

Introduction

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Between c. 1870 and c. 1914 Australian ethnography had a central place in social evolutionary thinking and in the production of anthropological theory. More than a dozen books addressing everything from the origins and development of the institutions of kinship, marriage, law, totemism and religion to ideas about paternity, the nature of intertribal relations and mythology were based largely, if not completely, on ethnography from Australia.² While almost none of the authors of these works feature in the discipline today, others such as Durkheim, Malinowski, Radcliffe-Brown and Lévi-Strauss, to mention the more illustrious, were also inspired by Aboriginal practices and beliefs. Indeed, right from the moment of first contact, Aboriginal people and their ways of life captured the European imagination not least because they were seen as humans in the chrysalis phase.³ Their nakedness, their lack of material possessions and the fact that they lived in an apparently unmodified natural environment all confirmed this. It took nearly a hundred years after settlement, with the emergence of a systematic interest in Aboriginal social and cultural practices, before it was realised that this material simplicity was juxtaposed with great cultural and social complexity. Kenelm Burridge suggests that it was the tension in this juxtaposition that was the principal source of the fascination that Aboriginal societies and cultures held for Victorian anthropology.⁴

The comparative interests of Victorian social evolutionary anthropology gave a special place to artefacts and technology in the classification and ordering of societies, but from the first encounters in the seventeenth century Europeans had started collecting Aboriginal artefacts as souvenirs, as commodities and as embodied manifestations of the reality of strange ways of life. They were also given them as part of Aboriginal desires to create social relationships. Such early collecting was rarely systematic, but since then many people have been keen to obtain things made and used by Aboriginal people, such that it is estimated that there are now as many as 250 000 Aboriginal items held in museums worldwide and others that must still be in private hands.⁵ Although it is impossible to say how many artefacts remain in private hands, it is clear that there were and still are many such nineteenth-century artefacts around, as activity in the London auction houses suggests. Over 600 Aboriginal artefacts were collected in the 1970s from such sources and became the core of a collection for the Christensen Fund that was placed on loan with the National Gallery of Victoria and then donated to Museum Victoria.⁶

It is from the often contingent and fragmentary selections of objects that have found their way into museums that we have a tangible relationship with the life of Aboriginal people who had led a truly independent existence. As each year passes these items are increasingly taking on the status of sacred heirlooms, rather than being seen as part of the everyday impedimenta of the past, raising questions about how a handful of artefacts, sometimes gathered in an encounter measured only in minutes, relate to the total suite of material culture, to the choices made by the collectors about what to collect, to the decisions made by Aboriginal people about what to relinquish, and to their lived experiences at the time. Leonn Satterthwait's chapter addresses these issues directly in his consideration of *collections* as artefacts. A central conundrum of museum ethnographic collections, as he points out, is that while they reflect the situation from which they are derived, they also present a distorted image of that situation even as they often come to stand for it. Ultimately, he says, the creation of a collection entails the making of connections and the establishment of associations that link things together in networks of meaning.

The chapters gathered here are the first attempt at a broad coverage of how many of the most important collections of Aboriginal artefacts came to be made, how they were influenced by the people who put them together, and how that in turn influences the image of particular ways of life. While the literature on collectors of antiquities and fine art is enormous, it was only from the mid-1990s that the makers and making of ethnographic collections started to receive attention either in Australia or elsewhere. There are now at least half a dozen such books on the topic, only a few of which deal with Australia.⁷ Tom Griffith's *Hunters and Collectors: The Antiquarian Imagination in Australia* appeared in 1996 and stands out as the major example. Its focus is on the state of Victoria, with attention divided between RE Johns, whose collection of wooden artefacts was sent to the Paris exhibition of 1878, and the many collectors of stone artefacts in that state. Otherwise, as with the history of archaeology and anthropology in Australia more generally, the limited published writing on collecting has been confined to articles mainly on individuals or collections of particular artefacts, with extended consideration remaining in theses that started being written from the mid-1970s onwards.⁸

The precondition for an interest in the collectors and collecting of Aboriginal artefacts to emerge was the development of a broad academic interest in material culture itself. It is, therefore, instructive to begin with an overview of the rise of material culture studies in Australia, which has been closely linked to their rise in Britain, before turning to an outline of the phases of collecting and examining the collectors and their methods.

Material Culture Studies in Australia

It has been suggested that the rise of functionalism eclipsed the artefact because collecting became privatised when artefacts lost the comparative significance given to them by social evolutionary theory and attention focused on social relations.⁹ Certainly, as far as Australian anthropology is concerned, research on material culture had no great audience from the 1920s to the 1970s, becoming lost in a theoretical and academic no-man's-land between anthropology, archaeology and museology, in spite of the publications of people like

DS Davidson.¹⁰ Nothing illustrates the indifference more clearly than the fact that even in the South Australian Museum, which has long had one of the best collections of Aboriginal material, the Aboriginal exhibition stood unchanged from 1914–82 (see Chapter 12) and likewise that the display in the Queensland Museum stood unchanged from 1911–86 (see Chapter 2). Things were little better in Sydney's Australian Museum, where the display stood from 1906–56 with a rearrangement by culture area, rather than typology, taking place in the 1930s¹¹, or at the Institute of Anatomy in Canberra where the nascent National Ethnographic Collection was housed in a display put up in the early 1960s and remained virtually unchanged until it closed in 1984 (see Chapter 11). This indifference to Aboriginal material emerges clearly in the 1933 Carnegie Corporation-sponsored report on the museums and art galleries of Australia and New Zealand, where it is commented that: 'In one very important museum we came across several cases of anthropological specimens, the only sign of any label in these cases being a number ... [without any key]'.¹²

