Artefacts of Time: Transoceanic Transactions
A Research Workshop hosted by the Cairns Institute

25-26 July, 2013
Cairns Institute Building (Cairns Campus, JCU)

Room D3.063

Convenors: Shelley Greer, Rosita Henry and Michael Wood

NB: All places in this workshop have been filled

‘Ways of attending to the past also created modes of apprehending certain futures (...) or of reconstructing a particular sense of the present that informs the treatment of “the future in the present”’. (Munn 1992: 113)

‘Duration [la durée] proceeds not by continuous growth, smooth unfolding, or accretion, but through division, bifurcation, dissociation – by difference - through sudden and unexpected change or eruption...This means that ... our very concept of objects, matter, being...needs to be open to the differentiations that constitute and continually transform it’ (Grosz 1999: 28)

This workshop provides a forum for the presentation and analysis of research conducted for the ARC Project Objects of Possession: Artefact Transactions in the Wet Tropics of North Queensland, 1870 -2013 (DP110102291) and of related research by members of the TransOceanik Collaborative Network (The International Associated Laboratory (LIA) for Interactive Research, Mapping, and Creative Agency in the Pacific, Indian Ocean and the Atlantic).

Our aim is to problematize time, as a category, so as to raise productive questions regarding the collection of, and transoceanic transactions in, artefacts from Indigenous Australia, the Pacific and across other regions of the tropical world. We invite discussion on topics such as:

- How artefacts and/or their exhibition and display might materialise, or encode, temporal meanings
- The way artefact ‘production’ (via collection, cataloguing, classification, curatorial practices, exhibition etc.) might contribute to the reproduction of various concepts of time
- The politics of time (timing) in the trade and exchange in artefacts
- Artefacts and time as resources linked to power and agency
- The role played by artefacts in the way time is experienced (i.e. as memory, hope, desire, nostalgia, heritage, connection with ‘old people’ and places etc.)
- The relationship between artefacts and social practices/performances, including the role of artefacts in creating and measuring rhythmic action, sequencing, and tempo.
- The reproduction of multiplicity and simultaneity (e.g. via artefact collection, sorting, classification, the identification of doubles, duplicates, samples and so on)

Planned Outcomes: Two edited collections are planned from the set of papers presented and work-shopped during the two days.
Day One

9:00 - Welcome by Sue McGinty, Director, Cairns Institute


9:30 – 10:15
Paper: Michael Wood - Toward a History of Writing about (and on) Message Sticks
Discussants: Graeme Were and Russell McGregor

10:15 -11:00
Paper: Maureen Fuary - Nostalgia and the Call of Things
Discussants: Robin Rodd and Borut Telban

11:00-11:30 – Morning Tea Break

11:30 – 12:15
Paper: Corinna Erckenbrecht - The Politics of Time: The Klaatsch Collection in Poland
Discussants: Shelley Greer and Barbara Glowczewski

12:15 – 1:00
Paper: Trish Barnard – Hunters and Collectors: Indigenised Souvenirs and Home Wares in the Glenn Cooke Collection
Discussants: Maureen Fuary and Mike Wood

1:00 – 2:00 – Lunch Break

2:00 - 2:45
Paper: Shelley Greer - Objects of Time or Time’s Objects? Past Connections within and beyond the Wet Tropics of North Queensland
Discussants: Rosita Henry and Corinna Erckenbrecht

2:45-3:30
Paper: Russell McGregor - Making the Rainforest Aboriginal: Tindale and Birdsell’s Foray into Deep Time
Discussants: Mike Wood and Shelley Greer

3:30 – 4:00 Afternoon Tea Break

4:00 - 4:45
Paper: Graeme Were - Planned Obsolescence in Object Design: Understanding Materials and Decay in a New Ireland Society
Discussants: Matt Leavesley and Maureen Fuary

4:45 - 5:30
Paper: Borut Telban - Karawari Spirit-crocodiles as Beings and Artefacts: Traversing Ontologies, Epistemologies and Temporalities
Discussants: Robin Rodd and Nicholas Garnier

5:30 – 7:00 Room D3.054
Film: Daniela Vávrová - ‘Skin has Eyes and Ears’: An Audio-visual Ethnography in a Sepik Society
7:00pm Meet for Dinner at the Trinity Beach Pub

Day Two

9:00 – 9:45
Report on TransOceanik Activities and Plans – Barbara Glowzewski

9:45-10:30
Paper: Rosita Henry - *Doubly Displaced: Indigenous Australians & Museum Artefacts of the Wet Tropics*
Discussants: Russell McGregor and Corinna Erckenbrecht

