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Aesthetic Judgment and the Transcultural Apprehension of Material Things

Ivan Gaskell

Abstract:

This paper is an attempt to examine aspects of the consequences of the transfer of individual culturally charged material items (principally artefacts) between societies that have different cultural values. This is an especially urgent matter, epistemologically, aesthetically, and ethically, when the societies concerned are likely to develop or are already in an unequal power relationship. One pressing set of circumstances in which individual material items changed hands was the expansion of European (in the extended sense) interests in the sixteenth through twentieth centuries. Many of the things acquired by Europeans entered collections initially or eventually devoted to the emerging field of ethnography. In this paper I claim that when an object moves from one society to another, one or more of three attitudes is in play, each of which involves aesthetic judgment: (1) *supersession*: the new users employ and interpret it solely on their own terms without regard to the uses and interpretations of its earlier users, either oblivious to those earlier uses, or purposefully to expunge them; (2) *assumption*: the new users discern familiar characteristics that they value, including aesthetic characteristics, and that they assume earlier users also discerned and valued; (3) *translation*: the new users attempt to learn the terms of use, interpretation and value of the earlier users by means of cultural acquisition and translation, acknowledging that these may differ from their own wholly or in part, but in the belief that their acquisition will bring them advantages. In this paper I examine the character and some of the epistemological, aesthetic, and ethical ramifications of each of these three attitudes for both European communities and for communities that encountered Europeans.

Key words: Aotearoa New Zealand, assumption, Joseph Banks, James Cook, history, *kaitaka*, Māori, *patu*, supersession, *taonga*, thing, translation, Tupaia, *whao*.

1.

In the discussion that follows, I want to avoid falling into the trap—often encountered in philosophy—of making universal claims about human behaviour. I want to emulate Ludwig Wittgenstein in trying to be sensitive to considerations of particularity, avoiding what in the *Blue Book* he terms the ‘craving for generality’ and ‘the contemptuous attitude towards the particular case’ [Wittgenstein 1960: 17-18]. That stated, I believe it is possible to discern a number of human behaviours that share characteristics in many, if

not all, times and places. One of these is a propensity not only to choose, make, and use a wide variety of things that have material aspects, but to engineer or at least acquiesce in the transfer of such things from one pair of hands to another.

Things change hands in a wide variety of ways. Before looking at some of those ways, it is worth acknowledging that the phrase ‘things with material aspects’ is an attempt on my part to recognize that many such things may have immaterial aspects, too. That is, to term them indiscriminately ‘material things’ can imply a discounting of any immaterial aspects that they or other things allegedly inseparable from them may have. Let me cite one example.

When on the Northern Plains of North America a medicine bundle changes hands, passing from one Niitsítapi man to another by mutual agreement, outsiders may assume that the transfer concerns no more than a package of material items each of which can be identified (various animal or bird skins, claws, or bones, for instance).¹ Yet associated with each of these items is a body of knowledge expressed in song or chant. The new possessor or guardian of the bundle has to learn these expressions of this knowledge perfectly from his predecessor. The bundle also brings with it a number of obligations regarding its proper care, proper place when the band is moving or when encamped, and the prohibition of certain behaviours in its presence. Passing on the medicine bundle is not merely a transfer of a material thing, but of an entire body of knowledge, and an onerous set of obligations. The medicine bundle is the means of entrance to a spiritual path. Within the Niitsítapi realm, the material thing cannot be dissociated from its immaterial components, such as chants and obligations, and retain its identity as a medicine bundle. This is not to claim that a medicine bundle is no more than the signifier or embodiment of an abstraction—a ‘culture’. Rather, it has affordances that are specific to its various material properties. A medicine bundle and its associated chants are specific things in their own right and are, in historian Bjørnar Olsen’s phrase, ‘indispensable constituents of the social fabric’ that act in the world [Olsen 2010: 37-38]. That acknowledged, within the Niitsítapi realm, any such transfer is highly likely to occur within a framework of shared cultural understanding: the parties to a transfer of guardianship know what is going on, and usually conform.²

The same can be said of a transfer of a thing with material aspects within any culturally homogeneous society. When I visit a store to get food, I know to take the items to the register and proffer sufficient cash or my credit card. I know to press certain buttons on a device overseen by the clerk. Again, both parties know what is expected of them, and usually conform.

