

Introduction: Tides of Innovation in Oceania

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The title of our collection, *Tides of Innovation in Oceania*, is directly inspired by Epeli Hau'ofa's vision of the Pacific as a 'Sea of Islands' in which seawater is an element that has always favoured connections between people rather than acting as a barrier between them (1993).¹ The image of tides refers to the ocean as a medium of communication and transformation through interactions recalling the cyclical movement of waves, which may have unpredictable consequences: some objects are carried by the outgoing tides entering into wider flows of communication, others are deposited on the shore where they move along local routes acquiring new life and value in specific cultural contexts associated to contingent situations and calling for the creative responses of Pacific islanders. This framework allows us to propose innovation as a fluid concept, unbound and open to many directions, and at the same time allows us to address the resulting unexpected cultural forms as a combination of new, old and creole elements.

In turn, the subtitle *Value, Materiality and Place* focuses on three intersecting dimensions informing the ethnographic contributions to this volume, providing some comparative terms useful for foregrounding innovative lines of thinking within the anthropological debate. At the core of these three themes is our commitment to the notion of agency as 'the socio-culturally mediated capacity to act' (Ahearn 2001: 109). All the chapters hinge on deeply elaborated analyses of locally inflected agencies

1 This introduction, 'Tides of Innovation in Oceania', and the editing of this volume, *Tides of Innovation in Oceania: Value, Materiality and Place*, are the product of the joint effort of Anna Paini and Elisabetta Gneccchi-Ruscone. Each one has contributed 50 per cent.

involved in confronting different transforming contexts. Although each paper engages with more than one of these dimensions, and we are aware of their continuous interconnections, we present each theme separately before considering the ways in which they feed into each other within the expanded theme of ‘tides of innovation’. Early versions of all essays in this collection, with the exception of those by Pigliasco, Tabani and Paini, were originally presented at the European Society for Oceanists (ESfO) conference in Verona ‘Putting People First’: Intercultural Dialogue and Imagining the Future in Oceania.

Value

Value is a very dense and complex notion, which in social sciences has different connotations. Within anthropological thinking a great variety of meanings have been attributed to the term, depending on whether the focus is on economic, social or religious phenomena. Value in any case is a relevant issue if we share David Graeber’s perspective on ‘social worlds not just as a collection of persons and things but rather as a project of mutual creation, as something collectively made and remade’ (Graeber 2013: 222).

The wide range of approaches to the question of value has been a central and controversial theme in the anthropological debate going back to Bronislaw Malinowski (1922), Marcel Mauss (1924), Karl Polanyi (1944), Claude Lévi-Strauss (1949) and Marshall Sahlins (1972), among others;² more recently it has been taken up in the 2013 double issue of *HAU Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, devoted to exploring the possibility and usefulness of developing an anthropological theory of value. However, the two guest editors, Ton Otto and Rane Willerslev, admit that despite the interesting and innovative contributions to the volumes they were unable to integrate their diverging positions into an encompassing

2 Chris Gregory provides an overview of the paradigmatic turns in economic anthropology that he considers to fall into three major phases: pre-1970s, 1970s and post-1970s (2009: 286). The keyword for the first period was reciprocity in the context of exchange theories, such as Sahlins’s lasting contribution (1972); during the 1970s the dominant paradigm centred around articulation, and the focus shifted from exchange to production (288). In the post-Vietnam war period, Gregory singles out a new shift of paradigm in which ‘consumption replace[d] production as the privileged economic concept and the rise of the “spirit” of the commodity as the new problem of global value to be investigated’; agency becomes the new keyword (289). He further points to the recent flourishing of works relating to different regional sub-fields and underscores that the issue that is shared by such diverse ethnographic and theoretic approaches is money (291).

theory (2013: 3). We share the concern for the conundrum they expose, which looms large in anthropology as a whole: is the recurrent need for anthropology to develop grand theories compatible with the discipline's position at the margins? How can anthropology contribute to an overarching theory while maintaining its habitual peripheral position, from which stems its capacity of bringing into the picture the experience of other world views and thus offering alternative viewpoints? Otto and Willerslev express it thus: 'As ethnographers, we enter into other realities and find striking kinds of thought and practice that can potentially subvert the dominating theories by confronting them with new understandings of what human life entails' (2013: 5). At the same time we are very well aware that value intended as moral standard casts light on another fundamental issue in anthropology, which is the comparability or incomparability of cultural worlds; in other words it brings to the fore the issue of relativism. Graeber (2001), among others, exemplifies the case of authors who are endeavouring to lay the grounds for a grand theory of value transcending geocultural boundaries. Others, such as Marilyn Strathern (1987), are more concerned with an analysis that keeps at the centre elements specific to a regional context. Similarly, we propose a reflection on these issues as articulated in the South Pacific. Without aiming at grand theory, we maintain the importance of comparative work for its ability to bring to the fore both unique histories and commonalities.