10:30-11:00 Morning Tea Break

11:00-11:45
Paper: Bard R. Aaberge - *Becoming Contemporaneous with the Ancestors: The Kierkegaardian Paradox of Eternity in Time*
Discussants: Barbara Glowczewski and Robin Rodd

11:45-12:30
Paper: Carine Davias - *Time, Memory and Identity in Australian South Sea Islander Literature*
Discussants: Victoria Kuttainen and Shelley Greer

12:30 - 1:30 Lunch Break

1:30 - 2:15
Discussants: Graeme Were and Maureen Fuary

2:15 - 3:00
Discussants: Barbara Glowczewski and Rosita Henry

3:00 - 3:30 Afternoon Tea Break

3:30 - 4:15
Paper: Nicolas Garnier - *Beer, Darts, Urban Status and Contemporary Artists in PNG*
Discussants: Michael Wood and Robin Rodd

4:15 - 5:30

General Discussion
   1. Summary and discussion of key themes/points from the workshop.
   2. Plans for Publication/s
Abstracts – Day 1

Toward a History of Writing about (and on) Message Sticks

Michael Wood (Anthropology, SASS, James Cook University)

This paper reviews some of the ways ethnographers have combined talk of time with their accounts of what the production and circulation of message sticks can achieve. The message stick’s promise as an apparently transparent communicative event is often complexly linked, by ethnographers, to an ability to co-ordinate memories, intentions and future events. But some researchers such as Tindale, Memmot and Anderson also indicate message sticks were, at various times and places, quite easily transformed into unconventional spatial maps of individual biography. This shift in function helps to further specify some of the key features of the temporal and semiotic ideologies that dominate the literature on message sticks.

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Nostalgia and the Call of Things

Maureen Fuary (Anthropology, SASS, James Cook University)

In the current turning away from objects as mere signs, it is becoming a commonplace for conferences to address the materiality of objects: their substance; what they want from us; their happiness; their power; their enchantment; their spirit and most recently, the emotions involved in curation. All these themes engage with the tangibility and active qualities of objects/things, and specifically on the relationships between people and objects, and objects and objects.

In line with these recent developments I am here considering the ontology and lively qualities of objects/things - their substance and affects. By focussing on object-thing transformations and on the effects they may have on human beings, I deploy the concept of nostalgia to help us think about the ‘call of things’ to other times, places and people. In particular, I reflect on the Roth Collection stored in the Australian Museum in Sydney, and a small sample of collections in Musée du quai Branly in Paris as platforms from which to explore how places, peoples and times might be felt or indeed might make themselves felt in us.

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The Politics of Time: The Klaatsch collection in Poland

Corinna Erckenbrecht (Cologne, Germany)

The German anthropologist Hermann Klaatsch (1863-1916) travelled to Australia in 1904 with no lesser aim than to find the origin of mankind on the fifth continent. Having travelled widely in Queensland and having received inquiries from German Museums of Ethnology to collect artefacts for their museums, his focus changed. While in Cairns from November 1904 till January 1905 he made excursions into the Bellenden Kerr Range in order to collect artefacts for German museums. He put his name and his numbers on them, thus claiming his private property rights, and sent them back home immediately. Later, they were distributed to those three German museums which, in the course of Klaatsch's 3-year travels around Australia, had all helped to finance his journey with their payments. A selection of up to 400 artefacts Klaatsch took with him to Breslau University where he had been appointed professor of anthropology in 1907. After his sudden death in 1916 the artefacts remained in Breslau, but after WWII and the beginning of the 'cold war' these artefacts were moved to Warsaw, the polish heartland, in 1953 and all traces of their 'German origin' were erased. The official policy in the following decades maintained that these indigenous artefacts from Aboriginal Australia were Polish property. The political situation today, however, and a detailed study of Klaatsch's historical documents and his own artefact lists now available for research, allows to cross-reference these artefacts to the original collector, the indigenous owners (in some cases), the ethnographic traders, the circumstances and the locality of acquisition. Thus, more than one hundred years later, the artefact transactions and the property claims both on a private and an international level can be reassessed through time and space.