Exchange in what is generally termed the market may well be the dominant mode of transfer of things in the contemporary world, whether on the small retail scale I have just outlined, or on the world’s leading commodity exchanges where contracts in energy sources, metals, livestock and meat, and agricultural products, or in instruments derived from them, are traded in dizzying bulk. Yet any anthropologist will affirm that the market

¹ In this section I draw on examples I cite in Gaskell Forthcoming. The case study I present in that publication—a mutilated Civil War guidon of the 6th Independent Battery, Massachusetts Volunteer Light Artillery—can be regarded as testing the thesis I advance in these pages as another example of a thing changing hands between cultural groups.

² For an early appreciation of this phenomenon by a sympathetic, observant, and trusted outsider, see McClintock 1910: 76-112, 251-70, and McClintock 1935: 76, 108-117.

is far from the only way in which things change hands among humans, and for all its sophistication, high speed, and high pressure character, it is not necessarily any more culturally complex than other human mechanisms of exchange. A well-known example of complex exchange among eighteen island communities over many hundreds of miles is the ritualized Kula exchange system of red shell disc necklaces and white shell armbands in the Trobriand Islands east of Papua New Guinea. The anthropologist Bronisław Malinowski famously described this system in his foundational book, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* of 1922.³ It furnished French sociologist, Marcel Mauss with material for debate in his enormously influential study, *Essai sur le don* ('The Gift') [Mauss 1923-24].

All the kinds of transfer of things with material aspects that I have mentioned so far—Niisitapi medicine bundles, supermarket groceries, commodity futures, and Kula necklaces and armbands—occur within single cultural systems in which everyone concerned—those who part with things and those who receive things—know what is going on and know how to conduct themselves. Each kind, of course, admits of misunderstandings or abuse—for instance, I might choose to shoplift in a supermarket—but, generally speaking, these systems work. They can be quite complicated enough, and no one formal explanation can account for the variety of behaviours they occasion. Can we imagine how complicated things can get when the participants in a transfer of things belong to different societies with different cultural norms and expectations? Furthermore, of all the factors regarding human behaviour to be taken into account—fear, desire, assertion, hostility, kindness, and many others—what role might aesthetic judgment play in the process?

2.

In this chapter, I hope to cast light on aspects of the transfer of culturally charged material items between societies that have different cultural values. In doing so, I do not wish to imply that the things changing hands are no more than ciphers or tokens that serve solely to signify cultural values. Rather, such things are parties to the process of changing hands each with its own set of materially grounded, specific affordances. However, I want to focus not so much on those affordances as on how users accommodate such things on their own culturally specific terms. Even when the sanctions to which either party to an exchange might have access are more or less equal, matters are rather complicated. They become more complex yet, and assume a greater urgency epistemologically, aesthetically, and ethically, when the societies to which the parties concerned belong are likely to develop, or are already in, an unequal power relationship.

In what follows, I shall use the term *European* to refer to people from the continent of Europe, and the term *Euro* for both such Europeans and members of the European settler diaspora throughout the world.

One pressing set of circumstances in which individual material items changed hands was the expansion of Euro interests around the world in the sixteenth through twentieth centuries. Many of the things acquired by Euros entered collections initially or eventually devoted to the emerging field of ethnography. Yet the flow of things with material

³ Malinowski 1922. In recent years market practices have affected some Kula exchanges, which, in any case, are more complex and varied among the communities concerned than Malinowski allowed, see Leach and Leach 1983.

aspects was never one way. The societies that Euros encountered—which for the most part I shall term *Indigenous*—also acquired things with material aspects from Euros. Things changed hands in a wide variety of ways between Indigenous peoples and Euros, some consensual, others under duress of various kinds, and yet others surreptitiously.

