

Tattoo: Bodies, Art, and Exchange in the Pacific and the West, edited by Nicholas Thomas, Anna Cole, and Bronwen Douglas. Durham: Duke University Press, 2005. ISBN 0-8223-3550-6 (cloth), 0-8223-3562-X (paper); 252 pages, figures, photographs, notes, bibliography, index. Cloth US\$99.95; paper US\$27.95.

Editor Nicholas Thomas's introductory chapter to this important collection of essays begins with a question about beginnings—the various competing narratives and truth claims for the origins and inspirations for tattooing in the West. Is the primary impetus for Western tattooing to be traced, as so many have suggested, to the voyages of Captain James Cook in the Pacific and the “tatau” he and his crewmen encountered there? Or is this narrative, as so many oft-recounted stories are, more a matter of popular myth making than establishment of historical fact? Thomas skims the various arguments but ultimately chooses to frame the disciplinarily diverse chapters that follow by rejecting this search for a “fetishized origin.” It matters less whether Polynesian traditions of tatau were the absolute or sole inspiration for the development and spread of tattooing in the West, and rather more that the rich and heterogeneous histories of tattoo exchange between Pacific Islanders, European explorers, seamen, missionaries, settlers, tourists, and others have much information to offer us about the contingent semiotic indeterminacy of cross-cultural encounters.

For those attentive to either Thomas's or coeditor Bronwen Doug-

las's previous work, this conclusion has a familiar ring. In this respect, *Tattoo* is noteworthy not so much for breaking radically new theoretical ground as for bringing the state-of-the-art theories currently afloat in the social sciences and humanities to bear on a subject that has not always garnered such academic attention: the risky business of leaving indelible marks in skin and the proliferation of meaning attached to such acts. Alfred Gell ranks as one of only a few scholars to have ventured extensively in this territory before, and, his work thus warrants the expected mention by multiple contributors throughout the text.

Structurally, the volume is divided into two parts. Part 1 contains essays examining tattooing in historical periods of cross-cultural exchange, primarily between Pacific Islanders and European explorers, sailors, beachcombers, missionaries, and settlers. Topics include European explorers' perceptions, and occasional acquisition, of Polynesian tattoos between 1595 and 1800 (Douglas); Russian encounters with Marquesan tattooing in 1804 (Elena Govor); the tattooing of Europeans, particularly beachcombers, in the Pacific in the late 1800s–1900s (Joanna White); and an examination of missionary responses to tattooing in the Society Islands and Sāmoa during that same period (Anne D'Alleva). The one exception to this section's Polynesian focus, useful for the comparative perspective it provides, is a reflection on the punitive use of tattoo in colonial Burma in 1889 (coeditor Anna Cole).

Part 2 continues the consideration of tattoo exchanges into the twentieth

century. Essays here include an exploration of the unique confluence of biography, opportunity, and aesthetic sensibility that might have contributed to New Zealand artist Tony Fomison's decision to take the full Samoan tatau in 1979–80 (Peter Brunt); the contemporary global circulation of Samoan tattooing and tattooists and its historical precedents (Sean Mallon); perceptions of tattoos and tattoo artists in the revitalized Tahitian tattooing milieu (Makiko Kuwahara); the meanings and attachments attributed to Māori facial moko by their present-day bearers (Linda Waimarie Nikora, Mohi Rua, and Ngahuia Awekotuku); and tattooing in the contemporary body modification networks often associated with peoples of European descent (Cyril Siorat). Siorat's final chapter, like Cole's, is a departure from the book's largely Pacific focus, though the striking photographs accompanying the text are testament to just how much tatau practices, especially Marquesan, Samoan, and Māori, influence the "tribal" or "blackwork" tattoo styles widely popular today.

