Wonderlust: the influence of natural history illustration and ornamentation on perceptions of the exotic in Australia

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Dissertation presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the Doctor of Philosophy

Declaration of Originality

I, ……………………………………….hereby declare that the thesis here presented is the outcome of the research project undertaken during my candidacy, that I am the sole author unless otherwise indicated, and that I have fully documented the source of ideas, references, quotations and paraphrases attributable to other authors.

Acknowledgements

Abstract

This thesis is comprised of two parts: a Studio Research component with an accompanying Exegesis (66%), and a Dissertation (33%). The Dissertation presented here examines the historical and cultural context of the production of natural history illustration and ornamentation, and the formal qualities of these visual forms that enabled them to inform and disseminate exotic constructions and perceptions. These visual forms were a significant part of the intellectual and cultural framework of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and frequently represented the 'other' as desirable and different. The aesthetic responses generated by such exotic representations operated subliminally to develop and reinforce dualistic notions surrounding the difference of the distant 'other' in comparison to the European self. The Dissertation examines the specificity of the operation of these visual forms in relation to exotic perceptions of the Australian 'other' from the late eighteenth to the early twentieth centuries, and develops an argument about the rise of a unique mode of perceiving the Australian 'other'.

The Dissertation elaborates the theoretical context for the studio research which is an evocation and examination of the aesthetic experience of the exotic, informed by natural history illustration and ornamentation. A process of quotation and transformation of historical imagery has been developed to investigate foundational representations and perceptions of the Australian exoticised 'other' and the manner that this imagery persists and reforms as it circulates in society. The imagery is reworked by a painting process that utilises the material and formal properties of paint to explore the nature of the aesthetic perception of the exotic while also providing a metaphoric model of the manner that the self is defined in relation to the 'other'. The process offers an alternative mode of conceiving the 'other' within the post-colonial concept of hybridity.

The results of the studio research are elaborated in the Exegesis and will be presented as a site-specific installation of paintings in the ANU School of Art Gallery from 17 to 26 March 2010.

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Introduction: Locating the 'other'

Frame of reference and motivations

This body of research, conducted in my studio and at my desk was initiated by the complicated and often contradictory perceptions of place that I experience. Fundamentally I feel a paradoxical mixture of pleasure and insecurity, excitement and fear when confronted with the strangeness of Australia outside of my familiar world of suburbia. Beyond a mannered fringe of houses and gardens alongside a fragile beauty I perceive an Australia of harsh light and dryness, inedible plants, and undomesticated animals; a land that does not allow for survival of the lost. This land with a history of brutal colonisation, penal servitude and a displaced indigenous population is a place that does not feel familiar to me. I am uncomfortable in the confrontation with the 'otherness' of Australia's natural environment and indigenous people who I perceive as perplexing, enticing and unsettlingly strange. Reminded of my status as settler I become uncertain who the 'other' actually is.

One of the art theory courses I undertook as an undergraduate, *Cartographies: Art, Exploration and Knowledge* introduced me to a discourse which struck a resonance with these feelings of disquieting wonder and was the impetus for my interest in the intersection between visual languages outside of the canon of fine art, perceptions of the natural world and the increasing bodies of knowledge regarding the newly discovered lands and peoples during the eighteenth century. Reading Bernard Smith's text during this course, *Imaging the Pacific: in the wake of the Cook Voyages*,[1] introduced me to the aesthetic perception of the exotic, which provided an entry-point for my exploration of the development and evolution of European perceptions of Australia. The reception, circulation and translation of natural history illustrations created by artists aboard the voyages of discovery in this period were integral to the formation of this perception of the distant exotic 'other'. Situated as a fifth generation Australian settler, the formation of convict, explorer and settler perceptions feels close and relevant to my own

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[1] Bernard Smith, *Imaging the Pacific: In the Wake of the Cook Voyages* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1992)

contemporary experience. This research project has grown from the desire to understand how these initial perceptions and the resultant often fabulous constructions have persisted and evolved into their contemporary form. Aligned to this enquiry was the certainty in my mind that the construction of the 'other' in Australia differed to that elsewhere. I wished to know how and why this distinction developed.