First, I want to address the act of acquisition itself in just one of its forms—consensual exchange—before turning to what I intend to be the philosophical focus of this chapter: some considerations that might precede that act and that might also apply subsequent to that act. While I acknowledge that power disparity and duress can underlie what might appear to be consensual exchange, in the early phases of encounter between Euros and Indigenous peoples Euros did not invariably hold the upper hand. I am deliberately discussing consensual exchange rather than the various phenomena usually labelled cultural appropriation. The latter is clearly closely related to the one to which I am drawing attention, but the cultural appropriation debate predominantly examines Euro responses to the Euro acquisition of Indigenous things and ideas in a wide range of Euro defined fields, from pharmacology to fine art. Here, in contrast, I seek to focus on things of various kinds as they cross cultural boundaries in either direction.

This is not a new move by any means, but it is rather less common than the extensive discussion of Euro appropriative acts.⁴ In the aesthetic realm, several projects over the last half-century at prominent museums have provoked criticism in terms of cultural appropriation as post-colonial theory developed concurrently. One example is the incorporation in 1976 of the Museum of Primitive Art, founded by Nelson Rockefeller in 1956, into the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York as what is now the Department of the Arts of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas [LaGamma et al. 2014]. A second example is the controversial exhibition curated by William Rubin, “*Primitivism*” in the *Twentieth Century: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern*, at the Museum of Modern Art, New York in 1984-85 [Rubin 1984]. Third, in 1989, Jean-Hubert Martin mounted *Magiciens de la terre* (‘Magicians of the Earth’) at the Centre Georges Pompidou and the Grande Halle, Parc de la Villette, Paris, as an attempt to establish equity by juxtaposing the work of a numerically equal number of living artists from the ‘centres’ of the Western world and from the ‘margins’ of Africa, Asia, Australia, and Latin America [Martin 1989]. My fourth example is the Musée du quai Branly, which opened in Paris in 2006, dedicated to collections from Africa, the Americas, and Oceania presented as the so-called *arts premiers* (‘first arts’), a term coined to avoid the term ‘primitive’, which even Rubin had placed in scare quotes in his 1984-85 exhibition title.⁵ These are among the many projects that have provoked heated discussion of cultural appropriation. In this chapter, I do not seek to rehearse these debates.⁶ On this occasion, I prefer to move elsewhere.

3.

In 1768, the British Admiralty sent an expedition to the south Pacific under the command of James Cook with two purposes: the publicly acknowledged one of observing from Tahiti, the transit of Venus across the sun; and the secret one of searching for a rumoured southern continent. Among those who accompanied Cook on the *Endeavour* was the natural philosopher, Joseph Banks. On Tahiti, Cook and his party met an *arii*—a priest or

⁴ An exemplary early instance of what I have in mind is Turgeon 1997.

⁵ Among the most trenchant of the many critiques is Price 2007.

⁶ I made a small, collaborative contribution with Eaton and Gaskell 2009.

ritual specialist—from the island of Ra’iatea named Tupaia. Tupaia was not only a ritual specialist, but a skilled navigator and negotiator. He had learned some English during the visit in 1767 of Samuel Wallis’s *Dolphin*. Tupaia established a friendship with Banks, helped Cook in relations with Indigenous leaders, and learned from the expedition’s artists (specifically, Sydney Parkinson) how to draw in the European manner.⁷ Scholars only began to surmise in 1997 that a number of drawings that had been in Banks’s possession, and are now in the British Library, are by Tupaia.⁸ Tupaia joined the *Endeavour* with the intention of voyaging to England, and in each place they visited prior to landing in Australia, his knowledge of language and ceremonial forms eased some of the tensions of these early meetings across cultural divides. On reaching Aotearoa New Zealand, Tupaia helped establish working relationships between Māori inhabitants and the European visitors. Cook was only the second European known to have reached Aotearoa, the first having been the Dutch navigator, Abel Tasman in 1642. Tupaia was able to interpret, as the language of the Society Islands was the original basis of the Māori language, *te reo Māori*. His lineage was important: he was from the Māori’s ancestral homeland, Hawaiki (Ra’iatea), and was seen by them to hold substantial spiritual power (*mana*). There were some violent clashes and misunderstandings, nonetheless. Tupaia, though, created a lasting impression on Māori communities and it was him, rather than Cook or Banks, who was most persistently asked after when the voyagers stopped.⁹