This ongoing debate provides an extended reflection on the varied use and relevance of the concept of value throughout the history of the discipline. Graeber maintains that the field of anthropological value theory since the 1980s has been shaped by the value/values issue: 'The fact that we use the same word to describe the benefits and virtues of a commodity for sale on the market ... and our ideas about what is ultimately important in life ... is not a coincidence. There is some hidden level where both come down to the same thing' (2013: 224). Nevertheless, the equivalence that is so fundamental in the economic dimension of value is absent when the term is applied in the moral and ethical field. Graeber (2001) has proposed that current research has engaged with this issue from three broad perspectives: the moral standards shared by a community; the worth attributed to a given object, good or practice; and the linguistic category referring to meaningful difference.

These different dimensions are reflected in a number of contributions to this volume, which draw out the entanglements between the value of things or practices and the words that are associated to them.

Sahlins (Chapter 1), for example, brings to the fore the significance that can be attributed to both material and immaterial things in his description of voyagers returning to their islands, when he says: ‘The social value that Tikopia men acquired from voyages in the transcendental world was expressed in the tales they told, in the objects they brought back, even in the talismanic virtues of English phrases they had learned’. Margaret Jolly’s (Chapter 2) analysis of the return of valuable objects from Europe to Oceania, by discussing the two different titles chosen by the curators of the same exhibition held in the two venues, Honolulu and Canberra, reveals the value of words in the flow of historical processes. Susanne Kuehling (Chapter 6) demonstrates the power of words to signify transformations and convey new meanings and values associated with goods and practices, in dealing with changes in everyday life on Dobu. Guido Carlo Pigliasco (Chapter 9), instead, highlights the value that can be attributed by islander communities to information, not so much for how it can be exploited in the market place, as for its contribution to ‘the group’s cultural capital and its sustenance’. We thus propose ‘value’ as a fruitful analytical key for reading this volume, spotlighting *its* value in terms of richness of ethnographic narrative, fluidity and dynamicity. As Jonathan Friedman wrote, ‘Questions of value, of ethos, are important, but [they] need not be seen as free-floating texts since ethos and values are active forces, embedded in social relations and strategies’ (1996: 7).

There are a number of dimensions of value that we wish to foreground here: first of all, value is not an essential dimension of things, practices, or words; things can have value, can lose or gain value, can change value in different contexts and mean different things to different people in the same context; objects may thus be recontextualised and ‘move in and out of a commodity state’ (Thomas 1991: 28). Nicholas Thomas’s insistence on ‘the mutability of things in recontextualisation’ (28) clearly applies to both tangible and intangible domains. From an Oceanic perspective, the intangible dimension of value is strongly present in the entangled relation between narrative, secrecy, public knowledge and the control of power among different groups. The worth attributed to a thing is socially created by its very inclusion within a process of exchange, be it formal or informal. Value thus emerges in action, since it results from the intentional action of someone, but this intention must be recognised and shared in order for something to take on value (see Munn 1986).

All these considerations lead us to focus on the polysemic nature of the concept of 'value'. We believe that this concept can provide insights for understanding complex social situations in the present as well as in the colonial period. One of the more lasting influences of *Entangled Objects* (1991) is Thomas's application of Arjun Appadurai's innovative argument to cross-cultural exchanges in colonial encounters, in which 'the discrepancies between estimations of value are one of the crucial sources of conflict' (31), or, in Sahlins's terms (1981), 'working misunderstandings' are often the result of attribution of different values to the same object, practice or event by indigenous people and colonials. Jean-François Baré's analysis (1985) of the encounter between the Protestant missionaries in Tahiti and Pomare II, leading to exchanges that allowed both sides to reinforce their authority reciprocally despite the ambiguity in estimation of value and the resulting *malentendu*,³ is an emblematic case. From this perspective, therefore, value is not an intrinsic property of goods and objects, in as much as it is attributed by actions and processes entailed in local – national – global flows of relationships, or in the 'creative action' involved in the shifting meaning of value in expanded social contexts (Graeber 2001: 249). As Nancy Pollock reminds us (Chapter 8), in local/global relations the value of goods and practices can also acquire a negative sign: despite the outside health experts' rhetoric of encouraging the consumption of local produce, their recognition (or not) of the nutritional value of local foods cannot be disassociated from the (negative) moral value attributed by the same outside observers to local practices of feasting.

The attribution of value can be relative or absolute. The attention to actions and processes not only shows us that 'few objects are simply one thing or another' (Graeber 2001:104), but also brings to the fore the gendering of goods, words and practices. Several intersecting elements participate in such an analysis; following Tatiana Benfoughal (2012), we suggest the importance of the gender of the producer and the context of use of an object for understanding its value or worth. Thus, the gendering of an object is a reflection of multiple intersecting elements, such as the transformations of social and gender divisions. These processes are clearly exemplified in a number of researches presented in the volume edited by Élisabeth Anstett and Marie-Luce Gélard (2012); among these Bjarne Rogan's study is telling. Rogan's research on collections and collecting

3 Misunderstanding.

of stamps and colour postcards in Europe from 1840 to 2000 shows ‘that it is not the nature of the object that is sexed, but an object acquires a male or female connotation depending on social practices’ (2012: 17).⁴

