



*Routledge Research in Museum Studies*

# MUSEUMS, SOCIETIES AND THE CREATION OF VALUE

Edited by  
Howard Morphy and Robyn McKenzie



# Museums, Societies and the Creation of Value

*Museums, Societies and the Creation of Value* focuses on the ways in which museums and the use of their collections have contributed to, and continue to be engaged with, value creation processes.

Including chapters from many of the leading figures in museum anthropology, as well as from outstanding early-career researchers, this volume presents a diverse range of international case studies that bridge the gap between theory and practice. It demonstrates that ethnographic collections and the museums that hold and curate them have played a central role in the value creation processes that have changed attitudes to cultural differences. The essays engage richly with many of the important issues of contemporary museum discourse and practice. They show how collections exist at the ever-changing point of articulation between the source communities and the people and cultures of the museum and challenge presentist critiques of museums that position them as locked into the time that they emerged.

*Museums, Societies and the Creation of Value* provides examples of the productive outcomes of collaborative work and relationships, showing how they can be mutually beneficial. The book will be of great interest to researchers and students engaged in the study of museums and heritage, anthropology, culture, Indigenous peoples, postcolonialism, history and sociology. It will also be of interest to museum professionals.

**Howard Morphy** is Emeritus Professor in the Research School of Humanities and the Arts at the Australian National University.

**Robyn McKenzie** is a postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Australian National University working on the Australian Research Council funded project *The Relational Museum and its Objects: engaging Indigenous Australian communities with their distributed collections*.

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# Contributors

**Jilda Andrews** is an Indigenous cultural practitioner and museum anthropologist based in Canberra, Australia. Currently a Research Fellow with the Australian National University and the National Museum of Australia, Jilda draws from her Yuwaalaraay heritage to investigate the connectedness of land, story and culture in museum collections. Her approach seeks to push the definition of custodianship, from one which is focused on the collection and preservation of objects, to one which strives to maintain connections between objects and the systems which produce them. Publications include 'The expression of traditional ecological knowledges in textile designs of Northern Australia,' in *Aboriginal Screen Printed Textiles from Australia's Top End* (Fowler Museum, UCLA, 2021) and the forthcoming chapter 'String ecologies: Indigenous country and pastoral empires' in *Ancestors, Artefacts, Empire: Indigenous Australia in British and Irish museums* (British Museum Press, 2021).

**Joanna Barrkman** is Senior Curator of Southeast Asian and Pacific Arts, Fowler Museum at UCLA. Her doctoral thesis, awarded by the Australian National University in 2017, documents the Bagaia Collection which was collected by Dr Alfred Bühler from Bagaia, Portuguese Timor (now Timor-Leste) for the Museum der Kulturen, Basel in 1935. She has curated several exhibitions and published scholarly catalogues about Timorese material culture and art in Australia, Timor-Leste and Indonesia for the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, Charles Darwin University Art Gallery in Darwin Australia, Secretariat of State, Culture (DRTL) and Timor Aid (Dili), Jakarta Textile Museum and The Netherlands Embassy (Jakarta).

**Joshua A. Bell** is a cultural anthropologist and curator of Globalization at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Natural History. Combining ethnographic fieldwork with research in museums and archives, Bell examines the shifting local and global network of relationships between persons, artefacts and the environment. Since 2000 he has been working with communities in the Purari Delta of Papua New Guinea to document the region's heritage and transformations in the wake of regional resource extraction. In 2011 he began a collaborative project on the material, social and linguistic dimensions of cellular telephony. He is the Acting Director of the National Anthropological

Archives and directs the Summer Institute of Museum Anthropology. As part of Recovering Voices, he co-directs the annual Mother Tongue Film Festival. Bell has edited several books and written articles on materiality, collecting, visual return, political ecology, repair and cell phones.

**Lissant Bolton** is an anthropologist, Keeper (head) of the Department of Africa, Oceania and the Americas at the British Museum, and Director of the Endangered Material Knowledge Programme. She is a member of the *Relational Museum and its Objects* project team. Her research focuses on Vanuatu, where she has also worked since 1989, collaborating with the Vanuatu Cultural Centre (VKS) developing programmes to document and revive women's knowledge and practice. Her publications include *Unfolding the Moon: Enacting Women's Kastom in Vanuatu* (2003); *Baskets and Belonging: Australian Indigenous Histories* (2011); the co-authored *Art in Oceania: A New History* (2012); and a series of co-edited volumes including *Melanesia: Art and Encounter* (2013) and the forthcoming *Anthropological Forum* special issue *The Art of Gardens*. Exhibitions for the British Museum, include 'Power and Taboo: Sacred Objects from the Pacific' (2006) and 'Reimagining Captain Cook: Pacific Perspectives' (2018).

**Anna Edmundson** is a Lecturer at the Centre for Heritage and Museum Studies at the Australian National University and a curator in the field of Oceanic Art. Her work explores the ongoing connections between people and objects across a wide range of disciplinary fields including anthropology, history, digital humanities and museum studies. Her work challenges the notion that museum-making is a uniquely European tradition and explores the intersections between different models of collecting, preserving and interpreting moveable cultural heritage in museums and communities. Her current research explores the development of new technologies and methodologies for digital returns, community archiving and knowledge restitution for First Nations Australian and Pacific Islander communities.

**Jason M. Gibson** is an anthropologist and historian with extensive experience on Australian Indigenous cultural heritage and museum repatriation initiatives spanning two decades. He is currently Research Fellow with the Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalisation, an Honorary Research Associate with the Melbourne Museum, and an Honorary Research Fellow with the School of Social Sciences and Berndt Museum of Anthropology at the University of Western Australia. He is the author of *Ceremony Men: Making Ethnography and the Return of the Strehlow Collection* (SUNY Press 2020) and the forthcoming *Repatriation of Indigenous Cultural Heritage: Experiences of Return in Central Australia* (Routledge).

**Nicole M. Hartwell** is a Junior Research Fellow at Selwyn College, University of Cambridge. Prior to her appointment as the National Army Museum Fellow in Indian Military History, she was postdoctoral researcher for an AHRC-funded project at National Museums Scotland and co-curator of the exhibition



'Legacies of Empire,' held at the National War Museum, Edinburgh Castle. Hartwell obtained her DPhil in Modern British and Imperial History at the University of Oxford (2017). Her research interests include the history and material culture of colonial military campaigns (c. 1750–1900), the development of military museums, South Asian art, arms and armour (especially of the Mughal period), and the role of memorialization in military cultures. She is also Managing Editor for the *Journal of Military Ethics*.

**Jessica De Largy Healy** is an anthropologist at the Laboratoire d'ethnologie et de sociologie comparative, Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique – Université Paris Nanterre, and an Honorary Fellow at the Indigenous Studies Unit, School of Population and Global Health, The University of Melbourne. Her doctoral research (PhD, 2008, UniMelb-EHESS) is built upon the ethnography of an experimental digital archiving project instigated by a group of Yolŋu ceremonial leaders of Galiwin'ku, in north-east Arnhem Land. Collaborating on a number of Indigenous-led studies of Australian material and audio-visual collections in European museums and archives, as well as art exhibitions and restitution processes, she has published extensively on the many creative ways in which these materials are being reinvested locally through art, ritual or new media.

**Anita Herle** is Reader in Museum Anthropology and Senior Curator for Anthropology at the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (MAA), University of Cambridge, where she oversees the Pacific, Americas and photographic collections. Her research and exhibitionary praxis are concerned with a range of ethnographic and disciplinary contexts for MAA's collections and their many contemporary resonances. She has explored the intersection between different knowledge systems, the complex relations that develop in the anthropological field and the potency of objects and photographs in relational encounters. For over 20 years she has developed and supported numerous collaborative projects with members of source communities in Torres Strait, Fiji, Vanuatu, Canada and elsewhere.

**Gwyneira Isaac** is Curator of North American Ethnology and director of Recovering Voices for the National Museum of Natural History at the Smithsonian Institution. She works in the Southwest region of the USA, focusing on the dynamics of and intersections between culturally different knowledge systems, especially where Native American and non-Native knowledge systems meet. This research has led to questions about how technology is used within the discipline of anthropology, museums and Indigenous communities, especially via the reproduction of knowledge through replicas, models and 3D printing. Her publications include 'Technology Becomes the Object: Art, Artifact and Digital Media at the National Museum of the American Indian' (2011); 'Whose Idea Was This? Museums, Replicas and the Reproduction of Knowledge' (2011); 'Perclusive Alliances: Digital 3-D, Museums and the Reconciling of Culturally Diverse Knowledges' (2015).