Although the intense interest in material culture during the social evolutionary period gave way to neglect and the relegation of it by university-based anthropologists to a handful of specialists, there was nevertheless an active engagement with Aboriginal museum collections that developed outside of mainstream social anthropology. The museums in Adelaide and Sydney became sites for the development of Australian archaeology, through Norman Tindale in the South Australian Museum and Fred McCarthy at the Australian Museum. It was also in the 1920s that Margaret Preston first began to draw inspiration from the Aboriginal displays in the Australian Museum in Sydney, which included material from the length of eastern Australia¹³, and to form a long-term association with McCarthy. Through him she became involved in the recording of Aboriginal rock art and contributed to the well-known Decorative Art exhibition organised by McCarthy at David Jones in 1941. His book on Australian Aboriginal decorative art, published in many editions, was highly influential. Charles Mountford, based in Adelaide, also influenced Preston and the art community with his popular writing, lecturing and photographs of Aboriginal art and culture. And in Melbourne, Leonhard Adam, author of *Primitive Art* (1940), who was associated with the History Department at Melbourne University

from 1943–60, established an ethnographic collection that was another influence on the wider public.

John Mulvaney graduated in history in 1948 from the department that Adam was in. But despite going on several digs with Adam, Mulvaney was, surprisingly, little influenced by him in his switch from classical history to archaeology.¹⁴ Mulvaney was to play an important role not just in the establishment of academic archaeology in Australia, but in the development of material culture studies through his position on the council of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, as it then was. McCarthy had been appointed the first principal of the Institute in 1962 and brought to the position his strong interest in material culture, including the documentation of making and use in daily life on film.¹⁵ Mulvaney was not only supportive of McCarthy's interests in these areas but was also involved in the appointment of two people to the Institute who were deeply interested in material culture. These were McCarthy's successor, Peter Ucko, whose 1969 publication on penis sheaths Susan Pearce identifies as a milestone in the rise of modern material culture studies¹⁶, and Deputy-Principal Robert Edwards from the South Australian Museum. Between them they laid the groundwork for the emergence of university-based material culture studies in Australia.

The first move was to establish a material culture advisory committee to consider research grant applications, to make recommendations on new initiatives that the Institute might take in this area, and to advise on the use of a special allocation of funds in the 1973–74 budget for the Institute to increase the rate of acquisition of items for the National Ethnographic Collection.¹⁷ This was to include the purchase of existing collections and antique pieces, and the commissioning of new art and craft. The latter went hand in hand with increased lobbying for the establishment of a national museum in Canberra under the heading of a Gallery of Aboriginal Australia, first formulated by WEH Stanner and persistently carried forward by Mulvaney. In 1974 Mulvaney was appointed to the Committee of Inquiry on Museums and National Collections, and chaired the Planning Committee for the Gallery of Aboriginal Australia. The recommendations of these two committees appeared as the Piggott Report, which laid the foundation for the establishment of the National Museum in 1975.¹⁸

Dissatisfied with the rate at which the universities were taking up this field of study, the Institute provided funds to James Cook University for a Chair of Material Culture in 1979, and in 1980 for a lectureship in material culture at the Australian National University (ANU), where Andree Rosenfeld and Anthony Forge had been doing some limited teaching of the subject. The chair was taken up by Barrie Reynolds and the lectureship by Howard Morphy. Another lectureship was established at the University of Queensland in 1983 and taken up by Leonn Satterthwait, replacing Peter Lauer's undergraduate material culture courses that had been running since the early '70s. In the same year, the Steering Committee of the Conference of Museum Anthropologists initiated a survey of the holdings of Australian museums, which was carried out by Betty Meehan.¹⁹ This survey stimulated the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies (AIAS) in 1986 to initiate a survey of museum holdings of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander material in overseas museums, resulting in the publication of a catalogue giving a preliminary listing in 1989.²⁰ However, a planned multi-volume publication on the material culture of Aboriginal Australia never eventuated, and the more general interest in material culture became overwhelmed by the rise of the Aboriginal art movement in the lead-up to the bicentennial celebrations in 1988. Central to the rise of Aboriginal art was the effort of many outside anthropology to wrest art from the anthropologists, and the ethnographic museum, and to relocate it in the art gallery.

Indeed, the only major ethnographic collector to catch the public eye during the course of the 1970s and 1980s was TGH Strehlow, and for all the wrong reasons. In a long, complex and sorry saga, Strehlow and his second wife sought, in various ways, to realise considerable sums from the sale of his enormously rich collection of central Australian artefacts, photographs, films and field notes. Particularly damaging was his sale in 1978 to the German magazine *Stern* of photographs of the restricted portions of ceremonies held by Arrernte men, which were subsequently resold and published in popular Australian magazines, causing a huge outcry.²¹

Another current in the rise of interest in material culture, and thus, subsequently, in collectors and collecting, was stimulated by Robert Edwards, himself a collector, especially of printed material. It was highlighted by the publication of the volume *Preserving*