Value is thus pertinent to social and gender relations. A telling example is illustrated by Karen Sykes (2013: 98) when she considers the links between brothers and sisters as ‘valuable relations’ that are challenged by contemporaneity. She emphasises that it is not sufficient to account for value in terms of creative ways of living together, since transformations of social and cultural realities have consequences for the question of value, which therefore must be ‘reposed’ in ethnographic accounts. Hence the question of value becomes more complex insofar as new concerns such as women’s esteem and dignity come to the fore. By emphasising how value is generated in embodied practice, Anna-Karina Hermkens and Katherine Lepani’s forthcoming edited volume looks beyond economic theories of value to focus on the agency of people who create and attribute value as a way to ‘make sense of their own social practice’ (see Pains 2013; and Gnechi-Ruscione forthcoming). In particular, they concentrate on dynamics of gender, power and change in considering women’s objects as part of the processes of materialisation through which social relations, desires and values are activated (see Bell and Geismar 2009). The forthcoming edited volume by Hermkens and Lepani shares with ours a focus on ethnographic contributions in order to appreciate the peculiar dynamics of ‘what value means and does in particular societies and particular people’ rather than ‘conceiving of value as *a priori* based on labour, or looking for a foundational basis for value’ (Hermkens and Lepani forthcoming).

Materiality

A further useful dimension in approaching the contents of this volume is that of materiality. We maintain that in order to understand social dynamics in the contemporary Pacific and beyond it is necessary to bring to the foreground the relationships between people and things. A focus on these interrelations enables us to deepen our understanding of cultural, social, economic and political relations in each place considered. The term

4 Though this study does not concern the Pacific, we find it useful insofar as it focuses on objects that have become virtually universal.

materiality opens up complex issues broached by the anthropology of objects and its reflections on the tension between ‘how people make objects’ and ‘how objects make people’, thus transcending the subject/object dualism (Gell 1998; Latour 1997; Miller 2005; see also Bell and Geismar 2009 for a review of the specifically Oceanic ethnography contributing to this line of thought). Engaging with Miller’s discussion of objectification, Joshua A. Bell and Haidy Geismar argue for a shift in perspective from the static concepts of material culture and materiality to the more dynamic one of materialisation as ‘an ongoing lived *process* whereby concepts, beliefs and desires are given *form* that are then *transformed* and *transforming* in their social deployment’ (2009: 4–6).

This shift in the debate, in all its inflections, continues to be indebted to Appadurai’s (1986) emphasis on the social life of things and Igor Kopytoff’s stress on the biography of objects (in the same volume, 1986). Another essential challenge to material cultural studies is offered by Fred Myer’s edited collection (2001), resulting from a seminar held at the School of American Research in 1996, which stressed ‘the existence of multiple, coexisting and variously related “regimes of value”’ (Myers 2001: 6). As Janet Hoskins has pointed out, both these ground-breaking collections ‘emphasise commerce and external constraints over local meanings and internal configurations, in keeping with the broader disciplinary change from “local” levels to “global” ones, and from single-sited field projects to multi-sited ones in order to trace persons and things as they move through space and time’ (Hoskins 2006: 75). However, she underscores that the risk inherent in this approach is that of losing sight of the relationships between ‘objects and individual subjectivity’ and ‘objects and gender or personality’ (ibid).

The terms of the debate have, over time, become more complex and articulated, encompassing new perspectives and providing new insights into the relevance of things; from the point of view of economic anthropology, Chris Gregory considers the current dominant paradigm of agency as ‘committed to a theory of value that turns the labour theory of value on its head: things as agents give value to people rather than the other way around’ (Gregory 2009: 290). The central question remains the relationship between subjects and objects. Moving beyond this distinction is necessary, nevertheless we believe that it is *as* important not to attribute the same kind of agency to objects as to subjects (see, for example, Hoskins 1998); taken to its extreme, the idea that an object is a *thing plus agency* can become slippery and may lead to studying

objects outside of their social and historical contexts. Though Kopytoff's contribution had an enormous impact in anthropology and beyond, too often his aim has been misinterpreted by over emphasising the agency of things: as Christopher Steiner has clearly expressed, 'the point is not that "things" are any more animated than we used to believe, but rather that they are infinitely malleable to the shifting and contested meanings constructed *for them* through human agency' (2001: 210). Highlighting the dimension of malleability, Steiner encourages us to address the tension between subject and object while avoiding the danger of reification that is involved when an object is considered to embody an essence. This perspective circumvents over-stressing the vision of an object as a *thing plus agency*. On this point we agree with Steiner's analysis on the recent agentive turn in anthropology as having loaded excessive weight on objects as the locus of agency, disregarding the relationship between the meaning of things and the wider cultural signification through which they are interpreted and used.