**Henrietta Lidchi** is currently Head of Research and Collections at the National Museum of World Cultures (Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen) in the Netherlands, and is also a fellow at National Museums Scotland, Edinburgh as Principal Investigator on the project *Baggage and Belonging: Military Collections and the British Empire (1750–1900)* which focuses on military collections (2017–2021). Lidchi's research interests include questions of colonial collecting and the history of collections; practices of representation, collecting and display; visual culture; questions of craft and craft practice and Indigenous North American art and material culture. Publications include the co-edited volumes *Imaging the Arctic* (1998), *Visual Currencies* (2009) and *Dividing the Spoils* (2020) and the monograph *Surviving Desires: making and selling jewellery in the American Southwest* (2015).

**Robyn McKenzie** is a postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Australian National University working on the Australian Research Council funded project *The Relational Museum and its Objects: engaging Indigenous Australian communities with their distributed collections*. Initially trained as an Art Historian, her interests in the visual arts have developed through dialogue with the field of Anthropology: history, theory and practice. She obtained her PhD in the Cross-cultural Interdisciplinary Studies Program at the ANU in 2016 for her study on the Yirrkala string figures in the Australian Museum, Sydney. McKenzie's research is focused on activating the latent potential of the legacy collections in our museums, big and small. Her most recent work (as part of the *Relational Museum* project) began with a stocktake of the collections of Indigenous stone artefacts found in local museums in the Riverina district of NSW (see <https://cdhr-projects.anu.edu.au/talkingaboutstones>).

**Howard Morphy** is an Emeritus Professor in the Research School of Humanities and the Arts at the Australian National University. Prior to returning to Australia in 1997, he held the chair in Anthropology at University College London, following 10 years as a curator at the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford. His publications include, *Aboriginal Art* (1998), *Becoming Art. Exploring Cross-Cultural Categories* (2008) and *Museums, Infinity and the Culture of Protocols: Ethnographic Collections and Source Communities* (2019). He was the 2013 Huxley Medallist of the Royal Anthropological Institute. He is a Chief Investigator on the ARC Linkage project *The Relational Museum and Its Objects*.

**Christopher Morton** is Head of Curatorial, Research and Teaching and Associate Professor of Visual Anthropology at the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford. He is also a Fellow of Linacre College, Oxford and the Royal Anthropological Institute. Morton's research centres on the overlapping histories of photography, anthropology and museum collections; how the visual technologies of the past have influenced the way that other cultures and societies have been understood within European social science, and how these legacies continue to shape social and cultural attitudes in the contemporary world. He is the author of several edited volumes, including *Photographs, Museums,*

*Collections: Between Art and Information* (2015, co-edited with Elizabeth Edwards), as well as a recent monograph on the fieldwork and photography of renowned British social anthropologist E. E. Evans-Pritchard (*The Anthropological Lens: Rethinking E.E. Evans Pritchard*, Oxford University Press 2020).

**Chrischona Schmidt** is the manager at Ikuntji Artists, a not-for-profit Indigenous art centre in Haasts Bluff, 230 km west of Alice Springs; and an Adjunct-Associate Professor at the University of Queensland. Her work as an arts professional with a particular focus on Indigenous Australian art spans over two decades. Her doctoral research focused on the history of the Utopia art movement and the art market. She continues researching the Utopia community and their art-making as well as the history of the Ikuntji art movement. In her current role as art manager at Ikuntji Artists, Chrischona has been working with artists and community members to locate and visit collections of Luritja objects in Australia and overseas.

**Gro Ween** is Professor in Social Anthropology at the Cultural History Museum, University of Oslo. At the museum, Ween is Keeper of the Arctic, North American and Australian collections. She has engaged in fieldwork in North Australia, Nunavut, Yupik Alaska and Sápmi, and written extensively on Indigenous issues, including heritage and museum-related topics from these locations. Ween has held the academic responsibility for two exhibitions, the temporary 'New Arctic' that has become a travelling exhibition, and the permanent exhibition, 'Controll: Attempting to Tame the World' at the Cultural History Museum.

# Introduction

*Howard Morphy and Robyn McKenzie*

Value is a complex concept. It is used in many different senses that are at times set in opposition to one another. In Oscar Wilde's *Lady Windermere's Fan*, Lord Darlington quips that a cynic is 'a man who knows the price of everything and the value of nothing.' Yet price is clearly one of the main measures of value in the everyday. But only one. The vast literature on the topic tends to be divided between value as measured in the sphere of economics and the values invoked in ethical and moral discourse, in line with Lord Darlington's opposition. Intuitively, we can grasp that there is a clear relationship between the two, but neither framework – the economic or the ethical – comprehensively accounts for the central place of value in social and cultural life more broadly, and in particular in discourse over the material world.

Material objects and people's occupations and activities often appear to be the location of value in and of themselves rather than the mere instantiation of value generated by the logic of economics or moral-ethical structures. Thus, objects and actions can be a fulcrum of connection between different dimensions of value, but equally, they can be valued substantively in relation to their own attributes rather than framed in a dualistic dialogue. Dualist oppositions often mask the rich and contextually specific ways in which the attributed value of things is central to human action in society.

Value as a term is used routinely with reference to material culture objects (jewellery, wooden panelling, smartphones) and to activities (bushwalking, free time, listening to music). Value is applied in formal ways to the description of the properties of things, to the tonal quality of colour or sound, to the properties of raw materials, to the nutritional status of food and so on. Some domains of value are more subjective and less tied to money than others – such as qualitative judgements about works of art or the appropriate clothes to wear. Value is also applied routinely to the techniques, knowledge and skills that people need to make the material world, in a way that is neither judgemental in an ethical or moral sense nor directly related to the price of things. However, it is easy to see how connections can be made from the material to the spheres of economics and ethics. In economic terms the qualities of materials can be related to their scarcity and to price in a market economy and then in turn to class (Bourdieu 1984; Douglas and Isherwood 1979) – there are objects that only the wealthy can afford, made by methods that are too costly to employ in the manufacture of everyday things.



Value is a central component of the knowledge that enables people to act in particular domains, habitats, societies, and classes but the knowledge itself cannot be reduced to its application to any one of them. The domain of value contains everyday and specialized knowledge about things, imbricated in the life of particular cultures and societies. The values associated with objects can be seen as chains of connection or disconnection as objects move across different regimes of value (e.g. Appadurai 1987; Myers 2001); the particular object provides a focal point that brings into play the different ways in which the material world has properties that are valued and different ways of valuing things.

Museums almost by definition collect things because they are of value to the institution itself.<sup>1</sup> But they do not necessarily collect things that are valuable in the monetary sense or which have a high value as exchange items. In the museum world, the different senses of value collide as much as they coincide – morality meets money, education tangles with display, aesthetics dances with decor and decorum, and the collector meets the collected. Museums are a venue in which value can be reduced or added as an object moves categories, as it gains in fame or its provenance is enhanced. The entanglement of museums with the art market is inevitable in the contemporary context, where fine art is still mysteriously associated with, among other things, refinement, class, prestige, contemplation and higher forms of knowledge.

Ethnographic collections can provide windows into value creation processes in societies at different moments of their history (Morphy 2019). They give the researcher access to the nature of colonial relations (Peers 1999; Bell 2017; Modest 2019) and reveal the entanglement of Indigenous cultural trajectories with external influences in post-colonial contexts (Thomas 1991, 1999). It needs to be recognized that the objects themselves are often a main source of evidence and that their materiality provides the most direct connection to their past (Sculthorpe, Nugent and Morphy 2021). From the perspective of material culture studies, the object must be primary and set in dialogue with any evidence that contextualizes it. Objects are a resource for researching the value trajectories of which they are a part and hence revealing the values and value creation processes of the societies from which they come.

It is important to draw a distinction between the value of an object as a potential source of information and how it is valued at particular points in time. Museum objects are valued in different ways by different people in different institutions and how they are valued changes over time and across cultures. Value can be located in many different attributes of an object according to different criteria – an object can be valued according to what it is made from, how it was made, the quality of the craftsmanship, its cultural significance, its rarity, the name of the maker, who previously owned it and so on. These values can change in significance over time and so too can the value of the object as a potential source of information. Value can change through the process of research and community engagement – new questions can be asked of an object and new potentials found.

The value now given to ‘ethnographic dirt’ by museum curators provides a very good example. Ethnographic dirt is a deposit on an object that is a product of use or



a by-product of its manufacture, a product of its age or its decay but is not thought to be an integral part of the object *qua* object. It is like the food remains on the plate that would have been washed away before it was placed in the cupboard. The problem the conservator or the curator faces is whether it is something that requires treatment to return the object to its 'original' condition or prevent the deposit from causing further damage, or something that is integral to the object *qua* museum artefact. The decision will depend on the particular focus of the museum, whether the object is to be prepared for exhibition and what the deposit is. In the past, the tendency would have been to remove the dirt (Greene 2006). However, today, people have become aware of the potential of ethnographic dirt as a source of information about past lives – it is recognized as something of value. The deposit on the surface of a wooden object or a textile provides evidence for anything from its use and what it once contained, to how it was manufactured, its age and, from the analysis of any DNA, provides a link to its maker or past owner.