The decision to focus my research within the visual forms of natural history illustration and ornamentation was based on several factors. Firstly, natural history illustration was a highly significant form of imagery during the period of British colonisation of Australia. The importance of drawing was elevated in this period in the pursuit of scientific knowledge and imperial power.[2] Illustrations of natural history and ethnographic subjects as well as topographic views were central to these processes. Secondly, my own artistic practice has been persistently centred on the natural world. I consider this a result of an enduring personal enquiry to understand and investigate the intellectual, emotive and aesthetic appeal that plants, birds, animals and the natural environment hold for me. As I experience a sense of the captivating wonder bound within the process of creating imagery from close observation of a living creature I feel a degree of empathy with the widespread enthusiasm that existed historically for the production of this form of imagery. Similarly, ornamental imagery has great aesthetic appeal for me. The recognition that the mercurial nature of ornamental forms provides a sensitive marker of shifting cultural tastes and values stimulated my interest in investigating the relationship between domestic decorative imagery, constructions of nature and perceptions of the natural world in Australia. Finally, although conventional art history focuses nearly exclusively on the fine arts as a cultural marker, examining alternative visual textual forms enables a richly insightful body of information to be gleaned. Nicholas Thomas points out that visual imagery such as maps, botanical illustrations, frontispieces, diagrams, prints and postcards are increasingly recognised as valuable revelatory materials. Such imagery may not only enhance textual records but can also communicate additional or discordant information regarding cultural perceptions.[3] I believed that study of the commonplace imagery which surrounded settlers, such as ornamental imagery in their domestic environment and natural history illustration reproduced within popular periodicals, newspapers and books, would offer a

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[2] *Ibid.* 28.
[3] Nicholas Thomas, Diane Losche, and Assistant editor Jennifer Newell, eds., *Double Vision: Art Histories and Colonial Histories in the Pacific* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 1.

subtle and nuanced revelation of the way in which the exotic was constructed and perceived.

Methodology

As this research project is concerned with the role of natural history illustration and ornamentation in engendering perceptions of the exotic and uncanny in post-settlement Australia, the nature of these practices from the late eighteenth century onwards is the focus of my investigation. A number of research questions structured the investigation of my topic, relating to the manner in which natural history illustration and ornament have informed the construction of the exotic in Australia. The most salient of these formative questions were as follows:

What is the relationship between the practice of ornamentation and perceptions of the natural world?

What were the formal qualities and cultural context of the production of natural history illustration and ornamentation that ensured that they both informed perceptions and acted as carriers of the exotic in the European imagination?

How did these visual languages specifically influence the formation and evolution of the perception of the exotic in Australia?

What were the unique features of the construction and experience of the exotic in Australia? In particular what, if any, relationship exists between perceptions of the exotic and the uncanny in response to the natural environment?

Has domestic ornamental imagery influenced the manifestation of the uncanny in Australia and if so in what manner?

I used three main methods: literature review, examination of primary sources and studio research concurrently in order to examine these questions. Each method provided a different experiential means of investigating my topic. The theoretical research of the Dissertation and the perceptual research inherent in the creation of artefacts within the studio mutually informed each other, particularly in my understanding of the perception and location of the 'other'. For the sake of clarity I have confined discussion of the

progress and results of the studio research to the Exegesis. This Dissertation elaborates the conclusions that I drew from my examination of the relevant literature and field studies undertaken to view primary sources. The range of archival material examined includes the Journals of Sydney Parkinson (1773), John Hawkesworth (1773), John White (1790), La Perouse (1791), John Hunter (1793), François Peron (1824) and La Harpe (1831) from the National Library of Australia and the Menzies Library (ANU); the illustrations of Sarah Stone in the Mitchell Library (Sydney) and the First Fleet Collection (which included the Port Jackson Painter and Thomas Watling) in the British National History Museum (London). The scenic wallpaper *Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacific* situated in the National Gallery of Australia was studied as was the wallpaper archive within the Caroline Simpson Collection (Historic Houses Trust, New South Wales, Sydney) which provided samples of wallpaper, journals and manuals available in Australia in the early twentieth century and unpublished material relating the to the Gilkes and Morrisons Wallpaper companies. Within the Victoria and Albert Museum (London) I immersed myself in British decorative art of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, particularly textiles. Many of these artefacts provided rich examples of the eclectic, consuming nature of the process of exoticism. Also of great value was a visit to the Pitt Rivers Museum (Oxford) which continues to present its collection of exotic artefacts in the same manner devised at its inception in 1884. The ability to engage with original material was immensely valuable as much of the research project explores the impact of these very same artefacts on the formation of aesthetic perceptions of the exotic in the contemporaneous British and Australian cultures. Selected case studies undertaken during field work are presented throughout the Dissertation.