Mindful of the limits and risks on both sides of the argument (things plus agency vs. malleability of things) we are persuaded that analysis of the material aspects of life should be grounded in historically contextualised ethnography. The recent interest for intangible heritage has moreover contributed to reshaping the concept of material culture itself,⁵ another factor to be taken into consideration in discussing the agency of objects, which thus takes on further complex dimensions. Authors like Pierre Lemonnier insist on grounding their theoretical contributions on the immaterial dimensions of material culture in ethnographically rich accounts; he argues that objects 'are situated at the heart both of a way of living together and of doing anthropology' (2013: 24). Another author who has engaged with the question of materiality is Ludovic Coupaye: in his very thorough analysis of the life of Abelam long yams, he considers the complexity condensed within an object without going as far as attributing sole agency to the yam: '*L'objet fini est donc un condensé de relations (sociales, matérielles, symboliques) réalisées au cours de la chaîne opératoire et concrétisées sous la forme d'un seul artefact ... qui doit impérativement*

5 See for example the rich documentation following from UNESCO's Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, 2003 (www.unesco.org) and the lively academic debate that ensued (icom.museum/programmes/intangible-heritage/), as well as the extraordinary interest by local communities to be included in UNESCO's list. Following the Faro Convention, drafted between 2003 and 2005 and entered into force in 2011, the term 'heritage community' has given further impulse to the rush to apply for inscription.

être donné à voir' (The completed object is thus a distillation of (social, material, symbolic) relationships, accomplished in the course of the operative chain and made concrete in the shape of a single artefact ... which must imperatively be made visible) (2009: 15).

Important observations from fieldwork centred upon material objects reveal the potential for things' capacity to start social processes in which human agency remains significant.⁶ Following in this well-established tradition of Oceania-based research on materiality and materialisation (see Bell and Geismar 2009) all the contributors to this volume differently engage with theoretical issues in important ways, and by keeping ethnography at the core of their work, they avoid the risk of sliding into ideologically biased theory. For instance Colombo Dougoud (Chapter 3), describing the exhibition on Kanak engraved bamboos—which opened at the Musée d'ethnographie de Genève (MEG) in 2008 and was shown for the first time in Nouméa in 2010—reflects on a key notion developed by Kanak elders engaging with their dispersed material heritage: the bamboos 'were far away because they had been sent in order to accomplish a specific task, that of becoming messengers, ambassadors who create connections and open paths'.⁷ Such connections are made possible by the history of relationships created by Kanak ancestors through objects; of course this vision does not deny the violence of the colonial past but emphasises those encounters that are still alive in native memory as important transformations marked by the handing over of gifts (Kasarhérou 2005). The messages carried by objects are not necessarily conflict-free, as Jolly (Chapter 2) reminds us in her comparison between the different curatorial strategies adopted in two exhibitions (in Honolulu and Canberra) on the Cook/Forster collection travelling temporarily from Göttingen to Oceania in 2006: 'I ponder the affective responses such objects elicit, how they move living human subjects, variously stimulating curiosity, respect, awe, terror or rage in spectators, some of whom are genealogically connected to the original creators, but most of whom are not'. To return to New Caledonia, in Anna Paini's chapter the relationship between people and things is analysed through a case study on an object that for a long time

6 Going beyond the context of Oceania, Anna's own students' ethnographic research on the relationship between people and things, in particular a current study by Francesca Nicalini in an old people's home near Verona ('Oggetti residenzializzati. Anziane e cose in casa di riposo') shows the power of objects in eliciting memories, feelings and desires in the old women who live there, and the resulting changes that the people working in the institution brought about to improve the guests' lives.

7 For an in-depth analysis of the concept of *objets ambassadeurs*, see Kasarhérou, 2014.

was ignored in ethnographic studies, namely the *robe mission*: a garment of colonial origin which has been reappropriated through time by Kanak women; by focusing on this dress, the analysis reveals its malleability and emphasises the agency of women. All these examples, though dealing with different kinds of things and relating to different Pacific histories, engage with the idea ‘that persons cannot be understood apart from things’ (Tilley 2006: 2).

A focus on transcending the dualism between objects and subjects hence permits a better understanding of historical and contemporary social processes at work in Oceania. As Maureen MacKenzie (1991) has brilliantly demonstrated in her classic work *Androgynous Objects* on the string bags made by Telefol women of New Guinea, interest in material culture should connect objects to the social and cultural construction of things and people, incorporating different levels of social and symbolic value. The value of things, she argues, is not inherent in the material object per se, ‘but multivalent and variously realised’ (MacKenzie 1991: 27). Remarkably, the same issue was taken up in the same year by Nicholas Thomas in his influential work on ‘entangled objects’, where he argued that value and meaning are contextually elaborated, and thus ‘it must be appreciated that the estimations people make draw upon a range of historical and sentimental considerations’ (Thomas 1991: 21). More recently, similar concerns are developed by Anna-Karina Hermkens, in her work on the female production of bark cloth among Maisin people, in which she stresses that ‘things are dynamic entities: their meanings change for the participants in different contexts depending on the specific values that come into play’ (Hermkens 2013: 339). For her this implies that the meaning of things do not reside only in objects: ‘Objects such as tapa have to be contextualized and reconfigured within performances and networks of people and things’ (ibid).