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Hunters and Collectors: Indigenised Souvenirs and Home Wares in the Glenn Cooke Collection

Trish Barnard (Museum of Tropical Queensland & SASS and School of Creative Arts, James Cook University)

The focus of this paper is my Masters research based on an interpretative evaluation of a particular collection which was donated by an arts industry colleague Mr Glenn R Cooke. This collection consists of 1,395 objects collected over thirty years that represent the production of souvenir tourist objects and domestic home wares manufactured in Australia (and China) and also marketed in Queensland that play a role in the way time is experienced. The collection clearly reflects blatant misappropriation, influence and adoption of indigenised motifs by non-Indigenous artists and makers to affirm the notion of a national identity. The irony of the collection is that while commercial manufacturers encouraged the production of this material, it contradicts Australia’s former political ‘keep Australia white’ policy, where non-Indigenous opportunists mass produced objects for the market using motifs from a culture they tried to oppress. This collection represents domestic home wares as well as tourist objects promoting Aboriginal Australia made by non-Indigenous and non-Australian makers that reinforce influence, appropriation and misrepresentation of Indigenous Australia.

Objects of Time or Time’s Objects? Past Connections within and beyond the Wet Tropics of North Queensland

Shelley Greer (Archaeology, SASS, James Cook University)

This paper explores notions of time in relation to past connections of Aboriginal people from the Wet Tropics region. It proposes that in the past, connections between individuals and groups were multifaceted, multifunctional and in relation to this paper, multidirectional, extending beyond the Wet tropics region. The paper draws heavily on the extensive work of Brayshaw (1990) that examined ethnographic, material culture and archaeological evidence for the Herbert-Burdekin region. While there is limited archaeological information for the region, it is used to extend the time depth beyond the recent past.

The paper also builds upon the concept of ‘portals’ as places where past, present and future collide (Greer 2009, 2010). In this instance, the portals are the artefacts or objects that have found their way into museum collections. The paper is particularly interested in where the objects were collected. While most were collected in centres such as Cairns (within what is today the ‘Wet Tropics’) some were found elsewhere. Are these objects ‘out-of-place’? Or can they tell us something about the extent of pre-colonial exchange networks?

While the examination of past connections is the primary concern of the paper, it also reflects on the way that proclamation of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area has influenced both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal understandings of connections within the region. Here, the focus is the influence of time passing on the way that objects are experienced.

Making the Rainforest Aboriginal: Tindale and Birdsell’s Foray into Deep Time

Russell McGregor (History, SASS, James Cook University).

In the late 1930s Adelaide-based ethnologist Norman Tindale and Harvard physical anthropologist Joseph Birdsell created the category ‘rainforest Aboriginal people’. They identified the inhabitants of the north Queensland rainforests as a distinct race of indigenous Australians, akin to the Tasmanians but separate from all other mainland Aboriginal groups. This classification was a keystone in Tindale and Birdsell’s attempted reconstruction of the deep human past of Australia. According to their narrative, the Aboriginal inhabitants of the rainforests were the living relicts of the first human occupants of Australia, refugees from later waves of Aboriginal invaders who seized all but the most inhospitable parts of the continent. From the outset, Tindale and Birdsell’s argument was burdened with serious problems, both in the qualities (physical, cultural and linguistic) they attributed to rainforest people and in their representation of the rainforest environment as a ‘refuge’. While Tindale and Birdsell’s racial theorising and historical speculations drew some supporters, they failed to win general academic acclamation and by the 1970s were quite thoroughly discredited. Yet the category ‘rainforest Aboriginal’ survived, disengaged from the reconstruction of Australia’s past that had inspired it and anchored instead to the distinctive economy of rainforest subsistence, instantiated in a distinctive material culture. This paper takes Tindale and Birdsell’s relict race representation of rainforest Aboriginal people as the starting point in an exploration of how European people represented the Aboriginal inhabitants of the North Queensland rainforests over
roughly a hundred years, from the 1870s to the 1970s.

**Planned Obsolescence in Object Design: Understanding Materials and Decay in a New Ireland Society**

Graeme Were (University of Queensland)

The deterioration of museum objects is normally understood in entirely negative terms. In Nalik society, New Ireland (Papua New Guinea) – the focus of this paper – the opposite could be said to be true of the material culture. I will examine how a material’s propensity for natural decay and deterioration plays a crucial role in its selection and uptake in the crafting of objects in Nalik society. The selection and technical handling of materials, I argue, is met with a shared understanding amongst Naliks of their transformative potential to fulfil specific expectations in the social world through their in-built obsolescence. Focusing on the observed decay of objects reveals ways in which Naliks intellectually manage social relations and thus demonstrates how object temporalities – through their calculated obsolescence – create tangible outcomes in the social world.