Theoretical research using a range of texts was vital for my understanding of the contextual cultural framework and key concepts within the topic. The manner in which I understand and employ these fundamental concepts and terms that form the frame of reference of this research project are defined as follows:

Natural history illustration: This is defined broadly as the graphic documentary field record created as a result of direct observation of the natural history subject. Constraints such as available time, difficult access and location of the subject ensured that these records were usually pencil and watercolour drawings on paper which aimed to observe and document as much information as possible in the often limited time available. The speed with which field studies may be executed and the portability of the associated materials of their production allowed this form of visual recording prior to

photography to be the most appropriate for capturing the vast volume of visual information that bombarded explorers, travellers and field naturalists. Natural history illustration's ability to privilege particular aspects of the information it documents has ensured that it is still preferred to photography as a means of visual documentation in specific aesthetic and scientific circumstances. The open diagrammatic nature of field studies enables them to absorb various meanings particularly when selected field studies are amended and transformed into 'finished' works; a process reliant on a varying combination of visual memory, collected samples, textual notes and previously published images.[4] It is significant that the processes of naming, classification by comparison and collecting, conducted with the aim to understand and order the information gleaned are associated with the production of natural history illustrations.

Ornamentation: the definition I have employed is derived from James Trilling's text, *Ornament: a modern perspective.* Trilling distinguishes between ornament and decoration, decoration defined as the most general term for the addition of one work of art to another so that it is physically and visually dependent on it. For example Michelangelo's Last Judgement is part of the decoration of the Sistine Chapel, but it is not classified as ornament.[5] Rather 'ornament is decoration in which the visual pleasure of form significantly outweighs the communicative value of content. Ornament can and does have representation, narrative and symbolic content, but visual pleasure must be paramount.'[6] Ornamentation plays a substantial yet shifting role in cultural definition, the significance of individual motifs on identity being linked to the social use of the ornamented object. Exoticism is readily manifest in ornament which rapidly alters its form to influence and reflect popular taste for distant and different visual ornamental cultures. This transmission and intermingling of motifs is a fertile and important area of artistic and cultural exchange

Exotic: The implications of identifying a distant and different 'other' are complicated by the construction of the exotic. The exotic is not an inherent quality found in particular people, objects or places; rather it is a particular form of culturally determined aesthetic perception –'one which renders people, objects and places strange even as it

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[4] Bronwen Douglas, 'Art as an Ethno-Historical Text: Science, Representation and Indigenous Presence in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Oceanic Voyage Literature,' in *Double Vision: Art Histories and Colonial Histories in the Pacific*, ed. Nicholas Thomas and Diane Losche (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 66.
[5] James Trilling, *Ornament: A Modern Perspective*, *Samuel and Althea Stroum Lectures in Jewish Studies* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2003), 23.
[6] Ibid.

domesticates them.'[7]   The perception of attractive strangeness is central within the construction of the concept of the exotic and its implications.   This is because identification of the strange or unusual exotic 'other' is made by comparison to the usual and familiar and its attractiveness generates degrees of often ambivalent desire. Particularly during the nineteenth century the exotic (distant) foreign 'other' whether plant, animal, artefact or person carried strong, commercially valuable connotations of stimulating and exciting difference.   Desire for the wonder of these exotic 'others' ensured their adoption as commodities in the consuming domestic economy.[8]