This take on object-subject relations also raises a question about whether objects should be seen as neutral, as male or female, or whether their gender affiliation should be considered as shifting according to their collocation in a wider scene including the historical, social and performative contexts of their production and use. Useful insights come from the above-mentioned work by Hermkens on engendering objects: ‘The reproduction of clan identity through a material transmission of knowledge elucidates the significant position of women. Although clan membership flows through

male lines and heirlooms are passed from one male generation to another, one of the most visual displays of clan identity is guarded and created by women' (2013: 116).

In our own research we have begun to reflect upon the issue of material production, the social uses of objects and the processes of engendering. The woven pandanus mats made by Lifou women (New Caledonia), which are no longer an item of customary exchange but continue to have a role in ceremonial events, are a case in point.⁸ Until a couple of decades ago pandanus mats were laid over woven coconut leaves on the ground to welcome groups of visitors in both formal and informal settings; for example, wedding ceremonies were organised in spaces within the groom's village covered by such layers with pandanus mats on the top. These mats, essential for creating a welcoming ceremonial space, were recognised by everyone as products of female work, even though they were used by both men and women.⁹ In the last 10 years, however, as locally handmade mats have become rare for several reasons, including the loss of interest in weaving by young women, they have come to be reserved for ceremonial occasions. An object that was previously widely made and used, the pandanus mat, over time has become scarce: not only has its value increased with the decrease of production, but it has also circulated in local networks, seldom reaching the market. Further, within such contexts the scarcity of mats has resulted in the social strategy of reserving pandanus mats for selected participants only. This practice has produced a new social experience which people in Lifou explained by stressing that the mats are reserved for the family of the chief, but since he sits on a bench on one side of the ceremonial ground, sided by other high-ranking men, the area covered by pandanus mats has effectively become reserved for high status women. Thus to an external observer, pandanus mats in Lifou are becoming associated with women, both as makers and as users. This fieldwork experience and analysis echo Lissant Bolton's work on objects and bodies in Vanuatu, in which she argues that a focus on

8 Anna Pains, 'Un art des femmes à explorer, le tressage à Lifou', Conférence-ethno, Musée de Nouvelle-Calédonie, Nouméa, 25 June 2010.

9 The pandanus mats manufactured by Korafe women (PNG) can also be said to create safe spaces for daily family activities such as eating and resting, as well as for ritual moments in ceremonies connected to the life cycle (Gnecchi-Ruscione forthcoming).

engendering must not neglect 'the intersection in relationships between gender, status and clothing as an embodiment of difference' (2003a: 120, see also Bolton 2001 and Bolton 2003b).¹⁰

We can analyse this kind of ethnographic data by stressing the value given to an object that has become scarce. In some cases an object that has become rare can be marginalised in ceremonial contexts to the extent that it becomes obsolete, in other cases a scarce object becomes more valued and thus reserved for specific situations in which it is considered to be irreplaceable; in any case the ethnographic data reveal that not all changes, incorporations or substitutions are acceptable. A telling example, to remain on the theme of pandanus mats, comes from the visit to New Caledonia by the then French prime minister Jean-Marc Ayrault at the end of July 2013. The objects he presented to the Jean-Marie Tjibaou Cultural Center in Nouméa in the course of the customary exchanges were arranged on an imported plastic mat, to the indignation of a Kanak woman friend who thought this to be an undignified replacement (email from Lifou, 29 July 2013).¹¹ So an object's itinerary can follow multiple paths, ranging from the re-attribution of value and function, to the realisation that its use has become too cumbersome for practicality resulting in its obsolescence, to defining it as inalienable (see Weiner 1992; Godelier 1999). Such outcomes may be considered as mutually exclusive alternatives as well as different stages in the social life of an object, which is attributed different social values in different historical contexts.

Place

The relation between value and materiality leads us to the third major theme of this collection, namely that of place. Like Aletta Biersack we ask what makes a place, subscribing to her suggestion that 'the answer is clearly both locational *and* relational' (Biersack 2006: 16). We do not conceive of place as a naturally bounded, isolated and confining locality; rather we prefer to think in terms of place-making as embodied practices involved in cultural, social and political processes situated within expanded arenas (Gupta and Ferguson 1997a). As Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson

10 Among the many texts addressing the intersections between gender, status, race and clothing in colonial times, see Margaret Jolly's 'A saturated history of Christianity and cloth in Oceania' (2014).

11 See also the photographs in Franceinfo, la1ere.francetvinfo.fr/nouvellecaldonie/2013/07/29/jean-marc-ayrault-visite-du-centre-culturel-tjibaou-51349.html (accessed 1 March 2017).

warned, ‘It is fundamentally mistaken to conceptualize different kinds of non- or supralocal identities (diasporic, refugee, migrant, national, and so forth) as spatial and temporal extensions of a prior, natural identity rooted in locality and community’ (1997c: 7); only by overcoming such deep-rooted anthropological approaches is it possible to reconfigure the local, avoiding the trap of the quest for originality and authenticity. It is noteworthy that a series of critical works on the concepts of boundaries, localities, place-making and the construction of identity, growing out of different anthropological conferences and meetings, were all published in the same year (Clifford 1997a; Gupta and Ferguson 1997a, 1997b). In particular Gupta and Ferguson, in *Anthropological Locations*, apply this critique to problematise place in constructing the ‘field’, underscoring that the ‘the distinction between “field” and “home” leads directly to what we call a hierarchy of purity of field sites’ (1997d: 13).¹²