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**Karawari Spirit-crocodiles as Beings and Artefacts: Traversing Ontologies, Epistemologies and Temporalities**

Borut Telban (Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts)

The Karawari River region of East Sepik Province, Papua New Guinea, is renowned for five to eight metres long carved wooden crocodiles. These artefacts were between 1930s and 1960s sought by art collectors and found their way into museums around the world. For the Ambonwari people they are powerful spirits, and it is their names, and the potency connected to them, which are tied to the first ancestors of those clans who founded the village. Whenever the spirit-crocodiles were carved they were hidden from women and children in the men’s houses. They had important role in headhunting and war expeditions, initiation rituals, hunting trips, and periods of epidemics and massive death. I argue that Ambonwari ontologies and epistemologies – where being and knowing are interrelated – are dominated by being-towards-birth mode of existence. When the artefacts are put into museums they enter different ontologies and epistemologies – where being and knowing are often separated – which are dominated by being-towards-death mode of existence. This is reflected also in different temporalities with which both the spirit-crocodiles and the museum visitors are confronted when these artefacts traverse the border between the village and the museum.

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**ABSTRACTS - DAY 2**

**Doubly Displaced: Indigenous Australians and Museum Artefacts of the Wet Tropics**

Rosita Henry (Anthropology, SASS, James Cook University)

The history of displacement of Indigenous Australians as a result of various government policies has been well documented. Going beyond this established literature, this paper explores connections between the removal of Djabugay and other Aboriginal people of the Wet Tropics of North Queensland to missions and reserves and a concurrent ethnographic trade in museum artefacts. I provide an analysis of how Aboriginal people and some of their material products were historically sent along different trajectories and the political agency informing various practices of re-connection and re-emplacement. The paper sheds new light on debates about the political and economic aspects of a history of displacement, circulation and emplacement that continues to produce inequalities today

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**Becoming Contemporaneous with the Ancestors: The Kierkegaardian Paradox of Eternity in Time**

Bård R. Aaberge (Anthropology, SASS, James Cook University)

This paper will address the difficulty in understanding Kuku Yalanji temporality as it is represented when post-colonial elements manifest in narratives of abiding Dreaming events. One such example from my fieldwork is Roy Gibson’s dream narrative where Kurriyala, a rainbow snake, spews three white women into the ‘Blue Hole’, a story place in the Daintree. As the women touch the surface they transform or infuse into the waterhole itself. According to Roy, this event is what created the waterhole itself, i.e. it is a creation story. When asked about why he thinks the women were white, his interpretation was that they were strangers to this place who may have transgressed Yalanji Law, and added that they might have been tourists.

Such seeming contradictions, where introduced elements (such as white tourists) are transformed into abiding land formations and represented in Dreaming narratives about creation, have previously been hotly debated in the Australian Aboriginal literature, under alternative headings such as historicity, cold vs. hot societies (Levi-Strauss) and prescriptive vs. performative societies (Sahlins).

Instead of attempting to resolve the paradoxical inherent in such narratives, I follow Kierkegaard and position paradox as an existential provocation requiring a qualitative leap to faith. The leap is a way of transcending the limits of objective reflection, which never gets beyond ‘an approximation of truth’, and is, according to Kierkegaard, the only way to experience truth about the religious and its temporality; "Only momentarily can a particular individual, existing, be in unity of the infinite and the finite that transcends existing. This instant is the moment of passion" (Kierkegaard, 2000). If we seek it, we must participate radically in the field; our quest for knowing must begin with knowing for ourselves. This necessarily starts with an inwardly earnest contemplation of paradoxes where the eternal and temporal converge, a cornerstone of religious transformation, and points to how one can become "contemporaneous" with the eternal.

**Time, Memory and Identity in Australian South Sea Islander Literature**

Carine Davias (PhD student at Paul Valéry University, Montpellier, France; Cotutelle with James Cook University, Townsville, Australia)

2013 is an important year for the Australian South Sea Islander community as it celebrates the 150th anniversary of their ancestors’ first arrival on the continent to work as indentured labourers on the sugar cane plantations of Queensland. So it is a time of mobilisation and commemoration during which several cultural events are organised along the eastern coast. It is also a time of reassertion of their unique identity as a distinct cultural group, mostly descended from a Melanesian ancestor brought from a surrounding island. Such a celebration was made possible thanks to the fight of a previous generation of South Sea Islanders like Faith Bandler, Noel Fatnowna or Mabel Edmund, who were actively involved in the revival of their history and personal stories through politics and writing.

In this paper, we will more particularly focus on their life stories and fictions that started to develop in the 1970’s. These accounts can indeed be considered as artefacts of time based on shared memories of exploitation, discrimination and eventually adaptation to a new environment. They therefore all contribute to the restoration of their own, sometimes contested, version of history, which highlights their historical dimension and a gradual move from a personal to a collective level of perception.