*Indigenous Cultures: a New Role for Museums*²², which can be taken as marking the beginning of a greater intensity of interaction between museums and Aboriginal communities.²³ At the 1978 UNESCO conference in Adelaide from which the publication arose, museums had come under intense criticism from Indigenous people for their lack of a relationship with the people whose heritage they curated, stimulating the beginning of the growth of anthropological interest in museums and their collections. But it was the repatriation issues that focused attention on museums directly. This first received great attention in the early 1970s with the approach of the 1976 centenary of the death of Truganini, the so-called last Tasmanian, and the development of a widely supported campaign that sought to have her reburied in accordance with her own wishes. In the same period, the Central Land Council in Alice Springs was seeking the return of sacred boards from museums and trying to involve the AIAS in the process. These pressures led to the appointment of Indigenous curators, along with the establishment of Indigenous advisory committees at a number of major museums across the country, and provided the impetus for researching collections. Unsurprisingly, the interests of these curators and committees were not always concerned with the makers and making of collections.²⁴

Within the museum world, the intensifying of the research interest in collectors and collections as a result of the 1978 conference was reflected in the establishment in 1979 of the Conference of Museum Anthropologists (COMA), another initiative of Robert Edwards. It held an annual conference and established a *Bulletin* whose first editor was Jim Specht of the Australian Museum. The conferences and the *Bulletin* were the only regular forums for dialogue about research on collections for museum anthropologists and interested Indigenous people. Responses to Aboriginal interests and concerns about museum holdings and exhibitions culminated in the major redevelopments of museum galleries—in particular Museum Victoria's Bunjilaka, the Aboriginal Centre at Melbourne Museum and the South Australian Museum's Australian Aboriginal Cultures Gallery, both of which opened in 2000, and the National Museum of Australia's First Australians Gallery, which opened in 2001.

Thus, it was not until the end of the twentieth century that a crucial precondition for a concern with collectors and collecting was

firmly in place: a wide interest in material culture, not just from academics but now also very strongly from Aboriginal people. Another precondition was the development of a historical interest in Australian anthropology and ethnography. This has been relatively slow to emerge, with the first book-length study only published in 2007.²⁵ However, there has been a regular but intermittent flow of articles on the topic since the days of AP Elkin's regular surveys of the history of research into Aboriginal society and culture.

Collecting

On the basis of the papers included here we can distinguish five periods of collecting that, while not self-contained or mutually exclusive, are characterised by a predominant motivation informing the collecting in each period. The first can be called the period of unsystematic collecting, which stretches from first contact to c. 1880; the second, collecting under the influence of social evolutionary theory, from c. 1880 to c. 1920; the third, collecting under the influence of 'before it is too late', from c. 1920 to c. 1940; the fourth, research adjunct collecting, from c. 1940 to c. 1980; and the fifth, the dominance of secondary collecting, from c. 1980 to the present day.²⁶

It is fascinating to realise that there was very little institutional collecting of Aboriginal artefacts until the 1890s. Indeed, in 1899, Baldwin Spencer, just appointed honorary director of the then National Museum of Victoria, assessed the state of ethnographic collections in Australia: Melbourne had next to nothing (see Chapter 5), Western Australia had even less, Sydney was ranked poor and Adelaide was rated the best. Richard Robins's chapter (see Chapter 2) allows us to safely add that the Queensland Museum ranked with Western Australia. Philip Jones, in his detailed and fascinating doctoral thesis on the South Australian Museum, provides insight into this surprising national lack.²⁷ Once Aboriginal people were impacted upon by colonisation and reduced to fringe dwelling, he indicates that there was not a great deal of interest in their way of life. Missionaries were one exception but, as he documents, much of their attention was directed to language.²⁸ While many individuals made collections, museums directed most of their attention to natural history, geology and technology, and in the absence of museum interest, the collections remained with individuals and eventually

disappeared.²⁹ Many sent or took items back to Europe where, over time, they became dispersed. Amazingly, for example, nothing is known of the whereabouts of the collections even of such men as Sir George Grey and Edward Eyre, both of whom had well-documented interests in Aboriginal life and artefacts.³⁰

Elizabeth Willis's account of collecting in the area and surrounds of present-day Melbourne between 1835 and 1855 (see Chapter 4) is the only contribution dealing with this early period but it reflects many of the foregoing points. Although the material she is dealing with often has poor provenance and is dispersed and fragmentary, there are possibilities for recovering information to contextualise the objects and the collectors. Some of the early exchanges were part of establishing social relations, and she reports that artefacts were in short supply by as early as the mid-1840s. Indeed, even in the late 1830s, George Augustus Robinson, Protector of Aborigines in Victoria, was encouraging his staff to get Aboriginal people to produce artefacts for sale and trying to set a scale for purchase prices.³¹ At the other end of the continent, Professor HN Moseley on *HMS Challenger* provided a description in September 1874 of the very well-established market in artefacts at the tip of Cape York:³²

Cape York is a sort of emporium of savage weapons and ornaments. Pearl shell-gathering vessels (Pearl shellers as they are called) come to Somerset with crews which they have picked up at all the islands in the neighbourhood, from New Guinea, and from all over the Pacific, and they bring weapons and ornaments from all these places with them. Moreover, the Murray Islanders visit the port [Somerset] in their canoes, and bring bows and arrows, drums, and such things for barter. The water police stationed at Somerset deal in these curiosities, buying them up and selling them to passengers in the passing steamers, or to other visitors. Hence all kinds of savage weapons have found their way into English collections, with the label 'Cape York,' and the Northern Australians have got credit for having learnt the use of the bow-and-arrow. I believe that no Australian natives use the bow at all ... Accurate determination of locality is of course essential to the

interest of savage weapons. What was characteristic of Somerset at the time of the 'Challenger's' visit in September 1874 applied to Thursday Island after the seat of Government had been transferred thither in 1877.³³