The potential significance of an object changes over time with the accumulation of evidence about it – through archival research, formal analysis, scientific analysis and additional information provided by museum visitors. Methods of analysis and changing understanding of the significance of the object can transform its value over time. Documentation is part of the value creation process but it can also be a rich source of information about the different ways in which objects have been valued over time.

## Museums as process

Raymond Silverman in the introduction to his book *Museums as Process* (2015) emphasizes the importance of what he refers to as 'slow museology.' Both of these ideas – museums as process and slow museology – are important for understanding the ways in which museums are linked to the creation of value. At the same time, they provide the rationale for one of the core values of public museums – their responsibility to hold the objects in their collections on behalf of others for specified or unspecified purposes into an unknown future. Those core values are often central to the critique of museums from those who fund them and from those who have interests in objects they contain. Museums are criticized for having too many objects of the same type, for conserving and curating objects of limited financial value, for failing to exhibit the entirety of what they hold, for not allowing people to properly engage with the objects by keeping them at a distance, and so on. The critics are both inside and outside the museums and reflect the interests of different groups (Karp et al. 2006). Inside the museum, conflict may occur between curators, researchers and conservators over a variety of subjects – the allocation of scarce resources, restrictions on handling objects, levels of light in exhibitions or the requirements of scientific investigation to learn more about or from the object.

The theory of museums and collections has tended to be written, sometimes positively sometimes critically, from the perspective of western societies. Museums are seen to be an outcome of the European Enlightenment built on the cabinets of curiosity and on the collections and accoutrements of the wealthy and the

aristocracy (Bennett 1995). Research focuses on the motivations of people who made the collections and built the museums, the reasons why the objects were collected, the ways in which they were exhibited (Kratz 2011), and how they gained in value from being included in museums. With certain exceptions – fine art and design – there has seldom been consideration of the motivations of the people whose work ends up in the collections. They have undergone a process of ‘neutralisation’ (Bourdieu 1984, p. 272). The makers and their descendants until recently have been seen as passive agents in the history of most collections. In most chapters of this book, in contrast, the maker’s presence is strongly felt and the value to them of the works in the museum is central to the argument about value (see Sleeper-Smith 2009). This is in part a reflection of the kinds of collections that are focused on – ones that in the past would have come under the general rubric of ethnography or ethnographic.

The essays in this book engage richly with many of the important issues of contemporary museum discourse and practice. As a whole they enable us to trace the trajectories of values over time and the ways in which museums and collections have been centrally involved in value creation processes. This perspective provides an important challenge to presentist critiques of museums that positions them as locked into the time they emerged. The central themes that recur throughout are the agency of people across space, time and cultures, and the emergence of values that become manifest and realizable through the museum process.

## **The creation of the public museum**

The public museums which came into existence in Europe during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries have become models over time for analogous institutions nested within the structure of nation-states globally. While sharing in common certain values about cultural heritage framed by international bodies such as ICOMOS and UNESCO, they have developed from their own histories and sets of values. Viewed from the *longue durée* the objects that comprise collections have an almost infinite capacity for interpretation and (re)connection. However, they can also appear at times to be constrained by imposed categories that lock them into past values and reproduce conservative institutional structures (Ween, Chapter 2; Bolton, Chapter 6). There is a danger that objects carry forward connotations from their past histories and the theories of a particular time, fixing the way they are seen and flattening their potential. Objects in collections that have had many lives both inside and outside the institution over the *longue durée* incorporate their history in the present by the acknowledgement of multiple pasts.

Cabinets of curiosity were museums of everything and over time they became subdivided to reflect the development of disciplines, interest groups, regional identities – from a museum *of* everything there has almost been a movement towards museums *for* everything – from natural history, to regimental museums, to portrait galleries, to museums of childhood, and Lego.<sup>2</sup> The creation of separate museums has in itself been a process of value creation; just as is the case with the changing labels and names for departments or sections in the museum. An ongoing



theme of the process of museums has been the work of cataloguing the objects by describing them, labelling, sorting them and placing them in categories. From the outside, this has often seemed to be an institutional imposition on the ways the objects were understood at the time of their production. The categorizations are pragmatically useful, they enable people to find objects that fit in with their interests, and they can open people's eyes to aspects of objects that they had not previously recognized. But the same object, as we shall see, could be placed in many different categories and held in many different institutions. Categories have shifted dramatically over time yet the slow process of change has often meant that these changes have emerged almost unnoticed and then imagined always to have been thus. Ethnography developed as a category in the nineteenth century about the same time as fine art was separated out to be housed in dedicated institutions of its own.

The same type of object – a Haida mask, a Trobriand Island shield, a Hawaiian feather cloak – could find a place in a national museum, an art museum, an ethnographic or anthropology museum, and many others. Objects are likely to be valued in each case primarily according to the focus of the institution – as a heritage item, an art object, a cultural artefact and so on. Different institutions value material objects in fundamentally different ways; hence, arguments over objects make different regimes of value visible. This is one of the reasons why theories that give agency to the objects and their materiality can ironically disconnect them from the people who made them and the purposes to which they are put over time. As Bolton (this volume p. 123) writes 'objects 'are made and used in systems of significance which accord value to a class of objects, and which may mandate changes to that value according to particular contexts and social calculus.'

Ethnographic collections, in part because of their generality and because they categorized objects on the basis of cultures or communities of origin, have provided a major resource for other museums with narrower agendas. Indigenous art was a largely unrecognized category before the twentieth century and even then, was only cautiously allowed in art museums under the rubric of 'primitive' art. Indigenous art has increasingly been recognized as an integral component of world art history and art practice (Morphy 2007). Works in ethnographic collections, which were previously undervalued by art museums, have recently become objects of desire.

Objects in museum collections can increase their value through the prestige they gain as culturally significant artefacts and/or the exposure they get as aesthetically pleasing objects (Chapter 7). The renown they gain can increase their monetary value. However, because the monetary value often reflects the positioning of a work according to western categories and scales of value – art as opposed to ethnography, fine art as opposed to craft – it can be seen to involve the imposition of western values on non-western cultures. This is one of the reasons why there is often an uncomfortable relationship between ethnographic museums and art museums, the former giving priority to the value of the object in the culture of production, the latter entangled with its value as a work of art on the global art market. Indeed for a long time, one of the main criteria of the 'primitive art' market was

that the work had not been produced for sale outside the society – a covert recognition of cultural significance as an albeit distorted sign of authenticity. However, as categories change, distinctions are challenged and art markets become more globalized and oriented towards contemporary production, then non-western artworks can gain in monetary value from their entry into the value creation process of the art market.

### **Ethnographic collections in museums of the world**

The museums that developed across Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were built on histories of collecting and the accumulation of material culture. The public museums included many objects that had been part of earlier collections. A bronze water jar (*hydria*) could have begun life as a trade object in Greece in the fifth century BC, been acquired as a prestige object in Roman times though capture and housed in a villa in Italy, resided in a merchant's house in Mediaeval Italy before being brought back to a stately home in England from the Grand Tour, and eventually gifted to a British museum.<sup>3</sup> The form of the vase remained constant over that time but it had been seen and valued in many different ways by people who had quite different relationships to it in the context of very different societies and times.

Caroline Vout (2018) in her book *Classical Art: A Life History from Antiquity to the Present* traces the ways in which antiquities – works of material culture from Greece and Rome – were understood, incorporated and activated in value creation processes from classical times to the present.<sup>4</sup> Classical antiquity has played such an important role in European cultures that tracing the history of the collection and curation of its objects provides a window to the many changes that occurred in European society and its relationship to the world outside at different moments in time. The building of classical collections over millennia is integrated within histories of trade, colonization, religious wars, the rise and fall of empires, and is associated with the continual transformation, creation and recreation of the boundaries of nations, states and regions. Classical antiquities formed a major component of the royal, aristocratic, ecclesiastical collections and the cabinets of curiosity. Such collections were often highly eclectic – cumulatively building and in a sense creating the heritage from the previous centuries. They included works from prehistory, the Middle Ages and Renaissance times, and each generation added contemporaneous works of art, craft and literature. The collections might also include minerals, natural history, anatomical specimens and manuscripts – indeed anything that might excite the curiosity and delight the senses of those privileged to be invited as guests to admire them.