Clifford’s metaphor of ‘roots and routes’ (1997a), motivates us to focus on places as increasingly interconnected and entangled through time and space, and to articulate local belonging with processes of contemporaneity, be they fluid or, in Anna Tsing’s words, sticky. In considering interactions between global and local she focuses on ‘friction’—‘the awkward, unequal, unstable, and creative qualities of interconnection across difference’ (Tsing 2004: 4)—and she also calls into question the concept of ‘universals’. She argues that it is important to decentre our focus from locality to universals, which are always to some extent local knowledge, insofar as they can only be understood in terms of ‘historically specific cultural assumptions’ (2004: 7). Thus rootedness and movement are interpreted from a contextual and relational perspective, as Teresia Teaiwa stressed in the preface to *Searching for Nei Nim’anoa*, ‘to search for roots is to discover routes’ (1995: ix). Such routes are preferential channels for ‘knowledge that moves – mobile and mobilising – across locality and cultures’ (Tsing 2004: 7). This vision represents an antidote to the common sense notion that constructs and opposes authenticity as centred in the local and modernity as connected to mobility.

To make a brief detour back to materiality, it is worth remembering Appadurai’s contention that the production of locality cannot succeed ‘unless hard and regular work is undertaken to produce and maintain its materiality’ (1996: 180–81). However, materiality should not be

12 Clifford’s essay ‘Spatial Practices’ (1997b) was also published in the volume edited by Gupta and Ferguson (1997b).

considered as an end in itself, but as connected to processes of place-making. Grounding in locality is an implied feature shared by most papers in this volume. Nancy Pollock's analysis of changing 'ethnographic practices of food use' in Oceania is a case in point, in so far as 'foodscapes are a depiction of an imagined bridge over space and time'. Further, Pigliasco's (Chapter 9) work on intellectual property is inextricably tied to notions of local cultural production. The boundaries between local and global are fluid and porous, indeed he writes: 'While cultural policies and cultural industries might stress local priorities, needs, and place-based cultural values, their activities are shaped by the activities of external actors, States and corporations, NGOs, UN bodies, and development aid institutions'. Similarly, Marc Tabani (Chapter 7) focuses on the importance of relations with one's place and, at the same time, warns that such relations may be drastically changed by the incorporation of external influences leading to the commodification of *kastom* and the resulting land grab in Vanuatu.

Our choice to highlight place as a thread running through these papers stems from our wish not to lose track of elements of continuity within the undeniable transformations of contemporary cultural worlds: such elements of continuity are expressed in living cultures rooted in changing local realities. For instance, as Strathern observed, the economic concept of value in the South Western Pacific cannot be understood if the comparison of entities is considered only in terms of ratio or rank equivalence (like and unlike items); a third relation of comparison must be taken into account in dealing with gift exchange: that 'between an entity and its source of origin. Value is thus constructed in the identity of a thing or person with various sets of social relations in which it is embedded, and its simultaneous detachability from them' (1987: 286).

In present time Oceania local to global dynamics are intertwined with an ongoing sense of belonging as people accommodate to expanded social processes. As a consequence of the resulting reconfiguration of localities, also the objects associated to a specific place may be re-signified as people, goods and ideas move faster and more frequently around the world, without breaking the connection with their place of origin, as 'local populations are integrated into the world system at the same time as they assimilate aspects of the latter to their own project' (Friedman 1996: 3). Place-making takes into account social change and cultural transformation as revealed in practices embodied locally, yet actively involved in wider

contemporary networks of ideas, objects and people.¹³ The recent volume *Belonging in Oceania* edited by Elfriede Hermann, Wolfgang Kempf and Toon van Meijl analyses the links between three dimensions: movement, identification and place-making by stressing the ‘dynamic configuration crafted by history in a unique melding of practices, linkages and powerful relationships’ (Hermann, Kempf and van Meijl 2014: 6). Seeing places as open-ended processes enables them to address localities as ‘interfaces, as points where relationships and interactions meet’ (ibid.: 8), where the local and extra-local cross paths (Biersack 2006: 16). We like to think of all these creative assemblages,¹⁴ movements, flows, reconfigurations, articulations and creolisations in terms of ‘tides of innovation’.

From ‘Putting People First’ to ‘Tides of Innovation’

This collection of essays originally arose out of discussions and critical engagement with imagining ‘Putting People First’, a notion inspired by the motto adopted in 1993 by the Pacific Forum in the ‘Suva Declaration’, and which was chosen as the main theme of the ESfO conference in Verona 2008.¹⁵ This vision emphasises the pivotal role of intersubjective relations at all levels of sociality for contemporary islanders in their daily efforts to imagine desirable futures and means to achieve them that reflect the ways in which value and values blend, giving rise to unpredictable social and cultural configurations. Dynamics involving processes of rupture and continuity, connection and rejection, resistance and domestication, overlapping and distancing, forsaking and revisiting: all processes reflecting islanders’ engagement in contemporary Oceania. Thus an emphasis on artefacts, engraved bamboos, *robes mission*, returning

13 There exists a growing body of literature on mining and deforestation for this part of the world. Although this subject involves themes connected to people’s livelihoods, the transformations of place, and place-making, this literature goes beyond the scope of our volume. However, we wish to mention, among others: Bell, West and Filer 2015; Hirsch and O’Hanlon 1995; Jacka 2015; Leach 2003; Stewart and Srathern 2003; Weiner 1991.

