perpetuated through such media as staged photographs of Fijian warfare for the titillation of travelers. The use of material to emphasize industry did not displace this preoccupation but served distinct purposes in the particular institutional domain of the advertisement of the colony; more broadly, it reflected a distinct "modality of colonialism"[113] that displaced the negativities of savagery and abrupt civilizing transformations with a discourse of improvement, suggesting progress and development within an existing fabric. Fijians were already available for, and suited to, commercial development; in the settlers' imagination, the obstructions were mainly at the level of administrative conservatism, but the administration also partook of Victorian ideologies of improvement in seeking to order and clean up the Fijians' persisting blemishes through programs of sanitary regulation and reform.[114] A similar depiction of indigenous craft and work as a basis for regulated native industry under settler colonialism is manifest in an early twentieth-century photographic tour of German colonies in the Pacific (published shortly before Germany lost the colonies as a result of the 1918 defeat).[115] These parallels reveal the projects of particular colonizers to be crucial in generating particular representations of indigenous peoples and material cultures: as was suggested by the constant figures of missionary discourse, these situational interests produced continuities across historical periods.

## The Name of Science

The European exploration of the Pacific was a protracted affair; it persisted well beyond the period of Enlightenment voyages discussed in the first part of this chapter. But by the early twentieth century, the

masculine thirst for penetrative pioneering was exhausting the scope for discovery, except in the interior of New Guinea; given that the demand for unexplored places exceeded the supply, it is not surprising that in the early 1920s the popular Australian photographer and filmmaker Frank Hurley should venture into parts of Papua well known to patrol officers, while representing himself through the Australian dailies as the leader of an intrepid party which had opened up, for the first time, the mysteries of a lost world, a prehistoric landscape inhabited by entirely untamed and ferocious savages. Although Europeans had long been discovering places already known to their indigenous inhabitants, it thus became necessary for them to discover places which were already known to other Europeans.

In terms of exposing rather than initially detecting, Hurley did "discover" the Papuan world to mass audiences through journalism, slide shows, lectures, films, and a book; in so doing he was producing representations of a colonial settler state (Australia) in a period when interests in further settlement and expansion in Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, and the New Hebrides were conspicuous.[116] Many in his audiences imagined that there were tracts of land to be opened up; the pervading motif of the film Hurley made of his trip through the rivers and lakes of lowland Papua is of the pith-helmeted party hacking their way through dense vegetation or striding through grasslands, establishing that spaces existed.[117] The very humanity of the owners of these prospectively colonized areas was placed in doubt: women who were smeared with clay as required by mortuary observances were "so filthy and hideous it is difficult to believe them human."[118]

Frank Hurley was anxious that his expedition be regarded as more consequential than a mere tour, and he sought to legitimate it by taking Alan McCulloch of the Australian Museum with him. A considerable number of specimens was acquired, and on one occasion the task was facilitated by the absence of the occupants of a longhouse.

> Everything was inexpressibly crude and primitive. We had entered the Stygian homes of prehistoric swamp-dwellers living by the shores of a primeval sea . . . [their] belongings hung from the rafters in countless bags, and, though feeling compunction for our actions, we ransacked them. In the cause of science, McCulloch allows that even an unfair exchange is no robbery; so we collected and exchanged to the great advantage of the owners and to our supreme satisfaction.

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> Skulls, human bits, and tit-bits filled our bone-bag, while axes, knives and fabrics were substituted. Surely, indeed, Father Christmas had visited the house! Iron and steel replaced bone and stone, and a million years was bridged in a day![119]

The science which made the generosity of Hurley and McCulloch so manifestly distinct from theft appeared to consist in the delight of the chase, the pleasure of acquisition, the denigration of former owners, and the assertion of absolute distance between the European self and the Papuan other:

> From a dim alcove I gave a yell of delight! We had discovered treasures beyond bonanza! Human heads! Stuffed heads! What luck!
>
> Skulls painted and decorated had grinned from every niche, but heads—stuffed heads! Glorious beyond words! Had we raided a bank and carried off the bullion we could scarcely have been more pleased than with such desirable objects.
>
> This is, of course, scientifically speaking, for I can scarcely conceive anything so gruesome as these hideous human trophies of the head-hunters. The heads had been severed from the victims, preserving the neck as long as possible . . . The stuffing process distorted the face longitudinally, whilst the mouth which was forced open excessively was stopped with a ball of clay. The eyes were likewise treated and decorated with red seeds. The whole gruesome object had evidently been subjected to a lengthy smoke-curing process which mummified it and stopped decay . . . a large seed was found in the brain cavity, which evidently caused much grim amusement when shaken as a rattle during their death dances.
>
> I have never seen objects more ghastly and horrible than these grim trophies.
>
> What sort of people could these be that so callously made toys of their victims? Infinitely barbarous, ferocious, and cruel, with no feeling nor thought for human agony and suffering, and I shuddered to think of the ghastly scenes that had taken place in the small clearing by the gloomy bamboos.[120]