While collections had always contained material culture from outside the changing boundaries of Europe, the expansion of European colonization and the so-called 'voyages of discovery' in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries began to change their balance.<sup>5</sup> Material culture from Asia, Africa, Oceania and the Americas began to have a major impact on European sensibilities and opened up different worlds. Initially, the dominant paradigm was to incorporate all within hierarchical oppositions such as that between 'barbarism' and civilization in continuity with



debates set in classical antiquity. The world outside Europe contained within the emergent museums was framed by existing categories and values but the collections also provided a challenge that would prove to be an engine for change.

As Joshua Bell (2017, p. 249) puts it, 'Colonialism was and is heterogeneous with a play of agencies defining the periods from which the collections emerged.' Museums were both in step with colonial processes that facilitated the building of collections and ahead of them in changing attitudes by challenging theories based on race and in recognizing the value of cultural diversity. The collections made during this time played and continue to play a significant role in demonstrating the value and richness of *other* ways of life and initiating slow processes of change in the domain of human rights, challenging received hierarchies and changing the meaning of terms from the past (Sculthorpe et al. 2015).

Europe has always been an arena for conflict and contestation, and the European Enlightenment was a time of war and revolution. The era of the expansion of cabinets of curiosity presaged a period when, as Vout (2018, p. 162) appositely phrases it, 'the classical and the colonial [and] the princely and the public realm jostle for supremacy.' It was the time when some collections began to move from the private to the public domain with the creation of national and regional museums.

Museums such as the British Museum and the Louvre developed in part to give the public access to collections that had been in private ownership. In France the transformation was literally part of a revolutionary movement. Abbé Grégoire, who played a significant role in the founding of the Louvre, argued that the treasures 'which were previously visible to only a privileged few . . . will henceforth afford pleasure to all: statues, paintings, and books are charged with the sweat of the people: the property of the people will be returned to them.' (McClennan 1999, p. 98). The changes in France were neither inevitable nor determined by revolutionary aspiration alone. Grégoire was contesting the very opposite solution to the problem of privileged collections – their iconoclastic destruction which some such as Robespierre advocated (Sax 1990). However, the movement to create public institutions was gaining momentum elsewhere in Europe. Similar sentiments to Grégoire's were expressed in the founding of the British Museum. In the words of Sir Hans Sloane in his will leaving his collection to the nation, his aim was to satisfy 'the desire of the curious, as for the improvement, knowledge and information of all persons' (Wilson 2002, p. 11).

Jason M. Gibson (this volume, p. 108), building on an argument of Pieter Keur's (2010) argues that the tension between Enlightenment ideas of acquiring knowledge for scientific study and the attentive localism of Romanticism, produces an institution that is not wholly rational and scientific but one that leaves room for sentiment and with it a recognition that its collections are part of 'larger social, political and cultural fields of human affective activity.'

In reviewing museums over time from the viewpoint of successive curators, it is possible to see them as being engaged in a process of trying to understand and influence the world as it changes with ever-increasing speed.

## Ethnographic?

The label ethnographic has until recently been primarily used to refer to collections from cultures and societies outside the boundaries of Europe. The crucial time for the development of public museums was also the time when material culture from distant places was becoming integrated within global trading systems, and being brought back to Europe by returning travellers, missionaries, military and colonial officials. The objects generally were not of high financial value (Bolton 2009) but the interest they generated is reflected in the large number that ended up in museums across Europe.

Present usage sees the term 'ethnographic' overlap with or even being replaced by the term Indigenous, referring to the people of a region prior to its colonization or their encapsulation within a nation-state. In settler colonial societies increasingly collections will become locally categorized under the preferred names of the source communities. Collections were subdivided in part on the basis of differences in the scale and presumed complexity of the societies concerned. Labels such as 'tribal' or 'civilization' were applied to some collections and not to others and they could be understood to reflect value judgements about the quality of the objects and the evolutionary ranking of societies. The labels have been entangled with the value creation processes of the market as in the case of 'primitive' art, or 'tribal' art. Such distinctions brought uncomfortable divisions between collections from the same geographical regions.

The very fact that ethnographic collections have been an integral part of the collections of the British Museum from its beginning shows the extent to which European museums were open to wider views of the world than those that dominated at the time. The Asian collections in the British Museum have a history of changing departments as categories shift. In 1933 the collections became divided between the newly created Department of Oriental Antiquities and the Department of Ethnography. Oriental Antiquities, as its name implied, looked backwards with a connoisseurial eye to past civilizations and forward to highly valued material objects of those continuing traditions. The Department of Ethnography retained the important collections connected with everyday life, with indigenous societies and with societies that were ranked lower by internal or external criteria – 'caste,' status or 'folk' traditions. The distinctions were problematic and the categories became increasingly outdated. Seventy years on, the Asian collections were brought together in a more encompassing department, the Department of Asia. The large collections from Britain and Europe held in the Ethnography department associated with everyday life and what would have once been classified as folk culture was moved to the Department of Britain, Europe and Prehistory. The Department of Ethnography itself disappeared as a label and its remaining collections re-emerged under the rubric of Africa, Oceania and the Americas. The labels are important as signs of changing values but it is vital to understand that the change is an integral part of the value creation process that museums are engaged in, often aimed at a better and more nuanced appreciation of cultural diversity.

The Department of Greece and Rome survives as an independent entity with its focus on Classical Civilization, reflecting the scale of its collections and in turn the important role that Greece and Rome have played in the European imaginary.



The changing locations of ethnographic collections within institutions have not diminished their importance but highlighted their value. Lidchi and Hartwell (this volume, p. 69) succinctly define ethnographic collections as comprising objects that are ‘salient to the understanding of a culture.’<sup>6</sup> This does well as a minimal definition of the concept of ethnographic value. Over time the museums that housed collections primarily for their ethnographic value developed in tandem with the disciplines that focused on human diversity – anthropology, archaeology, human geography, philology and, increasingly, cultural history and art history. While clearly all material objects have the potential to contribute to the understanding of the society of their maker, in the case of ethnographic collections this is to be seen as one of the primary reasons for the collection of an object, in contrast for example to its value as a work of art or an example of technology. Because ethnographic collections were drawn from societies outside of Europe it also meant that the museums housed material that would not otherwise have been curated and conserved. They comprised collections that fell outside the contemporaneous structure of values of Britain or France at the time of their collection.<sup>7</sup> In a sense ‘curiosity’ is a good word – open-ended, looking towards the future, oriented towards discovery and engagement rather than being locked into rigid categories.

However, it is important to note that the term ethnographic itself has the connotations of knowledge that comes from the people themselves. Material culture does to an extent objectify aspects of the society that produces it and in and of itself provides a source of evidence (Miller 2005; Dudley 2010). But ideally collections should be well documented at the time of collection from the culture of production. The documentation of a collection can reveal the techniques and knowledge that goes into their manufacture, it can record the different names associated with each object and the different ways in which it is valued and used within the society and in turn help understand the structure and organization of the society that produced it. But, however comprehensive and detailed an individual collection is, it only covers a short period of time. As records of human knowledge collections need to be linked across institutions and in a sense conceived of as a whole. Researching collections involves getting to know them, valuing them, putting the parts together and making sense of them inside and outside the museums. Collections in that sense are like archives and libraries in that they are inevitably partial but create a whole that is far greater than the parts. Understanding the particularities of human histories over time continues to be the primary objective of those who value ethnographic collections.

Lissant Bolton’s chapter on textiles from Vanuatu exemplifies the value of collections as archives of knowledge. The distributed collections from Vanuatu enable people to understand the diversity and complexity of the region’s creative practice and its regional variation and temporal trajectories. Ethnographically the distinctions signified by the variation in form and technique of different textiles are at least as important as the objects themselves. Without knowledge of these, the objects have lesser value and a major task of the curator and researcher is to reconnect objects in the collection that are undocumented to others that have definite attribution. As Bolton shows, members of source communities generally



have complementary ambitions. When they have the knowledge and authority, one of their aims is to ensure that the objects in the museums are well documented, and if the existing documentation proves valuable to return that knowledge back to the community.

From a global perspective, all collections are potentially ethnographic. Hence, most of the issues associated with the reconnection of ethnographic collections with their history and with contemporary descendants are now acknowledged to apply more generally to all cultural collections.