14 Tim Ingold contrasts two views of creativity: one, which he calls the ‘combinatory view’, focuses on the ongoing rearticulation of specific, discrete old and new elements; the other ‘is rather a movement, or flow in which every element we might identify is but a moment’ (2007: 47).

15 ‘Putting People First’ Intercultural Dialogue and Imagining the Future in Oceania (with the support of the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, Inc.) of which we were the conveners. The theme was inspired by the classic economic anthropology text by Michael Cernea (1985), which marked and fuelled the beginning of the Participatory Development policies of the 1990s, sponsored by the World Bank and other international agencies.

treasures, marvellous valuables from overseas, never transcends 'Putting People First'. We deem 'Tides of Innovation' to be an appropriate title for this volume, which opens with Andrew Moutu's reflections on the value of anthropology and his plea that anthropologists keep people first in daily practice. Early versions of all but three essays (Paini, Pigliasco and Tabani) in this collection were initially presented at the conference in Verona and have subsequently been substantially revised; they all differently engage with the dimensions condensed in the subtitle: value, materiality and place. Although the chapters are joined by several connecting threads, we have arranged them in two parts: Mapping Materiality in Time and Place, and Value and Agency: Local Experiences in Expanded Narratives.

In Part 1, Mapping Materiality in Time and Place, the emphasis is on the movement of objects, persons, ideas and meanings through interactions in networks at different scales and through time. The chapters take up a complex set of dynamics reflecting upon the toing and froing of people and objects today and in the past, considering the experiences, purposes and actions of the different parties involved, charting the processes of negotiation, readjustment and emotional involvement implicated in interpreting and making use of things whose biographies and trajectories are reviewed from the perspective of tides of innovation. Marshall Sahlins's wide-ranging excursus in time and space keeps people first by placing them on the forefront of his accounts of movements of people and goods, emphasising the aesthetics and values associated to alterity in autochthonous narratives and politics of encounters, extending well beyond the seas of Oceania. Starting from a discussion of the opposition of alterity and autochthony in Raymond Firth's remarkable Tikopia corpus, together with some general reflections on stranger-kingship, this essay reviews the marvellous Austronesian conceptions of Others opened by contact with various foreigner powers. Margaret Jolly, reflecting on the aesthetics and cultural politics of travelling Oceanic collections, leads us on a voyage from Göttingen to Honolulu, to Canberra. In her perspective, objects move in three dimensions: in the physical sense, in the affective response they elicit and in purposes of their display. She introduces the Göttingen's Cook/Forster collection, exhibited for the first time outside Europe in 2006, and moving to the Pacific, she elaborates on the intriguing differences between the two exhibitions, exemplified in the different titles that were given to them: in Honolulu, *Hele Mai: Life in the Pacific of the 1700s*; in Canberra, *Cook's Pacific Encounters*. In her analysis she reviews

the diverse institutional engagements with Pacific peoples in the setting up of such exhibitions in different places, highlighting the conflicting emotional and political tussles provoked by the returning objects.

A further case study considering materiality from the point of view of museum collections is Roberta Colombo Dougoud's contribution on an exhibition at the MEG in 2008. The exhibition's aspirations were twofold: to valorise the museum's collection of Kanak engraved bamboos, while at the same time divulging part of the museum's history. The close collaboration with the Musée de Nouvelle-Calédonie then resulted in a more elaborate exhibition in Nouméa in 2010, an important opportunity for curators to experiment with innovative forms of cooperation and knowledge sharing, for people from New Caledonia to see for the first time such a rich presentation of engraved bamboos, and also for the MEG's bamboos to acquire new strength and power, to become revitalised in their original home before continuing to play their role as Kanak ambassadors. Moving on from exhibitions to the use of objects in everyday life, Anna Paini explores the complexity of ongoing changes in the meanings and values expressed by the *robe mission*. A once imposed dress, the *robe mission* has gone through cultural reformulation not only in its materiality but also in the linguistic labels attached to it; in time the *robe mission* has become a valued indigenised dress that can be worn to manifest local belonging, and at the same time can be drawn upon to express a wider Kanak identity. Paini's chapter brings to the fore the creative energies manifested by Kanak women by establishing dress-making ateliers, an unprecedented case of female entrepreneurship in Lifou.