It was with the emergence of the social evolutionary paradigm, and the not unrelated rise of the 'museum age' (1880–1920)³⁴, that Aboriginal material culture took on a universal academic significance and a high public profile through artefact displays at international exhibitions, both at home and abroad. Given the poor state of the museum holdings of Aboriginal material, it is not surprising that an intense scramble for artefacts characterised this second period of collecting from c. 1880 to c. 1920. The importance given to material culture by social evolutionary theory set off a great hunt for 'genuine traditional' artefacts, preferably ones made with the original stone technology, although it is clear from the Aboriginal desire for iron from the earliest times that Aboriginal people were making items for their own use, as well as exchange, with metal tools. Baldwin Spencer's statement that he was 'annexing all I can lay hands on' (see Chapter 5) captures the spirit of the times. Even in the north of the continent, it is clear that the number of desired items to be found was often few, as the complaint of John Tunney, the professional collector for the Western Australian Museum, suggests: 'They only have what they require for their own use and will not part with them' (see Chapter 10).

Another emphasis in this period was the acquisition of artefacts related to religious life, particularly sacred boards (*tjurunga* or *tywerrenge*). Their existence was first discovered by Europeans in the 1870s and within fifteen years there was a huge demand for them. Indeed, they were, and still are, fetishised by collectors, as they were thought to provide the key to the origins of religion.³⁵ Annette Weiner accurately describes them as being inalienable possessions, the defining characteristic of which is their separation from the ordinary channels of reciprocity and exchange in which commodities circulate. Yet Christopher Anderson estimates there are in the order of 20 000 such objects in museums and private collections.³⁶ Aboriginal people started parting with these highly valued and restricted sacred objects in considerable numbers by the 1890s, possibly because the high

death rate made people prepared to sell them, although some were stolen and many others were made specifically for sale.³⁷ Spencer and his collaborators in central Australia were among the keenest of the collectors, and John Mulvaney seeks to put what, from the perspective of the present, seems an ethically problematic activity into the context of how it was seen at the time.

In the third period (c. 1920 to c. 1940) there is a division between people collecting from a base in museums, Norman Tindale, Charles Mountford and Fred McCarthy, and those working out of universities. The predominant influence for both sets was 'before it is too late', reflecting the anthropological project of Radcliffe-Brown, the first professor of anthropology in Australia, who took up the chair at the University of Sydney in 1926. With the help of funds provided to the Australian National Research Council (ANRC) by the Rockefeller Foundation, he was concerned with documenting Aboriginal culture in areas where it was still flourishing and before it was too late, because it would 'provide data of the very greatest importance for a comparative science of culture'.³⁸ To this end he sent a stream of field-workers to northern Australia—Lloyd Warner, Ursula McConnel, Donald Thomson, CW Hart and Lauriston Sharp among them—to work with the least contacted people. Interestingly, there is no sense from Thomson or Warner that they felt Aboriginal life in Arnhem Land was under immediate threat. Aboriginal people in central Australia living beyond the frontier, of whom there were many, posed too great a practical challenge to work with at that stage other than in the places where they had settled down.³⁹ This was the heyday of functionalism, with an emphasis on social relationships, social organisation and social structure rather than on the physical manifestations of life. Nevertheless, as Louise Hamby makes clear, it was expected by Radcliffe-Brown that the research workers funded by the ANRC would make collections of artefacts, largely it would seem as part of the comprehensiveness of the functionalist approach. Anne Perusco's paper on Ursula McConnel (see Chapter 15) reminds us that collecting was very much a masculine activity, as was, of course, anthropology in this period. McCarthy, who falls in this period, is something of a mystery, since although he wrote on trade of artefacts across and beyond the continent, and was the first professional curator of anthropology in an Australian museum, he seemed more

interested in the acquisition of stone tools, reflecting his original interests and training as an archaeologist.

In the fourth period (c. 1940 to c. 1980), research adjunct collecting emerged more clearly. Ronald Berndt is the clearest example of this kind of collecting, focusing on paper and bark drawings in both the desert and Arnhem Land as an adjunct to his research on religious, social and territorial organisation. This contrasted with Mountford, who also collected paintings in the previous period but not as a research methodology directed to understanding the sociological aspects of Aboriginal society. The other example is the impressive collection Helen Wurm put together of sets of paintings by patrician across Arnhem Land and the Kimberley. She was commissioned by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies to make this collection, which, as Margie West points out (see Chapter 19), raises interesting questions about gender and access to restricted information.

The final period (c. 1980 to the present) marks a number of transformations that took place both in Aboriginal life and Australia more generally. It marks the almost total dominance of the collecting of Aboriginal art, both by institutions and private collectors, over any other form of material culture. With the growth of outback tourism and then with the increased profile of Aboriginal issues, especially in the lead-up to the bicentennial celebrations in 1988, the desert acrylic painting movement burst onto the scene, completely dominating and transforming it as far as Aboriginal objects were concerned. Other artefacts were still being made for sale at the beginning of this period but by the twenty-first century there was a major decline in the number, diversity and quality of artefacts available.