### **Building collections (with museums in mind)**

The majority of ethnographic museums have developed agglomeratively over time. A proportion of these can be understood as the product of war and sometimes the spoils of war (Chapter 3), but a greater proportion were collected on ‘voyages of exploration,’ or were trade items, or derive from the collecting activities of missionaries and colonial officials in situ. The framing of museum collections as wholesale plunder or loot has been one of the most damaging over-generalizations of recent discourse that seeks to decolonize museums. Many of the chapters in this book provide evidence of uncomfortable histories and imbalances of power and status between collectors and makers. But museums and archives are precisely among the main sources of evidence for understanding and revealing past histories and placing them in context. In doing so, they often reveal much more complex processes at play, in which the agency of the makers emerges strongly.<sup>8</sup>

Trade has been integral to the building of nearly all museum collections. Material culture objects, things that could be made to sell, were an important way in which people linked in to the developing colonial economy (Barnecutt 2006, 2018; Kingdon 2019). The majority of objects in ethnographic collections were trade items, with the ethnographic collector sometimes, but rarely, being ahead of the trader. Edmundson (Chapter 1) notes in the case of MacGregor how quickly ‘scientific collecting’ gave way to commercial enterprise. The importance of many objects as trade goods has been masked in part because of the ‘scientific’ value gained through being as uninfluenced by colonization as possible. It is also because those in museum collections have indeed become rare survivors. The vast majority, that were in private hands, have long since ceased to exist.

The developing interest in collections as a form of knowledge in the eighteenth century meant that many presaged the emergence of public museums. The earliest Pacific objects in the University of Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology come from the eighteenth-century voyages of Cook and others (Chapter 7). While many of the artefacts collected on Cook’s voyages were sold as commodities on the return to Britain others were included in collections of colleges, learned societies and emerging museums (Bolton 2009). Sir Joseph Banks (1743–1820), who accompanied Cook on his first voyage, was instrumental in the process of transformation and gave and bequeathed his collection and library to the British Museum. Equally importantly the journals and artists’ pictorial records of the voyages provided the kind of documentation that would subsequently prove invaluable.

The Great Exhibitions and World Fairs were one of the main generators of ethnographic collections in the nineteenth century.<sup>9</sup> Gro Ween's chapter on the Sámi shows just how important they were. The foundation collection of the University of Oslo's Ethnographic Museum resulted indirectly from actions of the British philologist and ethnologist Dr Robert Gordon Latham, who commissioned the historian Ludvig Kr. Daae to build a collection for the Crystal Palace Great Exhibition of 1851. While often framed as integral to colonial processes, the Great Exhibitions also made visible the indigenous populations who, in the case of the Sámi, had been long encapsulated within the Nordic nations. Ironically, the Sámi gained their presence in the capital city of Norway as local representatives of global indigeneity a century in advance of that category becoming widely recognized.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, a major shift occurred in anthropology as a discipline. Whereas previously there had been a separation between the theorists and the collectors of data the two began to be combined in the single person, or through people working together collaboratively. Many of the leading figures in the development of the discipline of anthropology worked in the field and in the museum. In many cases, such as in the research of Franz Boas (Glass 2015; Jacknis 1996), Baldwin Spencer and Francis Gillen and the Strehlows, father and son (Chapter 5), Swanson (Chapter 10) and Haddon (Herle 1998) collections of material culture became an important adjunct to the notebook and the camera.

Museums remained one of the major locations for anthropological research into the mid-twentieth century. Joanna Barrkman's chapter centres on a collection from Baguia, Portuguese Timor (now Timor-Leste) made in 1935 by the geographer and ethnographer Alfred Bühler of Basel's Museum der Kulturen. Robyn McKenzie (Chapter 8) focuses on a collection of string figures made by Fred McCarthy, curator of the Australian Museum, on the 1948 American – Australian Scientific Expedition to Arnhem Land. Both collections are well documented with detailed notes and photographs and were valued in part for the evidence they provided for comparative anthropological research. The Baguia collection was made as part of a research project looking at boundaries between Austronesian and Papuan cultures. String figures had an important place in early anthropology because their widespread occurrence across cultures provided evidence for commonalities and historical connections. Both projects in part reflect the research focus of their times but as we will see they also provided a future resource that was unimagined at the time.

Those who made the collections that we have considered so far had in mind western institutions that were primarily educational, cultural and research-oriented. Their focus was on understanding different cultures and histories through a process that was dynamic and ever-changing. We can contrast these purposes with the motivations behind the development of military museums. Lidchi and Allan (2020) show, unsurprisingly, that the objects were selected for their relevance to the history of a regiment, its achievements and its ongoing identity – for their memory works, not for their ethnographic significance. The collectors for both kinds of museums might overlap and the same kind of object, such as the Qing Dynasty rosewater ewer, in the Department of World Cultures at National



Museums Scotland, may find its place in different collections instrumentalized for different ends and mobilizing different frames of value. Nevertheless, their chapter shows two very different kinds of western museums associated with overlapping but different sets of values, serving distinct purposes which result in very different collecting and preservation practices, institutional trajectories and community engagements.

The diversity of motivations comes up in a surprising way in Anna Edmundson's chapter. Her focus is on the collection made between 1888 and 1898 by Sir William MacGregor, the Administrator of British New Guinea. MacGregor came from a similar background to that of Spencer and Haddon and saw collections of material culture as integral to the development of a scientific and humanistic understanding of society. His aim was to create a representative body of material culture that could at a future time be recognized as a valued record of people's past heritage. However, in this case, he was building a collection for what he imagined at the time would one day be the independent nation of British New Guinea.

### **Museums and source communities – a brief note**

The concept of a source community or culture of origin is contested. The terms tend to be used interchangeably. At the heart of their meaning is the notion that a material object can be traced to the individual and/or the group of people who made it. A codicil is that there is, or can be, a continuing set of people who by descent, location or culture are connected to that originating moment (see Karp, Kremer and Levine 1992; Peers and Brown 2003; McCarthy 2011; Colwell 2017). Since a key value of objects in ethnographic museums is that they can be placed in time and in the context of the society that produced them, it is not surprising that the concept has particular salience there. A source community is central to the idea that a category of people or political entity have continuing rights in an object because their community or nation was where the object originated. The identity of the source community is premised on a real or imagined connection with the person who made the object concerned. Analytically, any label for a culture or society has to remain provisional, and so the 'source community' becomes a construct that may differ in space and time. In some cases, and for some purposes, the relevant community may be as large as the nation-state – as in the case of the Elgin Marbles or the MacGregor Collection.

For well-documented ethnographic collections where the individual maker is known, conceptualizing the local community clearly provides a starting point. De Lary Healy (Chapter 13) shows the way in which the Yolŋu intellectual leader and museum researcher Dr Joe Gumbula spent many years researching his community's collections. His research involved respecting sets of rights and relationships within his own society. His community is not simply defined and bounded but extends beyond the boundary of Yolŋu speakers through intermarriage. Yet, at the same time, his relationship to particular objects depended on his clan membership. A painting by his father in the National Museum of Australia could be classified as a Gupapuyngu clan object, or a Yolŋu object, or as an Indigenous or



First Nations Australian object, or as an Australian national treasure.<sup>10</sup> In each case, it is possible to imagine a large number of individuals who would have a strong emotional attachment to the object as representative of a category of persons, from Yolŋu to Australians in general.

The idea of a source community, though important, is essentially a fuzzy concept. It is difficult to theorize and apply, yet important to understanding the nexus of relationships between the makers of objects and the cultural institutions that hold them. If the museum and the source community are imagined as two entities – two locals – that have ongoing relationships, then the relationships between them have to take into account the fact that both are changing over time, that comparatively they can be seen to operate at different scales, and involve different space-times (Morphy 2019). For Nancy Munn ‘in comparative anthropological studies, the spatiotemporal dimensions of a theoretical problem not only are intrinsic to it but require analytic fore-grounding’ (1996, p. 447). Ethnographic artefacts not only move from the space-time of their place of manufacture but through the different spatio-temporal contexts of their life in collections where they are understood over time in very different ways. And engaging with museum collections involves different people in different ways entering and engaging with past times.

The source community can be anything from an imagined prehistoric society or a city that no longer exists, to the community associated with a living artist or craftsperson. Many of the chapters in the book touch on these issues in different ways. How do local communities exist in a global arena? What is the ‘local’ in a world of migration of diaspora and multiple identities? There is a sense in which Indigenous communities are both in their local places yet also part of national and international domains. And in the historical processes that have created those situations, the majority of people from source communities no longer live in their original ‘local.’ These problems of connection are central to how the value of museum collections can be realized in the present.<sup>11</sup>

In the case of ethnographic collections, the source community is a complement to the imaginary of the nation-state – both are phenomena that are simultaneously social facts and imagined entities. They are concerned with how, in a globalized world, the local can be recognized, and the ways in which local values can be acknowledged and respected at a global and national level. Many of the chapters in the book provide insights into the complexity of these issues and show how the idea of a source community is active in energizing museum collections (Phillips 2011; Krepps 2019). The idea that particular people have a relationship with a museum’s collections based on descent and other forms of identity is of contemporary significance and is integral to the processes of value creation within museums.