Uncanny: Sigmund Freud's 1919 essay, *Das Unheimliche*, is the seminal text that elaborates this concept.[9]   Freud describes the uncanny as a specific form of fear or dread which is initiated by a variety of circumstances to which individuals vary in sensitivity.   These circumstances are located or concealed within those that were formerly perceived as safe and homely.   It is not simply the experience of strangeness or alienation but a particular mingling of the familiar and unfamiliar.   The concept is further extended by the theories of Julia Kristeva who states perception of the uncanny occurs when the stranger or 'other' is recognised within the notion of the self.[10]

Chapter outline

Chapter One begins by describing the intellectual interest and wonder generated in response to the natural world at the time of European settlement of Australia.   Natural history illustrations introduced a receptive Western public to previously undescribed flora, fauna and peoples.   The wonder experienced in response to these illustrations was integral to the establishment and acceptance of the cultural construction of the exotic. The aesthetic perception of the exotic was developed further by the manner in which the novel subjects were represented and presented.   Within the chapter I explore the formal characteristics and the cultural context of production of natural history illustration that ensured that this form of imagery was intrinsically involved with informing the ability

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[7] Graham Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 13.
[8] Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 94.
[9] Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, trans. David McLintock (London: Penguin Books, 2003).
[10] Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991).

of the West to imagine the 'other'. The widespread contribution that natural history illustration made was largely due to the translation and circulation of the illustrations into other documentary and decorative forms. The chapter concludes with a case study of the panoramic wallpaper, *Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique*.

Chapter Two explores the reciprocal relationship between perceptions of the natural world and the culturally universal practice of ornamentation. The visual representation of aspects of the natural world in domestic ornamentation is often the most frequent mode of experiencing a conception of nature. This form of imagery both reflects and informs constructions of nature and perceptions of the natural world while exerting formative and expressive influences on identity. Within the chapter I examine the significance of the process of ornamentation to the human psyche; the relationship between the discourses surrounding ornamentation and philosophies of humanity's relationship to the natural world and the influence of modernism on the decorative arts. Wallpaper imagery of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is investigated as a case study of this interrelationship. Observations regarding the nature of influence between ornamentation and perceptions of the natural world generally are extrapolated to the specific experience of the exotic and uncanny in Australia.

The final chapter investigates the cultural mechanism of taste as a measure of social aspirations and cultural tensions in Australia. The establishment of Australian tastes from a blend of historical and cultural factors is explored as is the interrelationship between taste and perceptions of the natural environment. Taste as manifested by the widespread consumption of domestic ornamental wallpaper imagery until the mid twentieth century is examined as a case study which relates the unique visual properties of wallpaper to concepts of the home and the uncanny. A discussion of the relationship between an evolving contradictory sense of nationalism and ornamentation in Australia concludes the chapter.

The conclusion reiterates the role of natural history illustration and ornamentation in informing the construction and perception of the exotic 'other'. The significance of the formal qualities and manner of circulation of these visual forms is emphasised within the broad historical, political and cultural framework that informed the specificity of the process of exoticism in Australia. I relate this specificity to the development of a distinctive binary pairing within the operation of the Manichean allegory in Australia. I develop this argument by connecting the purposeful constructions of self and national

identity, the experience of the uncanny and the persisting process of exoticism in Australia.

Chapter One: Exotic representations

The wonderful exotic

Australia was predestined to be exotic to the European colonial mind. Speculation, driven by the classical construction of the Antipodes drove the search for a Great Southern Continent. Europeans hungrily anticipated a world that would be a mirror of their own; both a trading partner and source of wealth, home to a culturally sophisticated race that would point to the origins of civilisation. The Australia encountered by explorers and settlers however was bewildering. They found not just a new country but a perplexing and peculiarly unpalatable 'new world.' The British botanist and collector Sir James Smith pointed out in 1793 that

> When a botanist first enters…so remote a country as New Holland he finds himself in a new world. He can scarcely meet with any fixed points from whence to draw his analogies. Whole tribes of plants which first seem familiar… prove on nearer examination, total strangers, with other configurations, other economies, and other qualities; not only are the species that present themselves new, but most of the genera, and even the natural orders.[11]