One of Tupaia’s drawings shows Joseph Banks, on the right, and an unidentified Māori man exchanging what appears to be a handkerchief for a giant crayfish or lobster (Fig. 1).¹⁰ Banks described this, or another very similar incident, in a letter: ‘he [Tupaia] drew me with a nail in my hand delivering it to an Indian who sold me a Lobster but with my other hand I had a firm fist on the Lobster determined not to Quit the nail till I had Livery and Seizin of the article purchased.’¹¹ There are three parties to this exchange: Banks, the Englishman, who clearly expresses his guarded approach to the transaction; the Māori man, who presumably followed many other Indigenous people in desiring a potentially useful metal object; and Tupaia, the Ra’iatean, who rendered such an exchange pictorially using conventions he had adopted from his European voyaging companions. The two men who acquired things from each other presumably had an idea of the use to which they would put their new acquisitions: the nail either as a tool that could serve to work various materials, or as the bearer of a power superior to stone; the lobster for dinner. To the Māori man, the nail may have been culturally unfamiliar, but its properties made it adaptable to new circumstances, though not necessarily in the way its European maker had envisaged. Descriptions of these novel items had gone ahead of the *Endeavour* so that inhabitants of Queen Charlotte Sound and Palliser Bay asked the voyagers for *whao*, *te reo Māori* for chisels [Henare 2004: 34 citing Cook’s journal; Anderson et al. 2012: 157]. To Banks, the lobster was immediately recognizable as

⁷ Tupaia is likely to have received some instruction from Sydney Parkinson, as the other artist on the expedition, Alexander Buchan, died at Matavai Bay, Tahiti, on April 17, 1769.

⁸ The discovery is recounted by Smith 2005, citing the suggestion by Joseph Banks’s biographer, Howard B. Carter, taken up by Salmond 2003: 75.

⁹ Newell 2005.

¹⁰ British Library, Add. MS 15508, f. 11.

¹¹ Joseph Banks, Letter to Dawson Turner FRS, 1812, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, Banks Collection, MS 82 quoted in Smith 2005: 3.

something familiar that he could eat, or, perhaps, preserve as a natural history specimen. Of the two, the Māori man made the greater cognitive leap. I shall return to the processes involved in the anticipation and in the consequences of this exchange, but at this juncture, what matters is that this drawing is a representation of the actual moment of its occurrence.

Having established that the two islands of Aotearoa New Zealand were not the continent they sought, Cook and his men departed for the east coast of Australia from where, after various vicissitudes, they made their way to Dutch Batavia (present-day Jakarta). There, in December 1770, Tupaia and his servant Taiata fell ill. Tupaia died a few days after Taiata.

What, if anything, can be known about the relationship as it developed between the Europeans and the Ra'iatean? Contemporary readers can only surmise from various European firsthand descriptions of Tupaia what Tupaia might have thought of his hosts. He seems to have maintained a stance of pride and dignity throughout, so presumably considered himself at least the equal of the leaders of the British expedition. Banks recorded his admiration of Tupaia's navigational skills, but could not forebear implying the Ra'iatean's cultural inferiority by recounting in his journal entry for July 15, 1769 that 'Our Indian [Tupaia] often prayd to *Tane* for a wind and as often boasted to me of the success of his prayers, which I plainly saw he never began till he saw a breeze so near the ship that it generally reachd her before his prayer was finished' [Banks 1998: 302]. Cook recorded a summary of his assessment of Tupaia in his journal: 'a Shrewd, Sensible, Ingenious Man, but proud and obstinate' [Cook 1955: 442]. Respect tempered by condescension perhaps best describes this attitude on the part of the Europeans towards those Indigenous people they encountered and whom they came in some ways to admire.