## Agency revealed

Understanding the presence, absence and frequency of particular kinds of objects in ethnographic collections reveals the values they have both to the collector and to the source community. For example, Edmundson’s detailed analysis of the MacGregor Collection shows how it is balanced towards the objects of everyday life in

Papua New Guinea communities and objects that were already items of local trade. Sacred objects and objects of high ceremonial value within the society formed a very small percentage of the collection.

The structure of museum collections is far more influenced by the value objects had to source communities than is often realized. Because the objects are likely to be valued on a quite different basis when traded outside the community this can create highly complex entanglements between different regimes of value over time. And contrary to many people's expectations, the ethnographic and 'local' value of an object may lie as much in its absence from museum collections as in its presence.

Perhaps the most written-about objects in the history of anthropology are the exchange items of the *kula* ring – the necklaces and shell rings that circulate in opposite directions around the chain of islands of the Massim in Papua New Guinea (Chapter 7). They remain at the centre of debates on exchange, value creation and the nature of economy.<sup>12</sup> However, very few are present in museum collections, primarily because they have remained central to the regional system of trade and exchange until the present. They remain objects of value within the Massim, and their value as anthropological artefacts is ironically affirmed by their absence in collections.

However, many other artefacts are not as firmly tied to place. The finely carved splash boards (*lagim*) of the canoes that travelled with the *kula* valuables across the island chain are well represented in collections and became items of trade destined for distant markets. The *lagim*, as exquisitely painted carved figures, became valued more for their aesthetic impact as art objects than for their role in the system of exchange. As art objects, they crossed the boundary between two systems of values – the anthropology museum and the art museum.

Herle (Chapter 7) writes with reference to a Luan Veuv mask from Vanuatu gifted to the Cambridge University Museum that 'the value of the mask is transitive, the main value resides in the knowledge and ownership of making and performing, not the material object.' And other objects can change categories within a society as they move from one context of use to another. Bolton gives the example of *qana* textiles from Ambai Island, Vanuatu that gain value as objects of exchange in the marriage system but which when taken out of that system become something else and are used for domestic purposes. The Malanggan sculptures of New Ireland that have gained recognition as one of the world's great and dynamic art traditions were traded in large numbers to Europe at the end of the nineteenth century. In this case, the desires of the market became synchronized with the life of the object in the culture of production. The sculptures were commissioned for the memorial ceremony of community members and revealed as an installation in a final dramatic revelatory performance (Küchler 2002). The sculptures were often made by specialist craftsmen in neighbouring villages or islands and traded in. At the conclusion of the ceremony, the sculptures were left to rot or on some occasions burnt, but the sale to European traders became another option for a continuing existence in a distant place (Barneclutt 2018).

While in many cases source communities have maintained similar structures of value into the postcolonial context, in other cases the value of artefacts has been transformed. In the context of war and colonialism, values can be disrupted either



by a denial of agency to people or because of major internal transformations of societies and belief systems. The advent of Christianity or Islam has often challenged the value that objects held in Indigenous religious practices and has resulted either in the destruction of objects or their release from the community by sale. The accounts of collections made at the time often reveal moments of high tension when different belief systems collide.

In Chapter 9, Bell writes about the single object – a figure – from the Purari Delta in the collections of the Smithsonian Museum. It proved a difficult object to research and to reconnect to the community because it belonged to ‘a class of objects that slipped out of use during the early 20th century and its absence was cemented by the region’s iconoclasm of the 1950s.’

Jason M. Gibson’s focus is on the *tywerrenge* of Central Australia – a set of objects that have a parallel place in the history of anthropology to the *kula* valuables. The *tywerrenge*, or ‘churinga’ as they were initially recorded by Spencer and Gillen, were central to Durkheim’s distinction between the sacred and profane. Unlike the *kula* valuables, their power and authority lie in part in their restricted nature, and yet in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, many of them found their way into museum collections in Australia and elsewhere and were openly exhibited. As is the case with the figure from the Purari Delta, the *tywerrenge* became contested in multiple ways, and at times, encouraged in part by Lutheran missionaries, were deliberately sold outside the community. Importantly, Gibson notes that, rather than emphasizing secrecy *per se*, understanding them more correctly as components in ‘a tightly controlled system of knowledge access and revelation’ opens up the possibility of managing their value in a changing future. He shows how they are truly entangled objects that play a continuing role in value creation processes that have both a local and global impact.

The building of museum ethnographic collections can be seen as an emergent process. It was not until the end of the nineteenth century that some collections began to be made with museums in mind. Before that, most objects were traded as ‘curiosities’ or as functional or decorative items. And there are very few documented accounts from the time of the motivations of either the sellers or the buyers. In many contexts, the evidence suggests that trade was itself a key motivation for the people who made and sold the goods locally. The traders who bought them and sold them on were again interested in them as trade items, not as objects of ethnographic significance. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, in some cases, trade and ethnography came together in the building of collections that had museums in mind. For the first time, we begin to get evidence that source communities were beginning to see museums as a possible destination for their material culture in order to provide a future resource (Morphy 2019).

## Re-engagement, continuity and innovation

Engagement begins from the basis of very different histories of the relationships between source communities and museums. The possibility of reconnection requires very different kinds of work depending on the particularities



of history. In some cases, collections were made at near-genocidal moments and the agency of the makers present in the artefacts is largely absent in the documentation.

A number of chapters reveal the dynamics of present processes of engagement between source communities and museum collections and the impact of spatio-temporal disjunctions on the process and the outcomes. Jilda Andrews' and Jessica De Largy Healy's chapters on Indigenous Australian societies with overlapping but very different colonial experiences contrast poignantly with one another. Andrews writes about the process of her engagement as a museum anthropologist and as a Yuwaalaraay person with collections from her community that she uncovers in museums in Australia and overseas. The Yuwaalaraay were dispossessed of their country in the nineteenth century and researching the collections provides a visceral encounter with the objects, the labels and histories from the past. The things that were collected, the way they were catalogued and the fact that collecting stopped creating a distance – a gap – between the past and present that needs to be addressed and redressed.<sup>13</sup>

De Largy Healy's perspective can be seen as being in continuity with an almost collaborative history of the making of Yolŋu collections. Much of the chapter comes through in the voice of Dr Joe Gumbula (1954–2015). Effective European colonization of Yolŋu country took place in the mid twentieth century and in 1976 Yolŋu gained rights to their own land.<sup>14</sup> Healy shows Gumbula engaged in a two-way relationship, bringing objects back to the community and bringing the community into the museum. The question of value was central to his undertakings and he understood the value of museum collections as formidable intellectual and historical resources for Yolŋu and non-Indigenous people alike. In 2009, Makarr-Garma's *Aboriginal Collections from a Yolŋu perspective* opened in the MacLeay Museum in Sydney – 'the exhibition was imbued with transformative properties: like a ceremony, it became a site for the transmission and reproduction of Yolŋu knowledge' (this volume p. 250).

Yolŋu knowledge stored in museum collections is also the subject of Robyn McKenzie's chapter. Value creation processes are dynamic and material collections caught up in them change their value in unpredictable ways. McKenzie shows how the string figures collected in 1948 by McCarthy both lost and gained value in different ways in the museum and in the source community after an interval of 60 years. Anthropology's interest in string figures declined so that the collection became almost forgotten. And when McKenzie reengaged the community with the collection, the making of string figures was almost a forgotten practice. However, as a result of McKenzie's engagement, the tradition became revitalized in the community and the collection became a medium for the transmission of knowledge. Contemporary string figures became incorporated locally and nationally into art practice. The value of the ethnographic collection was enhanced through its contemporary use. At the same time, the history of the collections provides a window on the iterative relationship between academic disciplines and cultural change – these are non-linear relationships that are at times disarticulated but always have the potential to come together.

Gibson's focus is on relationships that are in some respects as continuous as in the Yolŋu case, although covering a longer and much more contested period of history. Changing museum and government policies have facilitated the return of *twerrenge* to Central Australia, and the museum-controlled environment of the Strehlow Research Centre in Alice Springs, as a local storehouse, has created an important 'middle space.' The Strehlow Centre has provided the place for the necessarily slow Indigenous assessment of the material and its reincorporation within the community.