The Australian natural environment was absolutely novel. Inexplicable plants and animals, the apparent barren nature of the land and its reclusive inhabitants crushed previous delusions of the Great Southern continent. The sprawling unknown of Australia necessitated a re-evaluation of anticipated concepts and an interpretation of fresh perceptions, observations and experiences by early explorers and settlers. The interpretive process gave birth to the exotic, which evolved as colonial perceptions were translated into textual and visual forms, circulated and consumed. Within the minds of settlers and Europeans that remained at 'home' a slippery continuum of interpretation of the unknown occurred between the alarming monstrous and the attractive exotic. The sheltered relic life forms found in the ecological sanctuary of the Australian continent were construed as primitive and perceived as grotesque and deviant by many early observers. Such freaks of nature became metaphors for cultural anxieties, surrounding settlers with their persistent presence.[12] Other colonialists however experienced an

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[11] Bernard Smith, *European Vision and the South Pacific 1768-1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960), 6.
[12] Richard Kearney, *Stranger, Gods and Monsters* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 115.

enthusiastic and opportunistic wonder in response to the unique environment of Australia. They drew and collected as much of the natural surroundings as possible. This wonder was as much a commodity as any other natural resource. It was extracted, shipped to Britain and marketed.

Human beings enjoy, seek and even lust for the experience of wonder. The pleasurable thrill stimulated by the strange and surprising is closely linked to the cultural construction of the exotic and discourses of discovery. Wonder presents a spectrum of experience ranging from curiosity or admiration to encounters perceived as revelatory or miraculous. According to Stephen Greenblatt, danger and desire are often closely aligned as the 'instinctive recognition of difference' occurs; 'the object that arouses wonder is so new that for the moment at least it is alone, unsystematised, an utterly detached object of rapt attention'. Such unsystematised objects may operate as malleable vessels for plausible or politically expedient constructions of explanation.[13] The pleasurable power of wonder continues to operate as an impetus and sustaining force in cultural notions surrounding difference observed in people and places.

Analogous to wonder the term exotic carries with it the connotation of the recognition of an intoxicating, yet often paradoxical, blend of foreignness, excitement and attractive strangeness. A particular distinction exists however between wonder and the exotic. Within the experience of wonder 'there must be no element of memory in the experience. That is part of the purity of this involuntary and, at least as first, purely aesthetic experience.'[14] In comparison to the innate emotion of wonder, the fabulous and flamboyant exotic is a particular form of cultural perception operating aesthetically as well as cognitively.

Although the recognition and desire for the wonderful difference of the 'other' and the analogous process of exoticism occurs in all cultures, within this Dissertation examination of the aesthetic genre of the exotic is limited to the process of perception that originated in the European mind when confronted with the 'other' Pacific or Australasian person, plant, animal, artefact or land from the late eighteenth century onwards. The subtle and ubiquitous nature of aligned exotic constructions often served political functions and are evidenced in literary texts, a wide variety of forms of visual representation and popular culture to the degree that stereotypes and cultural

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[13] Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 20.
[14] Philip Fisher, *Wonder, the Rainbow, and the Aesthetics of Rare Experiences* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London: Harvard University Press, 1998), 18.

assumptions based on the exotic and self are usually accepted uncritically. Most discourse surrounding the exotic is made in reference to its action as a catalyst in the process of colonisation which relied on the hierarchy of perceived differences between notions of self and the exotic 'other' person, natural environment or place. Physical differences such as skin colour or physical features were metonymically transformed into moral or metaphysical differences. The dualistic nature of this process which came to dominate every facet of imperialistic mentality has been termed the 'Manichean allegory'. It encompasses a field of diverse 'yet interchangeable oppositions between white and black, good and evil, superiority and inferiority, civilisation and savagery, intelligence and emotion, rationality and sensuality, self and Other, subject and object.'[15]

The trade of material objects was substantial in all initial encounters between differing cultures and was driven by the interest and desire to acquire material evidence of the 'other'.[16] The attractive and exciting nature of the exotic ensured its avaricious adoption as a lucrative commodity into the acquiring domestic culture. An appreciation of the exotic and its aligned implications of wealth and power became an indicator of good taste. From the outset of European voyages, 'exotic minerals, artefacts, plants, and animals were brought back for display in private collections and museums and live specimens were cultivated, in Kew Gardens for example, or in the many private and public zoos established in the period.'[17] These decontextualised signifiers of the 'other' provided the paying public an opportunity to 'experience wonder in the presence of the alien' and to see and perhaps touch a 'fragment of the world elsewhere, a world of difference.'[18] The objectification of the exotic 'other' is exemplified in the importation of peoples of other cultures to the European metropoles as popular entertainment.[19] The capture and display of people from distant lands can be traced back to the early fifteenth century and continued until into the twentieth.[20] The often dramatic display of these

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[15] Abdul R. JanMohamed, 'The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonist Literature,' in *'Race,' Writing and Difference*, ed. Jr. Henry Louis Gates (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1985), 82.