On his return to England in 1771, Joseph Banks did not hesitate to contrive the visual expression of his admiration for aspects of the cultures of the peoples he and his fellow voyagers had encountered by commissioning a portrait from the prominent American artist working in London, Benjamin West (Fig. 2).¹² It was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1773, and a mezzotint after it was published later that year. Banks is surrounded by various items he had acquired in the Pacific, and, most prominently, he is wrapped in a fine Māori linen cloak fringed with dog hair to which he draws attention by holding an edge with his left hand while pointing to it with his right. The open book on the floor concerns flax, so Banks is presumably pointing out the commercial potential for Britain of indigenous flax cultivation in Aotearoa New Zealand, and trade. However, this garment, which for Banks appears to imply commercial potential in compliance with the aims of British exploration as well as a certain cultural sympathy on the wearer's part, had quite different associations for its Indigenous makers and first users [Fara 2000: 1-3].¹³

Tupaia had depicted the man from whom Banks had acquired a lobster wearing such a cloak, likely aware that this was no ordinary garment, but an indicator of high status, and more. How Banks acquired a *kākahu* of the kind called *kaitaka* is unknown. Māori

¹² Benjamin West, *Joseph Banks, 1771-72*, oil on canvas, Usher Art Gallery, Lincoln, UK.

¹³ Fara points out that the sitter was not identified when the portrait was first exhibited, but that he was in the first mezzotint (and subsequent reproductive engravings). She also points out the significance of flax for Banks and his British viewers.

scholar, Paul Tapsell, has suggested that it is of such cultural significance that Māori leaders may have presented it to Tupaia as a high dignitary from the island to which the Māori people trace their origin, and hence of appropriate status and lineage to wear it, and that Banks only acquired it after Tupaia's death in Batavia [Tapsell 2009: 92-111]. However Banks may have acquired the *kaitaka* shown in West's portrait, it seems likely that it is the very one that Banks gave, with a number of other Oceanic items, to Christ Church, Oxford, his old college, and that is now in the Pitt Rivers Museum.¹⁴ Each individual *kaitaka* is associated with and embodies chiefly status and prestige in a particular lineage, but is also a mantle of power, enveloping its wearer with the protection of the creator deity who is not represented by but is instantiated in its weft-twined *whatu* fabric. Each *kaitaka* is not simply a prestige garment, it is a living being.

One of the many complex items that Banks noticed and commented on was the Māori *patu*, a tear-drop shaped hand club or *mere* (weapon). When not in use, *patu* were often worn suspended from the wrist by a fibre loop or thrust into a belt as symbols of martial prowess. The most prized examples, called *mere pounamu*, were made from greenstone (*pounamu*), a type of nephrite or jade. Laboriously ground and polished, *mere pounamu* were created for the chiefly elite and passed down within families as *taonga* (treasures). Like other Māori items, clubs often bore individual names and were prized as trophies in war. *Mere pounamu* were considered so prestigious and supernaturally powerful that some chiefs, captured in battle, reportedly handed the clubs to their enemies and requested to be killed with them rather than with ordinary weapons. They accumulated formidable *mana*, or spiritual power derived from their owners, and those whom they had killed. According to Māori scholar, Ngahuia te Awekotuku, they were (and are) to be treated with 'considerable reverence and caution' [Kjellgren 2007: 312-13].

The Pitt Rivers Museum holds a basalt *patu onewa* and four others made of bone or wood given by Joseph Banks to Christ Church (Fig. 3).¹⁵ Banks was most observant regarding the Māori uses of the *patu*, and he tried to understand their use by analogy with familiar, European conventions. In his general account of Aotearoa New Zealand written in his journal in March, 1770 he noted:

The principal people seldom stirrd out without one of them sticking in his girdle, generally made of Bone (of Whales as they told us) or of coarse black Jasper very hard, insomuch that we were almost led to conclude that in peace as well as in war they wore them as a war-like ornament in the same manner as we Europeans do swords [Banks 1998: 203].

Nineteenth-century photographs of Māori leaders often show them holding a *patu*. For example, a portrait by Edward Smallwood Richards of the chief of the Ngāti Poutama hapū, Mete Kīngi Te Rangi Paetahi, who served as Western Māori Member of Parliament in the New Zealand House of Representatives between 1866 and 1868, gives some idea

¹⁴ Cloak, *kaitaka*, of *Phormium tenax*, with a *taniko* border edged in places with narrow strips of dog skin, Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford, 1886.21.20; see Coote 2004: 6, 23.