There was a slow emergence of an interest in tourist artefacts such as the carved animals of central Australia.⁴⁰ But it was desert art that grabbed the Australian collecting imagination. The most innovative collection made by a museum during this period of tourist art is not documented here but was made by the Australian Research Group at the National Museum of Ethnology in Japan in 1982, under the direction of Shuzo Koyama. Koyama made a comprehensive sample of the full range of tourist art being produced for sale in central Australia. In Arnhem Land he also organised the purchase of

a whole bush domestic structure and all its content, including clothes and other items of everyday use, influenced by a similar collection made by Betty Meehan for the Australian Museum.

In 1985 an Indigenous institutional collector under Aboriginal control emerged on the scene. The Koorie Heritage Trust of Victoria was established to preserve, share and promote Aboriginal cultural heritage by purchasing items from individuals and auctions both in Australia and abroad, as well as almost anything made by Aboriginal people in Victoria. It currently holds over 3000 artefacts that are displayed in its own purpose-built Cultural Centre in Melbourne.⁴¹

Daniel Leo suggests there have been five ways in which collectors have obtained artefacts: local collecting, circuit travelling, using a network of collectors, on expedition and by trading. Each one of these is represented here, and sometimes more than one way of collecting is evident in a single collection. Local collecting is represented by the activities of people working on mission stations, as discussed by Chris Nobbs (see Chapter 8) and Ian Coates (see Chapter 9), although they were often collecting at the instruction of, or to meet the requirements of, others. Edmund Milne would be the closest to circuit collecting here as he travelled the New South Wales railway system as part of his work for the NSW Railways authority. LP Winterbotham, discussed by Leo (see Chapter 3), was the networker par excellence, but networking was also part of the method used by the Berlin Ethnographic Museum (discussed by Janice Lally; see Chapter 7) and other institutions that sought gifts, which, more recently, have been stimulated by tax deductibility. Collecting while on an expedition is most fully represented here by Mountford, McCarthy, Tindale and Thomson, but also by anthropologists carrying out field research projects. Finally, trading, here meaning purchasing from dealers, auction houses or other collectors, is represented in part by how the Berlin Ethnographic Museum and other overseas institutions put their collections together, and in part by the Kluge–Ruhe collection. However, the Kluge–Ruhe collection was put together using a diverse set of collecting strategies, Ruhe obtaining his bark paintings through trading, making expeditionary visits and networking.

Collectors

It is not possible to correlate a typology of collectors with the nature of the collections created in any kind of definitive way, but it can be seen from the chapters of this book that there has been a development in the type of collectors over the period during which the continent has been settled by outsiders. It might be possible to show that those collectors who had longer-term relationships with the people from whom they collected, such as missionaries and anthropologists, produced richer and more significant collections. However, an interest in collecting was crucial to the richness of the content, as the contrast between Lloyd Warner, discussed by Louise Hamby (see Chapter 13), and Donald Thomson, discussed by Lindy Allen (see Chapter 14), underlines.

David Kaus offers us a distinction between professional and amateur collectors (see Chapter 11), suggesting that the amateur collectors were omnivorous, often collecting a few types of artefacts, or, if they collected a wide range, they had only a few of each, and were not so interested in documentation as professionals. He provides a detailed case study of one amateur, Edmund Milne, and by his definition the maritime explorers and gentlemen colonisers would also fit the amateur category, as would the antiquarian Winterbotham. Edward Ruhe, discussed by Margo Smith (see Chapter 20), a professor of literature, really bridges the two categories. Ruhe started out as an amateur but in time became a professional collector who developed a research interest in detailed documentation. Indeed, the significance of the distinction between the two categories is not really clear in this volume because the authors have focused on the makers of large and significant collections while museum holdings are replete with many dozens of small collections that fit the definition of collections made by amateurs.

Kaus defines a professional collector as a person who collects within a restricted geographical area, seeks a broad range of object types and supplies a high level of documentation. There are several kinds of people who might be thought of as professional collectors. Of the people dealt with here, John Tunney is most clearly a professional collector in the sense of somebody paid to collect, as he was by the Western Australian Museum. Ross Chadwick (see Chapter 10) reveals that his real expertise was in the area of collecting biological

specimens and that his ability in getting material from Aboriginal people was limited, although there is the intriguing issue of why he was so successful in the Alligator Rivers area when he fared poorly elsewhere.

Anthropologists, using the term broadly, are another category of people who can be classified as professional collectors, especially because they confine their collecting to relatively restricted areas. It was the pre-World War 1 anthropologists who saw collecting as absolutely integral to their research. Here we have the cases of Baldwin Spencer, professor of biology and zoology at the University of Melbourne, and Walter Roth, a medical practitioner who became Protector of Aborigines in Queensland, both of whom were working from a background in natural science. Donald Thomson and Norman Tindale also had natural science backgrounds but provided a much higher level of documentation than either Spencer and Roth, or their contemporary Lloyd Warner, who was a coopted anthropological collector. Philip Jones (see Chapter 12) traces the development of Norman Tindale's collecting practice at two early points in his career, showing how he rapidly moved to a level of documentation that allowed for the situating of artefacts in their cultural context. It is also interesting to note that it was the three collectors with natural science backgrounds—Spencer, Tindale and Thomson—who saw the significance of film for enhancing still photography documentation.⁴² Of course, Charles Mountford, discussed by Sally May (see Chapter 16), also made good use of film, coming from a quite different background although one that was linked to photographs. Indeed, although reference is made to the use of photography by many of the people dealt with here, the place of photography in collecting remains to be fully examined. That it has not received more attention certainly suggests something about the perceived power and significance of objects.