[16] The reciprocal and at times non-reactive nature of cross-cultural encounters is examined by Nicholas Thomas and Diane Losche in *Double Vision: Art Histories and colonial histories in the Pacific* (Cambridge: Cambridge university Press, 1999), 5. Thomas emphasises the heterogeneity of perceptions formed in response to the exotic.

[17] Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, 94.

[18] Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions*, 122.

[19] Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, 94.

[20] Peter Mason, *Infelicities: Representations of the Exotic* (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1998), 111.

people served to reinforce a representation of primitive 'others.'[21] The example of Omai, who joined Cook's second voyage from Tahiti in 1773 on its return to London, is well known.[22] The successful absorption of the exotic into Western domestic economies was largely due to the fact that the imported artefact, object, person, plant or animal removed from its original natural or cultural context became a signifier of the exotic. Such a signifier was capable of titillating the public imagination while presenting no threat or confrontation. These 'innocent signifiers' could absorb whatever meaning was projected onto them by the societies into which they were introduced.[23] The processes of collecting and displaying these signifiers acted as expressions of imperial power and plenitude in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[24]

The exotic is produced by a process of exoticisation; or the manner in which the unsystematised subject is both presented and represented. Stated simply, the 'distance between the original context and the new context into which the exoticised object is inserted is a measure of its degree of exoticism.'[25] Representations of the exotic acquired a tenuous, shifting character; opposed to the beautiful in a spatial sense as the ugly and the grotesque were opposed to the beautiful more direct, qualitative sense.[26] The slippery, metamorphic nature of exotic representations was due to two main factors. Firstly the nature of the exotic 'other' is continually reconstructed in relation to unstable normative values. This is a reflection of the fact that definition and perception of the exotic 'other' is inextricably linked to continually transforming notions of individual and national identity and sense of place. The attributes perceived to belong to the 'other' by definition were contrary to how Europeans, including European settlers, perceived themselves. Thus constructions of the exotic equally revealed notions of the European sense of self and place which were vital in the maintenance of power structures both within the Imperial centre and its peripheries. Secondly, perceptions of the exotic are most vibrant where there is only a small body of accepted factual knowledge relating to the 'other' person or place. The exotic flourishes with the embellishment of the believable fantastic, which is constructed from the viewpoint of

[21] Ibid., 113.

[22] Michelle Hetherington, 'The Cult of the South Seas,' in *Cook & Omai*, ed. Michelle Hetherington (Canberra: National Library of Australia in association with the Humanities Research Centre, ANU, 2001), 4.

[23] Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, 95.

[24] The significance of collections of specimens, artefacts and drawings, within natural history museums of this period to the construction to the exotic will be alluded to later in this chapter

[25] Mason, *Infelicities: Representations of the Exotic*, 131.

[26] Bernard Smith, *Imaging the Pacific: In the Wake of the Cook Voyages* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1992), 9.

the acquiring culture. Graham Huggan points out that 'knowledge is incompatible with exoticism, but lack of knowledge is in turn irreconcilable with praise of others; yet praise (evaluation as desirable) without knowledge is precisely what exoticism aspires to be.'[27]

Despite the fact that exotic constructions alter, reflecting cultural shifts, several features are intrinsic in visual representations of the exotic. Importantly as the excitement and appeal of the exotic has its foundation in difference from the accepted aesthetic or cultural norms, within Western art, the aesthetic perception of the exotic necessarily is distinct from the aesthetic perception of beauty and/or the cultural assumptions such as morality within the perception of beauty, the Western ideal of appearance. This concept is elaborated by Bernard Smith who states that the aesthetic perception of the exotic