¹⁵ Pitt Rivers Museum 1887.1.387 (whalebone), 1887.1.388 (wood), 1887.1.389 (wood), 1887.1.393 (wood), 1887.1.714 (basalt); Coote, *Curiosities from the Endeavour*, pp. 11, 13 (Figs. 11-15), 14, 23.

of the role the *patu* played in status definition even after Indigenous selective adaptation to colonial rule (Fig. 4).¹⁶

Banks had Māori *patu* copied in brass at a London foundry in 1772. He had forty replicas of at least two *patu* made and engraved with the date and his coat of arms (Fig. 5). Banks intended to take them as presentation items on Cook's second voyage [Coote 2008: 49-68]. He had learned the value of ritual exchange. But in the event he did not sail. Charles Clerke, captain of the *Discovery*, took a number on Cook's third voyage between 1776 and 1780, and distributed them both in the Pacific Northwest of America and in Aotearoa New Zealand, and perhaps elsewhere. Accounts by slightly later British voyagers to the Pacific Northwest suggest that Clerke had left at least four of the brass *patus* at Nootka Sound on the west coast of Vancouver Island in April, 1778, three of which remained in the vicinity, and one having been gifted or traded as far north as the Hecate Strait between the islands of Haida Gwaii and the mainland by 1787.¹⁷ They were all observed in the hands of Indigenous leaders. British missionaries noted two others in the hands of Māori notables in Aotearoa New Zealand in the early nineteenth century.

Helen Kane Kunzie acquired a seventh example, supposedly excavated from an Indian grave on the Washington bank of the Columbia River between Washington and Oregon opposite Umatilla. Mrs. Kunzie sold it with other items to the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC in 1897. It was repatriated as a funerary object in 2005, and is now in the Tamátslikt Cultural Institute of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation near Pendleton, Oregon [Kaepler 2005: 152-57; Coote 2008: 58, 61, 62]. Whatever its history may have been between leaving Clerke's hands and entering those of Helen Kane Kunzie, it came to light in the later nineteenth century some 280 miles from the mouth of the Columbia River, perhaps having changed hands among Indigenous peoples more than once.

4.

Having described a series of particular transfers of things with material aspects across cultural boundaries, I want to ask if it might be possible to understand these complex transactions, and others like them, in terms of a schema. Although I am suspicious of attempts to describe human behaviour in terms of universals, I believe that certain pancultural categories can in some instances help us to understand human actions. I hope to show that one or more of three fundamental attitudes affect the behaviour of those involved in the movement of a thing from one society to another, in particular the recipient of that thing. Furthermore, I contend that each of these fundamental attitudes usually if not invariably involves the exercise of aesthetic judgment. It is important to acknowledge that these fundamental attitudes are significant not in respect of individual, idiosyncratic espousal, but only insofar as a community of like-minded people shares them. That is, each is a social attitude or disposition. Furthermore, and of vital importance, I do not see these attitudes as divided from one another by immutable

¹⁶ Edward Smallwood Richards, *Mete Kīngi Te Rangi Paetahi*, 1869, photograph, Patrick Parsons Collection, Alexander Turnbull Library, National Library of New Zealand, Te Puna Matauranga o Aotearoa, Wellington: F58461 1/2.

¹⁷ I follow Jeremy Coote's usage in referring to the Māori items as *patu*, and the objects Banks commissioned in an anglicized form as *patus*: Coote 2008: n. 3.

boundaries. Rather, I conceive of them as being points on a wheel of behaviour that allows for shading from one to another.

In the response I shall describe first, the new users employ and interpret the thing that changes hands solely on their own terms without regard to the uses and interpretations of its earlier users. They are either oblivious to those earlier uses, or act so as purposefully to expunge those earlier uses. An example would be the incident described by Joseph Banks of his exchange with a Māori man of a lobster for a nail, an incident of the kind represented by Tupaia in his drawing. The recipient of the nail—if his behaviour conforms to that of others who received such things—presumably adapted it for his own culturally prescribed purposes; that is to say, not necessarily as a device to affix one thing to another (although nephrite or greenstone nails were in use) but rather as a tool for working another material, a *whao*, or chisel.¹⁸ I term this change of use that involves the replacement of one use by another *supersession*. New users employ and interpret any given thing in question solely on their own terms without regard to the uses and interpretations of its earlier users, and oblivious to those earlier uses.