Collecting in Perspective

In trying to put the collecting of Indigenous Australian material culture into a wider perspective, the contrast between collecting in Australia and the United States is instructive. Unlike in the United States, there have been no great private collectors in Australia, such as the likes of Phoebe Hearst or George Heye, who amassed over one million items of Indigenous material culture from North America.

With collecting on such a scale, it is not surprising that the same people ended up building grand private museums to house their collections and made them accessible to the public. In Australia it is clear that Baldwin Spencer identified closely with the National Museum of Victoria, of which he was honorary director, and probably felt proprietorial about it. As John Mulvaney indicates (see Chapter 5), he was in a position to not need the salary that went with his position, and was able to gather large collections for the museum and to devote many hours to the very practical work of fabricating displays. The only other museum in Australia that has such an identification with named persons, that is the closest thing to a private museum, is the Berndt Museum at the Department of Anthropology at the University of Western Australia, discussed by John Stanton (see Chapter 18). This was established in 1976 by Ronald and Catherine Berndt, but it is only after their deaths that the museum is coming into its own as a public institution, with an appeal being launched for a new purpose-built building.

The situation in Queensland is particularly interesting. The University of Queensland has the only other anthropology department that has a university museum linked to it. However, in this case the museum collection was used by LP Winterbotham as a lever to get an anthropology department established at the University of Queensland, as Daniel Leo (see Chapter 3) explains in his fascinating account of the consequences of the vacuum left by the disinterest of the Queensland Museum in Aboriginal material culture, discussed by Richard Robins (see Chapter 2).

A puzzling feature of many collections, here and abroad, is the prevalence of spears, and to a lesser extent weapons more generally. Classically, people seemed to have concentrated on collecting weapons, although as Elizabeth Willis shows (see Chapter 4), some people also collected fibre bags, nets and etched barks from the earliest days in Victoria. Spears are by far the most common item as many of the authors here make clear, raising questions as to why this should be and how much this was due to Indigenous agency.⁴³ Was it that as Pax Australiana was imposed, the need for spears declined decisively? Was it that they were always a key item of exchange in Aboriginal societies and so were offered to people seeking artefacts? Were spears no longer central to subsistence once Europeans arrived?

Did men have spare time with the imposition of peace and used some of it to manufacture more spears for exchange? The other side of the coin is the question of why collectors wanted them. Compared to clubs, boomerangs and shields, spears pose logistical problems to field collectors, as many of them are 2.7 to 3 metres long.⁴⁴ But the evidence shows this was rarely an impediment to the most dedicated of collectors, with Donald Thomson being a case in point (see Chapter 14).⁴⁵ Weapons as items made of wood according to regionally differentiated templates must have had the attractions of solidity, patina, surface decoration and aesthetic form. But it is also clear that the sheer diversity of forms attracted the serious collectors, for if they were all the same, the lust for spears would surely not have been aroused. As late as 1930, the catalogue of the Australian exhibits in the Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology distinguished some fifty different varieties focusing on materials and functions but seemingly oblivious to the social production of differentiation.⁴⁶

As yet there is relatively little evidence about the impact of collecting on Aboriginal people, but two intriguing glimpses come from Donald Thomson's time in Arnhem Land, one specifically related to spears. In 1935 Donald Thomson recorded that at Caledon Bay in eastern Arnhem Land, where people were leading a self-sufficient life, very few spears were available because the missionaries from Milingimbi had bought most of them on a recent visit.⁴⁷ Of more significance is Lindy Allen's observation that over the eight years that Thomson collected in eastern Arnhem Land, he gathered the equivalent of six items from each adult! The same issues of surplus, scarcity, production for exchange and impact are raised in connection with the huge numbers of sacred boards collected from the Arrernte before World War II, as mentioned above, and certainly warrant further investigation.

Order of Chapters

The first three chapters, comprising Part I, relate to collecting in its institutional context. Leonn Satterthwait considers the idea of a collection and explores this through material gathered by Walter Roth. Richard Robins documents some of the factors that can affect the nature of a museum's holding. In the case of the Queensland Museum,

the indifference of the museum to Australian material culture not only resulted in two major Queensland collections ending up elsewhere (most of Roth's collection in NSW and Ursula McConnel's collection in South Australia), but in the collector Winterbotham, discussed by Daniel Leo, giving his material to the University of Queensland and using it to help get anthropology established there as a teaching discipline.

With only one contribution covering the first period of collecting, identified above, we have grouped it with the chapters relating to the second period of collecting under the influence of social evolutionary theory in Part II, on the grounds that they are all united by an idea of progress. The first chapter by Elizabeth Willis deals with unsystematic collecting by the early gentlemen settlers in the Melbourne area. The next chapter, by John Mulvaney, deals with the most famous of all the people of this period, Baldwin Spencer, who like Walter Roth, considered next by Kate Kahn, was trained in the natural sciences. Both men collected keenly and wrote extensively and influentially. Janice Lally examines how the Berlin Ethnological Museum put together its collection of Aboriginal material using a wide network that included German officials and nationals in Australia. Chris Nobbs writes about some of the people in this latter category who were missionaries at Bethesda Mission on the Cooper Creek, in particular Otto Seibert, who was influenced by the views of a Protestant theologian called Warneck who saw a significant role for ethnography in missionary work. Like HJ Hillier, discussed by Ian Coates, who was also an employee at Bethesda before moving to the Hermannsburg mission, he traded extensively in Aboriginal artefacts with people both in Australia and abroad. Ross Chadwick deals with the only truly professional collector in the sense of somebody paid to do that and nothing else, although John Tunney's primary responsibility was obtaining natural history specimens for the Western Australian Museum. This section concludes with David Kaus's comparison of Edmund Milne, an amateur collector in terms of his typology, working mainly in NSW, and Herbert Basedow, a professional collector focused on South Australia and the Northern Territory.