Commendable in this collection is its editors' awareness, voiced in the introduction, that it was always destined for multiple audiences. Such is the nature of its subject matter that it will be picked up as much by tattoo aficionados for its handsome illustrations as by scholars for the insights it holds regarding the precarious nature of cross-cultural transactions. While language and tone vary widely across contributions (compare Brunt's art historical analysis with Kuwahara's ethnographic anecdotes, for example), this perhaps ensures something for everyone. Personal highlights included

Govor's airing of heretofore unpublished Russian accounts and images of Nuku Hivan tattooing, which underscore the shiftiness of early European pictorial representations of Pacific tattoos, and Siorat's interesting reflection on the ways tattoos slip in and out of the processes of commodity valuation and exchange. One weakness worth mentioning is a number of editorial oversights in the first pressing of the book—probably invisible to all but the closest of readers but no doubt aggravating for the individual authors who toiled several years on the projects resulting in their contributions. Thankfully, I understand these have been corrected in subsequent pressings.

I co-convened, along with Peter Brunt and Teresia Teaiwa, the 2003 conference where the papers in this collection were initially presented, "Tatau/Tattoo: Embodied Art and Cultural Exchange, 1760–2000." In the convenor's statement for that conference, I noted that tattoos are filled with meaning, but the meanings and values attached to them may vary greatly between those who give them, those who receive them, and those who view them. Like the specific embodied art of tatau, cultural exchange takes place in a wide variety of contexts, and, like tattooing, cultural exchange can be accompanied by an intensity of feeling whose marks endure. As with tattoos, also, that intensity of feeling may be interpreted differently by those who variously claim a stake in the exchange process. While Part 2 of *Tattoo* benefits from the contributions of indigenous scholars and the insights of ethnography, any attempts to explore this semiotic slipperiness in the early historical

periods of exchange between Pacific Islanders and westerners remain hampered by the reality of the research materials available. Such is the overwhelming lopsidedness of the archives that we can never really know the full range of indigenous Pacific thought on tattooing at the time of European encounter: even native researchers today remain outsiders to the past, as others have famously remarked. Scholars must content themselves to look for “countersigns,” as Douglas terms them—moments of narrative ambiguity in the records we have inherited. Acknowledging this difficult predicament, this useful and beautifully illustrated volume explores, as best it can, some of those meaningful moments of meeting and exchange inking the skin of Pacific history.

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Life in the Pacific of the 1700s: The Cook/Forster Collection of the George August University of Göttingen. Honolulu Academy of Arts, Luce Galleries, Honolulu, Hawai‘i, 23 February–14 May 2006, and National Museum of Australia, Canberra, Australia, 1 July–10 September 2006.

My responses here reflect my work as a Native Hawaiian customary practitioner of making kapa (bark-cloth, also called tapa elsewhere in the Pacific) and weaving, a contemporary artist, and an educator.

Seeing the exhibition *Life in the Pacific of the 1700s* was extremely important. The work was stunning. More specifically, the pieces from Hawai‘i revealed the excellence our

ancestors achieved in their customary practices. It was especially wonderful to see the variety of Hawaiian kapa and the complexity of the layering and designs.

Because of the existing literature, many people assume that the intricate designs on Hawaiian kapa developed only after contact with westerners. For those of us fortunate to have traveled to museums outside Hawai‘i to see precontact kapa pieces (often hidden away in storage drawers), we know this is a misconception. Hence, the exhibition was important because it dispelled the idea that precontact kapa was simpler than postcontact work.

The exhibition also allowed people to view everything in the Cook/Forster collection. Generally, in selecting the pieces to represent a historic period or a cultural practice, curators sometimes exclude items that customary practitioners want to see (ie, an undecorated piece of kapa). Hence, it was important that in this exhibition, all visitors, and not just research specialists, had access to all the works.

I would like to discuss a few of the problems the exhibition posed. I would have preferred seeing the works arranged by culture and not by function. Seeing all the material of a culture together gives you a sense of that culture. With that said, since the works were arranged by function, there should have been information explaining the repetition and variation of certain forms and their significance for different Pacific Island cultures. As an educator, I know visitors cannot be expected to understand all the connections visually.

Perhaps my most serious criticism is that the exhibition did little to link