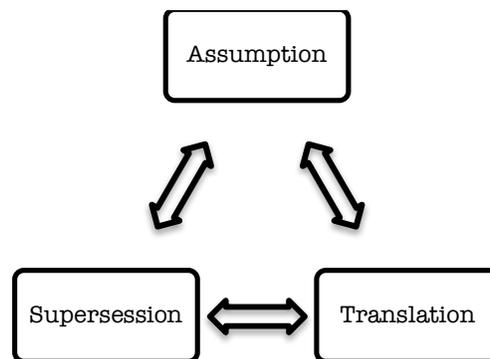
The purposeful expurgation of an earlier use or interpretation by a subsequent user is a somewhat different matter, because it proceeds from an acknowledgement of at least some aspect of that earlier use insofar as the would-be expurgator understands it. Thus members of the London Missionary Society in the early nineteenth century brought back from Oceania a selection of deities that their conversion of Indigenous peoples had displaced. They did so in order to show the idolatry from which they had saved the Indigenous inhabitants. This was not supersession in the sense I have just defined. Rather, the missionaries were acknowledging the potency of these items, however hostile they may have been towards them. This was therefore an act of what I term *translation*, the second attitude I wish to describe. In *translation*, the new users attempt to learn the terms of use, interpretation and value of the earlier users by means of cultural acquisition and translation, acknowledging that these may differ from their own wholly or in part, but in the belief that their acquisition will bring them advantages. In negative *translation*, the new users exercise translation to denigrate the items concerned, and to deprive them of their former high status. A hostile aesthetic assessment—such things are not only manifestations of error but must be devoid of beauty or sublimity—is often part of this kind of translation. On the other hand, a positive aesthetic assessment often accompanies positive translation.

An example of positive translation is Joseph Banks's reception and emulation of Māori *patu*. He recognized their role as status indicators, making an analogy with European swords, and further recognized that such things change hands as symbols of regard, not commerce, so had his own versions made for use in ritual gifting. With the various *patu* he acquired from Māori people, and his own personally marked brass *patus*, Banks was a new user who, in order to gain advantages and benefits, attempted to learn the terms of use, interpretation and value of the earlier users—the Māori—by means of cultural acquisition and translation.

A third attitude on the part of the new users of items that cross cultural boundaries involves new users discerning familiar characteristics that they value in such items. An instance is most likely the *kaitaka* that Banks wears in Benjamin West's portrait, which is likely the one he gave to Christ Church, Oxford. He valued it as a garment made of a fine

¹⁸ I owe the point regarding nephrite or greenstone nails having been in use to Stephen Davies.

material derived from the plant species that would be formally recognized in Euro terms only during Cook’s second visit to Aotearoa New Zealand in 1774: *Phormium tenax* in its Linnean designation, or New Zealand flax; *harakeke* in *te reo Māori*. He presented it in West’s portrait at least in part in terms of its utility. If this *kaitaka* had indeed been given to Tupaia rather than to him, its ritual significance may well have escaped Banks. Banks knew a cloak when he saw one. He had little reason and presumably no inclination to recognize it as a *taonga*, a living thing. His attitude was one of what I term *assumption*, in accordance with which new users discern familiar properties that they value, including aesthetic properties, which they assume earlier users in the cultural group from which the item comes also discerned and valued. Furthermore, the new user generally assumes that these values, including aesthetic values, are shared across cultural boundaries, and that the principal reasons for attributing value to the item in either cultural group are the same.



Each of these three attitudes that I have identified does not necessarily exclude either or both of the others, but exists rather as varied behaviour on a wheel of possibilities in which each can partake of either or both of the others. Each of these attitudes, and their combinations, has epistemological, aesthetic, and ethical ramifications for all the cultural groups involved. Aesthetic judgment on the part of anyone involved in the transfer of an item from one cultural group to another inevitably, it seems to me, plays a role in determining how the new user will employ that item. Yet aesthetic judgment is not the only factor involved in whether a new user will exhibit what I am terming supersession, translation, or assumption—or a mixture thereof—in respect of a transferred item. Just what that aesthetic judgment might consist in must await another occasion for exploration, but I can at least report my intuition that it will vary from cultural group to cultural group; and that even within broadly Euro society, contemporary, if not earlier, criteria will no longer be predominantly Kantian, for few would now leave utility out of the account.¹⁹ Nonetheless, the fact that Euro private collectors and art museums covet items of superb workmanship and artistry that Indigenous peoples also value, though as living treasures—*taonga* in *te reo Māori*—leads to a certain competition for them. Descendants hold that the presentation of things to outsiders by their ancestors did not entail their permanent alienation; rather, such things are ambassadors, bringing knowledge of their cultures to strangers, yet fully expected by the descendants of those who entrusted them to strangers one day to return.