The experience of time in their stories is also related to the writing of a biography or autobiography within an established temporal framework, usually corresponding to the lifetime of the main character. Thanks to a retrospective glance and an internal reconstruction of one or someone’s personal life, this type of writing partakes of a process of identity formation and identification to a particular community. It is also a way to perpetuate the writer’s connection with his/her home island by conjuring up memories of its people and landscape with nostalgia while living in Australia. We are thus invited to consider identity not as a stable and rooted notion but as a routed, rhizomorphic, time and space–related construction within a diasporic context.

Emma Scott (Anthropology, SASS, James Cook University)

Past and present meanings about indigenous cultural practices and beliefs are inscribed in artefacts and attitudes towards them. Indigenous herbal remedies were previously regarded as mere ‘craftwork’ and sold alongside other indigenous artefacts as curiosities for tourists in the indigenous market in Puerto Ayacucho, Venezuela. This has changed over the last twenty years as the indigenous movement increased in power, and the government has recognised more indigenous rights to education, health, and lands, including the preservation of traditional medicine. Indigenous medicines are now lauded as part of the national patrimony and history. But even as indigenous medicine and artefacts become more highly valued and enter the capitalist economy, these traditions are being lost in favour of professions and government jobs that take people from their traditional communities: the production centres for these artefacts.

Who’s in Charge Here, Anyway? Reflections on the Vegetable Agency of a Living Transoceanic Artefact

Robin Rodd (Anthropology, SASS, James Cook University)

This paper explores notions that Australian ayahuasca drinkers articulate about the agency of plant as opposed to human consciousness in the context of the transnationalisation of religion. Ayahuasca (Banisteriopsis caapi) has been cultivated in tropical and subtropical Australia for at least twenty years, imported originally from Peru, Brazil and Ecuador. Demand for ayahuasca within Australia exceeds local supply by about 2 to 1 and ayahuasca is imported, in either dried plant form or as a brew, from Peru and Brazil. Along with the plant the idea of plants as teachers and that ayahuasca asserts its agency on humans has also migrated west from the Amazon region across the Pacific Ocean to Australia.

McKenna (2005) contends that Ayahuasca might be asserting its own ecological agenda to wake humanity up to the extent of its future-eating, anomie and environmental catastrophe. Lechter (2007:92) argues that dominant discourses that preclude the possibility of agency in the vegetable realm ‘at best... cut off a potentially fruitful avenue of consciousness research and, at worst... endorse a short-sightedness, a human-centred narcissism in which consciousness can only be recognized if it comes packaged in a human form’. Exploration of the notion of plant agency – that ayahuasca is using humans to assert its own reason upon the world – allows for discussion of human consciousness as an historical artefact, and for examination of identity politics tensions among advocates of autochthonous Australian ayahuasca rituals that need not reference the plant’s cultural origins among indigenous and mestizo communities in the Amazon.

Beer, Darts, Urban Status and Contemporary Artists in PNG

Nicolas Garnier (Anthropology, University of Papua New Guinea)

This paper proposes a renovated approach to contemporary art in Papua New Guinea in focussing on the financial incomes it generates for artists. Around Nine Mile and Six Mile markets – two highly populated settlements of Port Moresby – people play darts every evening. The lucky winners are awarded with one, two or three bottles of SP beer. This game is considered as the cheapest way to buy beer. The dart clubs are mostly frequented when employees receive their fortnights pay with an alternation between public and private sector. Large quantities of money are therefore spent on Friday evenings and this generosity consecrates a volatile social prominence within settlement groups in Port Moresby. Later in the week-end and during week days people involved in informal business rarely have the occasion to spend large amounts of money to entertain a large group. Their income, although sometimes substantial, does not come in large amounts. PNG contemporary painters have developed in the last 15 years an economic activity which enables them to spend occasionally large amounts of money in buying beer and entertaining a group of people sometimes all night long. This paper analyses the strategies of urban dwellers in Port Moresby and their involvement in visual arts in order to satisfy new forms of Melanesian urban social reciprocal exchanges and the way contemporary art has been used as a way to gain social prominence in a changing society.
‘Skin has Eyes and Ears’
Audio-visual Ethnography in a Sepik Society
Papua New Guinea

Film by Daniela Vávrová
PhD candidate in anthropology
The Cairns Institute and School of Arts & Social Sciences
James Cook University
rachel@reflectangulo.net

84 minutes
Ambonwari village, East Sepik Province, Papua New Guinea
Languages: Karawari and Tok Pisin (with English subtitles)