In Part 2, Value and Agency: Local Experiences in Expanded Narratives, the chapters bear witness to different forms of enactment and transformation of specific cultural practices to accommodate old and new, inside and outside elements. The complexities involved in these interactions yield quite different outcomes and interpretations in terms of value, yet all involve strong elements of agency, as reflected in the five essays. The section opens with the voice of a female Pacific Islander, the late Marie-Claire Beboko-Beccalossi's, reflecting on the crucial passages of indigenous women's struggle in New Caledonia, from early colonial days to the present. In particular, it underlines the role of the younger generation of women of the 1960s and '70s in establishing women's groups, giving rise to networks which would enable Kanak women to overcome the pervasive tensions and conflicts of the *Événements* in the 1980s, thus effectively creating a constructive way to participate in the contemporary

social and political life of Kanaky New Caledonia. Beboko-Beccalossi's contribution focuses on Kanak women's engagement and their assigning a central value to the pursuit of their own well-being together with that of the wider community. The narrative of her own experience as a female Kanak activist, almost anticipating Andrew Moutu's appeal for political involvement, illustrates the action of New Caledonia's women's groups which not only provide women with a space for sociality, but embrace the wider perspective of local engagement by dealing on a daily basis with problems of contemporary life in ways that empower them as women and as Kanak. Unfortunately, Marie-Claire Bekobo-Beccalossi sent us only the first draft of her text, which she was unable to revise because she became gravely ill, and a few months later passed away. We want to remember and to convey to our readers her abilities as a fine analyst and her standing as a grassroots activist, who was able to dialogue with local politicians and French ministers, but was also ready to soil her hands working with a concrete mixer while participating in a women's group's project to build toilets and ovens for local groups in Kouergoa, on the main island of New Caledonia.

Local ways of coming to terms with new values and social expectations in everyday life sometimes give rise to innovative solutions with unexpected implications. Susanne Kuehling explores this in her chapter that considers the dynamics of transformations starting from words for valuable objects and practices. She focuses on contemporary economic behaviour in Dobu and on a dilemma that can be solved through strategic choices of vocabulary. Through a case of not-giving, she shows the value and adaptability of the knowledge surrounding old exchange principles, and how they change according to new demands emerging from the ever intensifying contact with the global economy. Language needs frequent updating in terminology and as words are assigned more or less value they reflect dynamics of moral and economic aspects of life that help us to contextualise specific local instances of the 'tides of innovation'. Certainly one of the most pervasive innovations throughout the Pacific area is the use of money in the different aspects of life, not only in the economic domain but also in ceremonial contexts. The increased requirement for cash in many instances stimulates people's interest for tourism as a sustainable form of business or development. However, this strategy for contributing to the local economy brings with it a number of shortcomings. Marc Tabani's essay deals with the increasing commodification of the lifestyle, environments and ceremonial events of rural people in Vanuatu resulting

from their involvement with the tourist industry, and emphasises the contemporary paradox in which the daily practices and national ideology centred on the rhetoric attributing value to *kastom* comes into conflict with the economic value of *kastom*, resulting in the exploitation of cultural heritage. An account of the development of tourism on the island of Tanna examines the intricate question of different agencies that interact or clash in locally managed tourist activities, resulting in local division, instability and wealth inequality. Further, the commercial exploitation of traditional ceremonies in Pentecost and the consequent disruption of their yearly occurrence in the local calendar, contribute to changing the value of rituals for the participants, and to the transformation of traditions into commercial products. Such monetisation of rural communities encourages wage employment, but it also leads to the phenomenon of land-grabbing, transforming peasants into poor workers in exile on their own lands.

Innovations in values and lifestyles are also entailed in the expanded horizons of dietary choices. Nancy Pollock's chapter reflects on the values inscribed in well-being through an excursus of the processes of diversification of foodscapes across the Pacific, showing a variety of different influences on household food consumption. Highlighting the relevance of notions such as 'good and healthy food' and showing how these values cannot be separated from that of sharing food, this contribution, through its contemporary ethnographic snapshots, underlines how despite changing practices and growing health-related concerns, the well-being of each person remains connected to social and cultural webs of relations. The final chapter of the volume focuses on the importance of shared values within relational networks. In Fiji and in contemporary Oceania, culture and policy are indicated as a strategic binomial artefact to structure collective action and community values. This model is sought to mobilise rules and government decision-making towards explicit guidelines for the regulation of intellectual property and the management of cultural heritage in the service of positive nation-building and development of cultural and creative industries. Beginning from the recent debate on the trademarking of *masi* designs by Air Pacific, Guido Carlo Pigliasco analyses the problematic issue of cultural heritage protection policies, raising a series of questions such as the distinction between cultural and intellectual property, owning and using a cultural product or practice, ownership and custodianship. In this context, he emphasises the implications of a crucial distinction: 'Whereas western

intellectual property seeks to define products of human creativity that can be alienated from their creators ... across the Pacific, the ownership of intangibles does not include the possibility of alienation', thus stressing that like culture, legal acts and property relations should also be considered in a processual perspective.

The thoughtful Epilogue by Christian Kaufmann draws out intersecting paths from the different chapters. We hope that this volume will encourage further discussion on these interrelated themes and on the ways in which tides of innovation reach the Pacific Islands and the possible local responses of continuity, transformation and recurrence, and at the same time carry elements of Pacific creativity to other shores, engendering new stories.

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