The set of chapters comprising Part III deals with collecting by museum curators or for museums, and by professional anthropologists. All of these people were only too aware of the changes or

impending changes that were impacting on people's material culture and, as in the case of Fredrick McCarthy, lamenting it. Philip Jones discusses the early years of collecting by one of the giants of museum ethnology in Australia, Norman Tindale. Louise Hamby reconstitutes the dispersed collection of Lloyd Warner, who collected material because it was part of his grant conditions. Lindy Allen discusses Donald Thomson, who like Warner was an anthropologist from the Radcliffe-Brown stable, but unlike him was deeply interested in material culture and had a huge interest in collecting. It led to him collecting in Arnhem Land by far the most comprehensive body of material existing in Australia from people who were still largely self-supporting. Anne Perusco describes the activity of Ursula McConnel, another anthropologist trained by Radcliffe-Brown and one of only two women dealt with here. She makes an interesting comparison between a collection made by Donald Thomson and one made by McConnel in the same area of Cape York, to examine the extent to which gender influenced collection composition. Sally May deals with a collector who had a high profile among the general public that was not matched, for the most part, by his standing among academics and museum curators. Charles Mountford led the American–Australian Scientific Expedition to Arnhem Land in 1948, which spent nine months in three locations with a large team of people. Mountford himself was interested in art and seems to have had a direct role in what was painted. One of the members of that expedition was Frederick McCarthy of the Australian Museum, discussed by Val Attenbrow, who was the first university-trained anthropologist to be appointed as a curator. His main interest was archaeology but as a curator in Sydney, and subsequently the first principal of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies (AIAS), he greatly influenced what was collected. At the museum his interest in non-stone material seems to have been driven largely by concerns for display, while later at the AIAS, he would place great emphasis on filming as a method of recording. Like Roth he made an impressive collection of string figures recorded by pasting each actual figure to a separate cardboard sheet.

The final three chapters, comprising Part IV, deal with people who collected in a rather different framework from those who went before them. Two dealt with collecting as an adjunct to research. This

is clearest in the case of Ronald and Catherine Berndt, who are discussed by John Stanton, the curator of the museum that bears their name. To better understand the nature of the totemic landscape and relations to place, the Berndts encouraged people to make paintings and drawings in their hundreds at two of their major field sites. Such is the exceptional nature of the Arnhem Land collection, that it has been placed on the UNESCO *Memory of the World Register* (as has parts of the Donald Thomson Collection). Margie West writes about the work of Helen Wurm, who was commissioned by Frederick McCarthy, then at the AIAS, to make an inventory of the core paintings for groups across Arnhem Land and areas to the west. This involved her in commissioning paintings and producing a magnificently documented comparative collection whose riches have yet to be explored properly. Margo Smith writes about quite another form of collecting that focused on art from Arnhem Land and the desert, describing how two Americans put together the largest collection of Aboriginal material in North America: the Kluge–Ruhe collection.

Conclusion

Together, the chapters in this volume lay the foundation for the further study of museum collections of Aboriginal material culture and how they have come down to us. Yet there is, of course, so much more to be said about the collectors, their interactions with Aboriginal people, the nature of Aboriginal people's influence on what was collected, the impact of institutional policies and practices on the collectors and collections, and how all these things have influenced the way we come to understand Aboriginal life in the past. As Susan Stewart says, the museum creates the illusion of adequate representation from the partial array of objects that come into its holdings and displays.⁴⁸

Two important aspects of collecting have been barely touched on. Although this volume is illustrated, it is evident that much remains to be said about museum collections, particularly in relation to photography. While museum exhibitions can tend to fetishise particular objects, this is often countered by images of the object in use, which can also tell us so much about what was not seen as worthy of collecting or possible to collect. Also barely touched on here is the influence of dealers on what was collected. The best known

of the dealers in Aboriginal artefacts in Sydney, prior to its takeover by the book dealer James Tyrell in the 1920s, was the curio shop run by Tost and Rohu in Martin Place.⁴⁹ After acquiring the business in 1929, Tyrrell produced a catalogue showing prices for a wide range of Aboriginal and Pacific items, but no work has been done on the influence of the major dealers on collectors or of dealers as collectors in their own right. In particular, and in more recent times, Jim Davidson and Dorothy Bennett, who both specialised in barks from Arnhem Land, as well as trading, created collections that eventually ended up in the National Ethnographic Collection. To the extent that documentation of the impact of dealers exists, it is likely to be most substantial in relationship to the production of art and to cover the last half of the twentieth century.⁵⁰

This volume comes as the making of distinctively Aboriginal artefacts central to an economically self-sufficient life is coming to an end, and the numbers of older nineteenth- and early twentieth-century artefacts available through auctions declines as they increasingly get absorbed by institutions. The attention of the makers of collections of Indigenous Australian material today is increasingly captured by the art market, but identity politics is likely to generate distinctive artefacts and the possibility of new collections for a long time to come.