Schmidt's chapter, like McKenzie's, shows the importance of contemporary art practice as part of a continuing trajectory of collecting, in this case, in Central Australia. Her focus is on an Indigenous community art centre at Ikuntji in Central Australia. Some of the artists are descendants of people who had worked with Spencer and Gillen and the Strehlows,' but they were also participants in the early years of what became known as the Western Desert art movement. The founding of community art centres can be seen as part of a process whereby Indigenous Australians became incorporated within the state, as part of a movement from exclusion to inclusion that almost literally became visible in the 1970s. The Western Desert art movement was partly facilitated by the newly created Aboriginal Arts Board which brought national arts funding to Aboriginal communities for the first time (Myers 2002). This art was produced explicitly for sale. The works were initially treated by southern institutions and the buying public with some scepticism and with questions about authenticity. The first museums to acquire the works were not the museums of fine art but museums with ethnographic collections. However, Indigenous people had their own view of the history of their engagement with Europeans. They had a sense of autonomous continuity with no need for external categorization of their cultural production. Desert paintings soon moved into the art museums. Schmidt's chapter emphasizes the holistic nature of Indigenous art practice and the ways in which the Ikuntji community has seized the opportunity to visit collections in Australia and overseas and take part in a global process of reconnection to country.

The examples we have been considering so far in this section come from Australia – a settler colonial society in which the rights of the Indigenous population were disregarded during the colonial process. The context of collections in the USA and Canada is not dissimilar (see Isaac, Chapter 11). However, the majority of today's nation-states have populations within them, who may or may not be classed as Indigenous, but who claim a primary identity that is different from that of the encapsulating state. Frequently, that identity is de-emphasized or denied at the national level. Museum collections become entangled in different ways in the politics of identity and relative autonomy inside the borders of nation-states, which may themselves have very short histories.

Gro Ween's chapter provides a fascinating analysis of Sámi collections held in Norwegian cultural institutions and the process of relocating them within the nation-state through a coordinated process of return. She shows how the process of creating Sámi institutions has resulted in different structures in each of the Nordic nations – Norway, Sweden and Finland – whose boundaries encompass Sámi



populations. As a people, the Sámi themselves cut across the changing boundaries created by state formation but the solutions that have been developed have involved Sámi as citizens of each state. Within Norway, the redistribution of collections has been influenced by the regional political structures that have developed within the structure of the nation-state. The decisions over where collections are to be located add value to evolving systems of regional governance.

Re-engagement also occurs across the boundaries of nation-states as we have seen and may involve an initiative of the museum as part of its agenda in opening up its collections. The relationships often begin with individuals recognizing the value of a collection and initiating a process of reconnection as was the case with the Baguia collection. The Baguia response illustrates one of the many ambiguities of diasporic objects removed from place. In this case, there was no sense of loss of valued object as such. People believed that the objects that had remained behind, that had been looked after properly, and had the appropriate rituals performed, had in a sense been enhanced by the fact that in a distant place similar objects had been valued, cared for and have survived. The objects that have remained in place had accrued in value.

In the Baguia case, the initiative came from outside but received an immediate positive response from the museum. But, in many cases, the museums themselves play a central role in initiating the process. The Smithsonian Museums *Recovering Voices* program has been set up to build relationships between the museum and source communities around the world. Bell's chapter focuses on the visit of a community member from the Purari Delta in Papua New Guinea to Washington. He shows how the engagement involves, even requires, personal relationships built over time and reciprocal visits to allow for priorities to emerge. And in Bolton's case, it was a 'local/national' institution the Vanuatu Kaljoral Senta (Cultural Centre) that showed her the direction for her research in Ambae and in collections overseas.

Anita Herle's chapter focuses on 'Pacific Currents,' a two-year project researching and redisplaying the University of Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology's collections from the region. In this case, the museum built on over a century of discontinuous yet enduring and recursive relationships with source communities. The very title of the exhibition subtly condenses the museum's awareness of the process they are engaged in – signaling movement, change and exchange of ideas and values and 'developing a more open and less proprietorial approach to access, interpretation and display' (this volume p. 139).<sup>15</sup> Increasing access is essential to the development of the trust that provides the basis for ongoing productive relationships.

### **Photography: objects, returns and replicas**

One of the common problems shared by curators and researchers on the one hand and communities and individuals interested in their own histories on the other is bringing data together. The historical record gets redistributed for various reasons; books are broken up because the individual engravings are at a moment



in time more saleable, on a death an estate is broken up, redistributed among different beneficiaries, and unwanted items – account books, old invoices, letters photographs – are simply classified as rubbish and thrown away. Different institutions prioritize and compete for different things from the past. Collections can be distributed between libraries, archives and museums. And within institutions such as museums where collections may have arrived as a whole, they are again subdivided into separate departments and often managed in different ways – the objects are separated from the archival documentation, from works on paper, from photographs and so on. There are many different reasons for separation and dispersal but how things are valued and the needs of conservation are paramount. However, the value of each item can be enhanced and become more meaningful when it is reunited with other objects or documentation from its original context of collection.

Images have always been an integral part of the recording of and interaction with other cultures. The seventeenth- and eighteenth-century voyages often included artists as essential members of the crew and anthropologists were among the earlier users of film and photography in research. Images add value to collections of artefacts. They provide contextual material, enabling objects to be provenanced and providing a window into the past and the history of change. Today, photographs are seen as an important part of the anthropological record (Edwards and Morton 2015) and have become central in the developing relationships between museums and source communities. But this was not always the case.

A number of chapters in this book provide interesting case studies for tracing changing valuations of photography and film over time. Christopher Morton provides insights into the crucial period of time at the end of the nineteenth century when photography was seen to provide an essential resource for the emerging discipline of anthropology. It was a time when the theory of anthropology was being debated in the European metropolis. Photography was welcomed because it was seen to be closer to reality than the artists' sketches, more reliable. A photograph seemed to be a less mediated representation, bringing a person from a distant place into the study and the lecture theatre. Portraits as *cartes de visite* were one of the dominant genres of the time and fitted into existing modes of exchange in Europe. They had a market value as Morton shows in the case of the Godeffroy Museum.

Morton shows how photographs in museums can lose their association with the context of production either deliberately or because they arrive undocumented. Just as in Josh Bell's chapter on the Purari Delta, there is a key artefact that reveals a rich, complex and uncertain history. In Morton's case it is a photograph published in Germany in the 1870s said to represent a man from the Warrego district of south-west Queensland in Australia, but who turns out to be from another continent. But no matter how wrongly contextualized it might be the material form of the object contains the possibility of challenging and reconnecting it to other pathways. In this case, the presence of an *isicoco* head ring making it likely that the person was a Zulu from South Africa. The forensic process of locating an object in its historical contexts and recovering its multiple identities is integral to value creation processes within the museum.

As a component of the ethnographic record film and photographic objects were subsequently neglected as an anthropological resource for much of the twentieth century. Photography was associated with racial typology and perhaps too closely associated with the process of exoticizing other cultures.<sup>16</sup> One consequence of the fieldwork revolution was that anthropology became focused on the synchronic. The emphasis shifted to the analysis of social structure and social organization and current beliefs and practices. Photography and film were costly, required substantial equipment, and were seen to be of limited use as methods of recording data on such topics.

However, a number of factors have meant that towards the end of the twentieth-century attitudes to photography began to change (Banks and Morphy 1997). Film and photography increasingly became a more affordable medium and could be integrated methodologically within fieldwork. Documentary film became a more accepted medium of communication and historic portraits became reconnected to descendants from source communities.

Many chapters show the value of photographs in archives and museum collections to contemporary communities, often being used for unimagined purposes. Photographs are used by Indigenous Australians to establish traditional patterns of land ownership and to trace genealogical connections over time (Aird, Sassoon and Trigger 2020; Lydon 2006). Dr Joe Gumbula was closely involved in identifying, redocumenting and repatriating visual and sound recordings to Yolŋu communities (Chapter 13; Hamby and Gumbula 2015). Yolŋu attitudes to images of the deceased have changed over time. Where once close relatives were protected from viewing images, they are now incorporated in burial and memorial ceremonies (Morphy and Morphy 2012). Bell's chapter shows the strong engagement of people with F.E. Williams' photographs from the Purari River and the reasons why they are valued today. Perhaps ironically these direct recordings of people and places are valued for the same indexical character that made them so desirable in nineteenth-century Europe. They seem to provide a direct connection to people in the past, an emotional link that can evoke positive feelings of connection. Yet, at the same time, they can be seen to capture uncomfortable histories. In both cases, their reproducibility enables them to be re-purposed to reflect different kinds of truth values (Chapter 12).