¹⁹ Early twentieth-century art critics and analytic philosophers of art emphasized these criteria, but their formulation and interpretation are matters of contention. I owe this point to Jennifer McMahon.

Concerning the movement and possession of such things, institutions and individuals are obliged to conform to legal requirements, whether international, such as the UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property of 1970; or national, such as the US Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990. Yet often the adjudication of claims remains problematic—especially complex ones in which more than two parties might have interests, such as that of the Banks brass patu until recently in the Smithsonian, and now in the Tamátslikt Cultural Institute. As the anthropologist Adrienne Kaeppler has argued, the Umatilla, the Māori, and even the British all have legitimate interests in this cross-cultural item. We should also bear in mind that there are those who do not believe in waiting patiently, especially on Euro terms. Some inhabitants of Aotearoa New Zealand, in particular, tend not to back down. In his *Do-It-Yourself Repatriation Kit* (2006), consisting of an aluminium attaché case lined with buffering plastic foam in which sits an emergency glass breaking club hammer, and a shaped recess to receive a liberated *hei tiki*, artist, Jason Hall intimates that his patience is wearing thin.²⁰ Further, I intuit that in all or at least in most of these cases of repatriation, ethical rather than aesthetic criteria predominate.

I hope I have shown that people's relationships with items that cross cultural boundaries, in some instances more than once, are complex and varied, but that we can discern three principal attitudes in play to varying extents and sometimes combinations: *supersession*, when new users put an item to a new use; *assumption*, when new users believe that there is a continuity in the values they and the previous users espouse in respect of an item; and *translation*, when new users attempt to understand the terms of use of previous users, acknowledging that the values they express are not the same as their own. Lastly, I contend that any attempt to make use of this formulation must be subject to the constraints of particularity of both cultural circumstances and of the material affordances of the items changing hands. Philosophy at the expense of history is poor philosophy indeed.²¹

²⁰ Jason Hall, *Do-It-Yourself Repatriation Kit* (2006), mixed media, included in the exhibition *Pasifika Styles: Artists Inside the Museum*, Cambridge University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge, UK, 2006-2008.

²¹ This chapter develops an argument I first made in Gaskell 2009: 202-10. I owe debts of gratitude to those who have helped me navigate the Pacific, including Jennifer Newell, Maia Nuku, Philipp Schorch, Paul Tapsell, and Nicholas Thomas. I should like to thank Jennifer McMahon for the opportunity to present these ideas at the annual meeting of the American Philosophical Association, Western Division, in San Francisco in April, 2016, and Elizabeth Coleman for taking them seriously. Other philosophers on whose observations and advice I have relied include Stephen Davies, A.W. Eaton, and Paul Guyer. No one edits my writing more severely than Jane Whitehead, and, as always, it is to her I owe the greatest thanks.

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Illustrations

Fig. 1 Tupaia, *A Māori man and Joseph Banks bartering a lobster or a crayfish for a handkerchief*, 1769, watercolour on paper, British Library, London.

Fig. 2 Benjamin West, *Joseph Banks*, 1771-72, oil on canvas, Usher Art Gallery, Lincoln, UK. [OR mezzotint after West.]

Fig. 3 Hand club (*patu onewa*), 18th-century, basalt, Māori people, Aotearoa New Zealand, Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.

Fig. 4 Edward Smallwood Richards, *Metu Kīngi Te Rangi Paetahi*, 1869, photograph, Patrick Parsons Collection, Alexander Turnbull Library, National Library of New Zealand, Te Puna Matauranga o Aotearoa, Wellington.

Fig. 5 Hand club, after a Māori prototype, made in London for Joseph Banks, 1772, brass, British Museum, London.