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Notes

- 1 We would like to thank Howard Morphy for some very helpful comments on a draft of the Introduction and for drawing our attention to Edward's work on Margaret Preston and the Australian Museum.
- 2 See Elkin, pp. 17–18.
- 3 Sir James Frazer; see Kuklick.
- 4 Burridge, p. 238.
- 5 See Jones, *Ochre and Rust*, p. 5.
- 6 The number of artefacts in the Christensen Collection is now 3800. The Collection was donated to Museum Victoria in March 1994.
- 7 See Krech and Hail for native North America and O'Hanlon and Welsch for Melanesia. For Africa, see Phillips and Stein, and Schildkrout and Keim.
- 8 For example, Coates; Cooper, The Beechworth Collection of Aboriginal Artefacts; Cundy; Hugo; Jones, 'A Box of Native Things'; McBryde; Morphy, *An Analysis of the Toas of the Lake Eyre Region of Central Australia*; O'Gorman; Sculthorpe.
- 9 O'Hanlon, pp. 2, 6.
- 10 Also see McCarthy; Anell. Although DS Davidson wrote many papers on the distribution of Aboriginal material culture, they had little impact as they addressed, directly or indirectly, historical issues of cultural

- succession, a concern rejected by Radcliffe-Brown and the functionalism he promulgated.
- 11 Lampert, p. 14.
 - 12 Markham and Richards, p. 43.
 - 13 See Edwards, pp. 76, 99.
 - 14 Inglis, p. 26.
 - 15 Bryson, p. 13.
 - 16 Pearce, p. 8.
 - 17 This was called the Commonwealth Ethnographic Collection at that time; see *AIAS Newsletter*.
 - 18 Piggott.
 - 19 Meehan.
 - 20 See Cooper, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Collections in Overseas Museums*, p. vii.
 - 21 Kaiser.
 - 22 Edwards and Stewart.
 - 23 The volume was the result of a UNESCO conference held in Adelaide in 1978, for which Edwards was the driving force. Edwards had also played a key role in the development of Aboriginal keeping places in central Australia, which were misleadingly called museums locally. The best known of these were the Yuendumu Museum, established in 1972, and the Aboriginal Keeping Place at Shepparton, built around the same time.
 - 24 Indeed, when information about the conference from which this volume has emerged was widely circulated, the response of one Indigenous art gallery curator was dismissive.
 - 25 Gray.
 - 26 These dates are very approximate. The date of 1880 is chosen because this is the year that *Kamilaroi and Kurnai*, the first monograph on Australia in the social evolutionary framework, was published by L Fison and AW Howitt. The period 1920–40 was the heyday of functionalism. The final period begins with the growth of the contemporary interest in the Aboriginal art market.
 - 27 Jones, 'A Box of Native Things'; also see Jones, 'Words to Objects'.
 - 28 Jones, 'Words to Objects'.
 - 29 For example, in the Australian Museum in Sydney, founded in 1827, there were only nine Aboriginal artefacts on display in 1837. The museum subsequently lost much of its collection in the great Garden Palace fire of 1882. It was only in the 1980s that the museum acquired the Aboriginal collection of the man who had been its curator between 1874–94; see Lampert, p. 12.
 - 30 Jones, 'A Box of Native Things'.
 - 31 *ibid*.
 - 32 Moseley, p. 361.
 - 33 Haddon, vol. 4, footnote p. v.
 - 34 Sturtevant, p. 622.
 - 35 The fact that they are not allowed to be exported and that people sending them to auction in Australia are usually forced to withdraw them or sell

- them to the government adds to the fetishisation.
- 36 Anderson, p. 99.
- 37 Jones, 'Objects of Mystery and Concealment', p. 72.
- 38 Radcliffe-Brown, p. 3.
- 39 Daisy Bates worked with people at the Ooldea soak on the transcontinental railway line, which was in effect an Aboriginal settlement that became a mission. Olive Pink did work for a time with Warlpiri people in the bush, setting up camp at two different major water sources and meeting people that way (see Marcus).
- 40 See Koyama; Sculthorpe; Kubota.
- 41 See <http://www.koorieheritagetrust.com/collections>. In the early 1970s, a number of small 'museums' were established in remote Australia—these are not museums in the normal sense of the word but, particularly in desert Australia, are places for storing men's sacred boards and other objects. Subsequently, a number of women's museums were built to serve the same purpose. Today, with the availability of computer networks in remote communities, there is a move to establish 'Knowledge Centres' that seek the repatriation, frequently in digital form, of photographs, articles and objects relating to the local region.
- 42 Most unfortunately, Thomson's 20 000 feet of black and white film was destroyed by fire, but fortunately his unrivalled still photographs have been preserved for posterity.
- 43 Thomas, pp. 18–19.
- 44 Hayter, pp. 9–15.
- 45 But see Chapter 4, where Willis reports finding spears cut in half.
- 46 Hayter.
- 47 Thomson, p. 86.
- 48 Stewart, pp. 161–2.
- 49 Tyrell, p. 179.
- 50 See Altman; Morphy, 'Aboriginal Fine Art'; Williams. Other dealers were Stephen Kellner, active in the 1970s in Sydney. With the rise of the Aboriginal art market, there is now a large number of specialist art dealers, some of whom were working back as early as the 1970s. There have long been missionary organisations such as the Church Missionary Society in Sydney that have marketed Aboriginal art and craft.