Digital repatriation through photography has become an important way in which source communities can become aware of the collections held in museums and gain access to images of objects. They allow people to access large collections of objects that would be impossible by other means. Their portability, potential for electronic transmission and reproducibility afford their use in multiple ways. And as reproductions, their conservation requirements are much reduced compared to those of an original artefact. While photographs are often seen as a poor substitute for the 'real thing' it is much more interesting to view them as another kind of 'real' – connected to the object in the museum but with properties of its own. De Largy Healy shows how the return to the community of photographs of paintings collected in the 1940s 'provided a spectacular demonstration of how the spirits associated to the museum collections could "start talking again"' (this volume



p. 244). Joanna Barrkman found photographs of objects in the Baguia collection made a surprisingly effective medium for community consultation since people were able to view them in different ways in public and private spaces and make presentations. They were in a very real sense artefacts in their own right rather than substitutes for the real thing.

Digital technology has provided a new means of creating replicas of objects. 3D imaging enables virtual objects to travel globally and opens up the potential for people to examine objects and repurpose them. Gwyneira Isaac's chapter shows how this has enabled a series of positive outcomes. The museum artefacts are central to a controlled process of collaborative reproduction where one manifestation of the object can be used in a ceremonial performance and be subject to ritual action, while another, the original mask, too fragile to be moved, can remain in storage in the museum. The positioning of 3D copies not as replacements but as an educational resource has been a key message from the museum's repatriation office when discussing these projects. They differ from conventional replicas for sale in museum shops not only because the processes of reproduction give greater control over the process of manufacture but because the museum process has set up enduring relationships which at the same time has involved an interrogation of the value of the objects in different contexts – the 3D images' become engaged in 'reflexive moral and informed cultural engagements.' The replicas become real and engage in their own value creation process. This is well demonstrated in the case of the Kéet S'aaxw replica Tlingit mask which resides in its own glass case, has been danced at meetings of the Museum's board and had articles written about it in the *National Geographic Magazine*. As Boast and Enote (2013, p. 110) write 'Digital objects . . . gain roles and capacities in their use in different social settings.'

The emotional effect of photographs of objects from afar, their ability to stimulate creative action; the excitement generated by virtual replicas and digital three-dimensional imagery; provide fundamental challenges to Walter Benjamin's pre-suppositions about mechanical reproduction – the simulacrum is as real and can have as much of its own aura as the original.

Through photography, we can see a process of change occurring in the value of the objects to the museum and their value in providing access to collections. Photographs also show the changing attitudes over time contrasting the source communities with the museum. The process of return continues the process of anthropology – with the museum staff as a critical part of the audience – and the public as respondents. The staff become the anthropologists, the participant observers in the field!

## Conclusion

Value is concerned with the importance that something has to a person. It overlaps with what something means, but as the philosopher Jared Sparks Moore (1914: 184) expressed it, 'value, primarily, perhaps (but not solely), emphasises the affective dimension of meaning.' It concerns how things are meaningful to a person.



Perhaps for this reason the value of something cannot always be commodified – some things cannot be meaningfully given a monetary value.

Museums are nonetheless linked in many ways to the increase in the market price of certain categories of things. They need to beware of the influential role they play in converting heritage value into commodity value, and they do have to take account of financial value in the management of collections. In the context of the nation-state, there will always be a requirement to allocate a value, for insurance purposes, for compensation or for compulsory purchase. Herle indeed notes that since government and funding body directives tend to turn values into a quantifiable value with currency equivalents, one of the challenges for museum staff is to productively bridge these different notions of value. However, through the uncynical ethnographer's eye, the focus of museums is more towards the value of everything than the market price of a few things.

The core values associated with museum collections are that the material is to be conserved for present and future purposes as a public good, that the collections have educational value in that they provide information about objects and their contexts, and that those who appreciate an object get pleasure through its being there and through having access to it. In the case of ethnographic objects, a major part of their value is their salience to understanding human cultures across space and time. The very idea of cross-cultural understanding contains the idea that difference is expressed through different systems of value, in the ways in which objects are valued in the societies of origin compared to in the culture of the museum. In that respect, the value an object has in its culture of production is an essential component of the value it has in the ethnographic collection – but its affective value might be different for the museum curator and the member of a source community. The values in the museum and of the community may come into conflict but more often they come together, when the desire for understanding meets the desire to be understood.

The chapters as a whole provide insights into how things are valued inside and outside the museum. It cannot be presumed that the core values of ethnographic collections and of museums are universal. Arguably that would cut across the rationale of ethnographic collections as a means for understanding difference. On the other hand, museum practice suggests that many values are held in common or are at least understood to be commensurate and can provide a basis for collaborative engagement (Phillips 2011). The key values of the museum such as curation, conservation, preservation, truth, respect, cross-cultural understanding, cannot be assumed in their particularities but need to be worked out through practice.

Edmundson explores the concept of patrimony as a category of value that may be cross-cultural, as the discourse on repatriation sometimes implies. But as with all these general concepts that have developed in the formation of states, it is nested within hierarchies of connection. Is it the patrimony of the nation, of the state, of the lineage, of the family? – Is it a kind of value and/or a kind of property? The concept of curation is closely associated with caring and looking after. But what should be the basis of caring relationships? Is kinship as Kim TallBear suggests (2016) 'an alternative to liberal multiculturalism for righting relations

gone bad . . . Making kin is to make people into familiars in order to relate' (see Chapter 9, p. 182).

While it is important to recognize the existence of different regimes of values and acknowledge the fact that different societies, cultures, or more generally, groups of people can value the same object in fundamentally different ways, systems of value are dynamic and values change over time. Change can result from trade, intermarriage, religious conversion, or the incorporation of local communities or societies within larger polities, through the development of states or as a result of colonization. Museum collections are testaments to eons of change and have often been made through, or even as a consequence of, those changes. In the process of articulating with contemporary communities, such changes are made visible and communicated in the present. But museums themselves also provide the context for changing values, both within a society and in people's perception of other cultures and times.

Societies are always in a process of change. A comprehensive collection is likely to contain much that is no longer part of oral tradition, objects that are no longer made, techniques that have been forgotten. Oral traditions are not accounts of the past but narratives brought into the present. Museum collections from Vanuatu comprise more types and more distinctions of textiles designs from Ambae than are now known locally. Their presence is not a sign of cultural loss but of the dynamics of culture. The museum provides the opportunity for people to have a window on moments in time, on the diversity of designs sedimented in the past but brought together in the present, as things of interest that can be applied in infinite ways in the present. They hold knowledge that has been curated and preserved. The same arguments can be made with respect to the material culture in European museums that focus on the diversity of material culture from the European past – the museums of glass or pottery, of childhood, of fashion, of regimental history.

The curation and conservation of objects over time are clearly both motivating and enabling values, and facilitation and collaboration are values associated with many contemporary museum cultures. Perhaps as a consequence of this museums in their articulation with source communities have provided arenas where adjustment and articulation of different systems of values have been played out. Discourse over the access to collections by source communities including, in some cases, repatriation is one such area (Colwell 2017). Many of the chapters in this book deal with the issue of repatriation either directly or indirectly.

Museums are under-recognized sites of and for collaborative value creation in a changing world in which different values systems inevitably coexist. They enable people to work together while maintaining differences allowing people relative autonomy in process of coming together. Jilda Andrews argues that in looking towards our cultural futures, first, we must engage with an ideal of what we wish for them to be; then we must grapple with our cultural present, and what it is we hope to change. She sketches out a complex national agenda for Australia, an ongoing value-creation process – the making of interventions resulting in changes that will be seen and felt differently by different Australians at different times.



The essays in this book show how values can arise out of museum practices as categorization, conservation and the history of collections; how conferences influence the ways in which objects are seen and understood, and how material culture is integral to cultural trajectories. But they also show how museums are part of dialogical processes that are changing people's worldmaking in the present – part of a dialogue between people with different histories who have different relationships to the past but who occupy or overlap in the same space. Co-production across time becomes an important concept, bringing the past into the present.

### **The order of chapters**

This book is the result of an iterative process. The chapters have mainly been drawn from presentations given at two conferences. We circulated participants a general paper we had written: 'Museums, Anthropology and Value Creation Processes – A Prolegomenon.' Overall, the chapters share an understanding that value creation has to be understood in processual terms. The introduction has been written out of a close reading of the chapters, and this provides one point of entry into their relationships. However, we have found it helpful to divide the book into a number of sections with short introductions which provide alternative pathways into the relationships between the chapters. The majority, though by no means all, of the chapters draw their examples from Australia and the Pacific region, but the complex dialogical relationship with museums in Europe and America means that the arguments that are developed resonate widely.

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### **Notes**

- 1 See for example Richard Handler's 1992. "On the Valuing of Museum Objects". *Museum Anthropology* 16(1): 2–27 and from a conservator's perspective Miriam Clavir's important 2002 book *Preserving What is Valued: Museums, Conservation, and First Nations*.