What is perhaps most telling about this discourse is the physical absence of the native people: "It was a deserted world."[121] Orientalist writing has often created the absence of particular people through anonymity and stereotyping: nameless Polynesian women are merely bearers of breasts and alluring dark hair, nameless Melanesian men are headhunters with clubs and axes. This passage from Hurley's text takes this effacement of humanity a step further by imagining people who



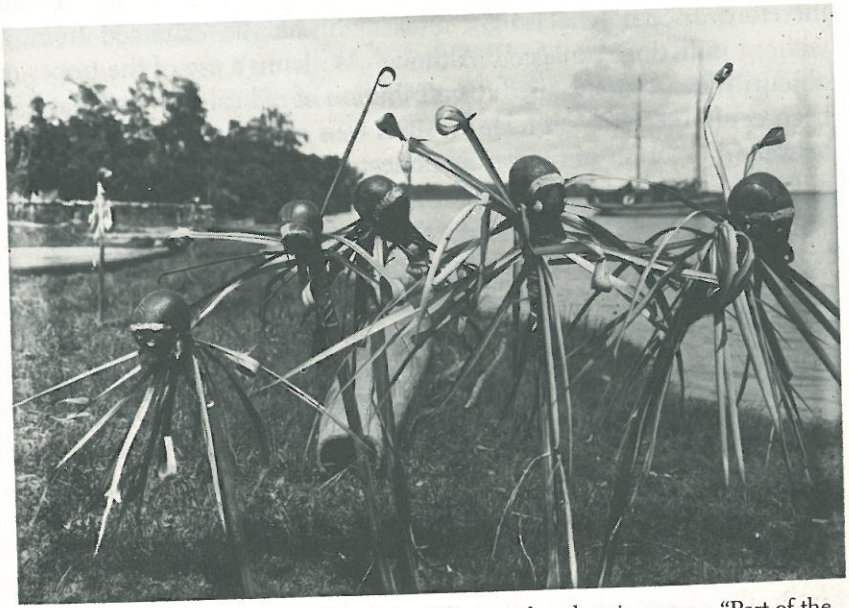
McCulloch of the Australian Museum, with preserved heads, from Hurley, *Pearls and Savages*, 1923. These are not the same set of heads as those described in the passage I quote.

are never seen, whose million-year distance from civilization places them beyond representation. In this operation material culture performs a crucial mediating function. Just as one tribe was ironically presented as "welcoming" visitors and manifesting their savagery with a display of skulls, the crudeness of the general array of artifacts was "inexpressible"; the stuffed heads testified in a more specific manner to horrifying and murderous propensities of those with "no feeling nor thought for human agony," implying a lack of feeling or thought *per se*. Yet while the nature of the Papuans is explicitly represented to be beyond comprehension,[122] Hurley could confidently infer that the head would be shaken as a rattle during dances, and that this shaking would cause "much grim amusement." This would seem to establish conclusively the promiscuity of the artifact: the racist imagination roamed freely across these objects in the absence of their makers and users.

"Science" was (and is) of course a contested term, and Hurley's slippage and self-correction—"this is, of course, scientifically

**

speaking"—marked the deployment of this authoritative cover for a characteristically colonial prurient tourism, which was as morbidly curious about heads and skulls in one part of the world as it was about foot binding and cliterodectomy in other parts. Hurley's claims were disputed on this occasion because his style of collecting material was too much for the Papuan administration: an assistant resident magistrate forwarded allegations to Port Moresby, and the collection was impounded while "irregularities . . . in securing certain curios" were investigated. Photographs of the "stuffed heads" in question appeared in *The Sun* amidst an acrimonious series of articles by Hurley under such headings as "Hurley—Not a Pirate."[123] Most of the specimens, including the heads, were in fact released, but a number of bull-roarers and a shield were apparently returned to their owners. Hurley claimed that this would have been "far more valuable amongst the records and treasures of a museum than in the dinginess and filth of a dismal Dubu." But Science had not been entirely defeated: "However this object was photographed, and this is the next best record to the object itself."[124]



Hurley's savages are represented by their artifacts, rather than in person: "Part of the committee of welcome, Goaribi, N.G."

F. E. Williams, then assistant government anthropologist and later the author of many papers and a number of substantial anthropological monographs on Papuan ethnology, was prompted to write a report called *The Collection of Curios and the Preservation of Native Culture*, which stressed that "not every one that saith Science, Science, is a scientist."[125] Williams foregrounded ethical issues in insisting that the scientific claims were not the only ones that were relevant; questions about the "influence, for good or evil, of the collector upon the native" had to be raised. He even suggested that the sacral objects of Purari Delta secret cults provided "an example of an object which (at least from one point of view) should never occupy a place in a museum" because of the serious disturbance in native religious life that their loss caused. Though "absurd creations of wicker-work," they were "possessed of another meaning in the dimness and obscurity of their own environment."[126] Williams thus employed the same figure of darkness and partial invisibility as Hurley, but to a different purpose: the absurdity of the figures was in the viewer's eye, the viewer being identified with the outsider, perhaps the reader, or even the writer in his ordinary persona. But the writer was also the expert, who had some knowledge of native religion as a functioning system and who could therefore discern what might and might not be extracted from it without inflicting damage.[127] Although Williams's use of the tropes of obscurity and dimness aired the attribution of radical savagery that had been central to Hurley's text, darkness thus also marked the boundary between the vision of the casual collector and that of the anthropologist. Though the terms had changed, the issue was the same as that in Johann Reinhold Forster's quarrel with the ignorant and avaricious seamen who competed with him in the curiosity market. Williams policed the boundary by emphasizing differences between various forms of unsystematic collecting that privileged the spectacular, the grotesque, and artifacts allegedly representative of "vanishing cultures" and more thorough and systematic collecting that appropriated a totality in the manner of Von Hügel and Gordon: "The ideal Papuan Collection would be one in which each of the principal cultural areas was thoroughly represented, in its material culture generally."[128]

Williams's suggestion that the claims of science should not override the interests of the natives remains commendable, and he drew attention to the power relations that often made the appropriation of specimens possible: "There are many things which the native is genuinely

unwilling to part with; but there is nothing which, with a little show of bluff or authority you cannot get out of him."[129] It is not clear, however, that the underlying motivation was primarily ethical; or perhaps the point is that ethics were constituted in the context of colonial administration. The ceremonies that Williams was anxious to see preserved were delicate mechanisms, "easily thrown out of gear by bungling," susceptible to being encouraged or corroded respectively by the sympathetic interest or ignorant interference of white men. "It is much as if one were playing some game of makebelieve—tea parties or doctors or any other—with a child. Follow her lead carefully, and all goes smoothly; but break the sequence, do something out of keeping with her notion of the game, and there will be an outburst:—'All right, you've spoilt the whole show: I won't play.'"[130]

In colonial Papua, there was hence an underlying fear that the native, though child to white adult, and female to male, could refuse to play the game if mishandled; and Lieutenant Governor Murray's statement about the Hurley controversy made it quite clear that a local economy of power, rather than questions of general principle, was the nub of the matter. "Whether taking the possessions of natives who were outside the influence and control of the Government can be called robbery in a legal sense may be left for lawyers to discuss. But the action was one that no Administrator could acquiesce in, because it places immense difficulties in the path of the Administration which is endeavouring to get the wild natives under control."[131]

The previous chapter began with consideration of a narrative—a narrative which located the origins of asymmetry between white and native people in an exchange relation. A thirst for Western commodities was imputed to the indigenous actors, which led them to subordinate themselves through imbalanced transactions, to alienate their land, and perhaps to offer their labor for exploitation. In this story tribal peoples are the authors of their own dominance by Europeans. I have put forward alternative accounts of these early exchange relations. In the case presented by Hurley, the tribal people were in fact absent from the transactions which ostensibly constituted their engagement with the civilized world; their willingness to receive what Hurley substituted for their goods was presumed on his part, and the introduction of an analogy with Father Christmas must be seen as distinctly idiosyncratic. The encounter that was not really an one can hardly be seen outside the space of colonial fiction, but it does mark both the

signifying power of certain pioneers and their disproportionate capacity to discover places and create relationships.

I have emphasized two propositions: a specific one, that in certain phases of contact and colonial history, indigenous people are no less powerful and no less able to appropriate than the whites who imagine themselves as intruders; and a general one, that indigenous perceptions of, and reactions to, foreign people and goods must be taken seriously. Hence the other alternative account I offered envisages a process of local appropriation for local ends and situates colonial dominance in part in the unforeseen consequences of engagement in trade, and in part in processes such as annexation and appropriation which were not, in any sense, initiated by islanders. Neither the French annexation of the Marquesas nor the assault upon the traditional Tahitian aristocracy were in any sense prefigured by early interests in iron, muskets, and fabric. These relations of displacement and dominance were effected through the practical projects of the various agents of colonialism described in this chapter: explorers, missionaries, planters, ethnologists, administrators, pioneers. Their interests in material artifacts attested at once to the mutability of such things and to the particularity of their projects. Some of these people had far less impact than others; the projects of some classes were related more to the ways in which others might be imagined and represented, rather than practically controlled, but they must all ultimately be seen in the global context of European dominance. There is thus an overall level at which Murray's statement applies to everything from Forster's gentle legislation to Hurley's misogynist dehumanization: they were all "endeavouring to get the wild natives under control." This is also why the conceit in the symmetry of my chapter titles must now be repudiated: indigenous appropriation may be compared with European appropriation to establish that both sides have creatively changed the purposes of abducted treasures, represented the other, and imagined a narrative of contact objectified in artifacts of alterity and artifacts of history. Those propositions remain valid, but analytical fictions are created to subvert and be subverted in turn; one of the ends of an exposition of parallel processes can be the exposure of their fundamental difference.