> may reveal any visual qualities except that of ideal beauty derived from classical naturalism, the central norm of European aesthetics. It may be bizarre, extraordinary, marvellous, weird — anything but beautiful. Nor could the exotic stand for the real. It could never be those others, the non-Europeans, as they viewed and valued themselves. It was a category of accommodation by means of which the European perceived and interpreted the Other according to constraints and limitations of European understanding.'[28]

The production of images based on direct empirical naturalism with the intent to document difference was antithetical to traditional fine art practice of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries which was established on a practice of copying pre-existing art in order to learn the classically accepted norms of beauty and proportion.[29] The differing traditions of process, evolution of forms and intention of natural history illustration and ornamentation situates these forms of imagery at the margins of fine art practice. Unconstrained by the hegemony of classical naturalism these visual forms were more apt modes of presenting an aesthetic perception situated outside of the tenets of classical beauty. In particular these modes of artistic practice gave visual form to cultural notions of the nature of the exotic; impetus to the actions of exploration, colonisation, and travel and generated widespread trends in popular taste for the exotic artefact.

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[27] Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*, 17.
[28] Smith, *Imaging the Pacific: In the Wake of the Cook Voyages*, 10.
[29] Ibid., 3.

Natural history illustration: a modality of knowledge

The broad discipline of natural history is basically the systematic study of any form of natural object or being. The concepts of natural history and philosophy were closely aligned in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and contributed significantly to Western structures of knowledge. In *The Order of Things,* Michel Foucault examines the basis and development of such knowledge systems. One aspect of this evolution that Foucault traces is the manner in which living creatures have been perceived and grouped as a reflection of how cultures have manifest concepts of order.[30] The concept of history from the mid-seventeenth century shifted from a process of compilation of past and current perceptions, thoughts and imaginings to being a 'meticulous examination of things themselves for the first time'. History was construed as an innovative means of connecting things both to the 'eye and to discourse.' The first form of history constituted in this period of 'purification' was the history of nature.'[31] Information gleaned from vision, directly and via instruments such as the microscope, was privileged above that gathered from other senses, perceptions or circulated in culture in the form of myths or anecdotes. Indeed from the seventeenth century onwards observation was considered a perceptible knowledge; 'sight was considered the sense that could perceive extent and furnish proof.'[32] Observation however was aimed to limit and filter the visible in order to record a structure that could be analysed, recognised and named. Once named using an appropriate descriptive language the living subject could be located within a general science of order. Within this discourse, natural history was considered capable of accurately articulating the four variables that constitute all natural beings 'the form of the elements, the quantity of those elements, the manner in which they are distributed in space in relation to each other and the relative magnitude of each element.'[33] The documents of this new history were predominately the spaces where things were juxtaposed: herbariums, collections, gardens where the outward surfaces of creatures could be compared and grouped

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[30] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2002), xxiii.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid., 144.
[33] Ibid., 146.

according to their common features. Natural history fundamentally was considered as a nomination of the visible.[34]

The generation of the grid of knowledge that became known as natural history was due in part to the re-evaluation of Cartesian rationality and the rising prominence of empirically derived information. The Enlightenment ideals of democracy and the universal expansion of knowledge by observation rather than the acceptance of dogma fostered the widespread practice of observation to enable self-education. Many researchers and philosophers directed their studies towards natural history in order to speculate on relationships between living species and ultimately humankind's relationship to creation. The preoccupation with the comparison of the observable outward structure of living things that underpinned the concept of natural history could be recorded visually by illustrations. The acquisition of competency in the practice of drawing thus came to be considered part of a balanced education. This enabled large sections of the upper and middle classes to engage with the practice of natural history illustration as a tool for personal study and the documentation of observations of the natural world as well as events and places experienced when travelling.[35] Natural history's preoccupation with the observable outward form was accompanied by a devaluation of forms of knowledge associated with the invisible functions and relationships of the objectified subject. This included the multifarious manner in which subjects were culturally known and located. The privileging of the outer visual shell and inadvertent emptying of cultural content fostered the process of exoticism.

During the period of European settlement of Australia, natural history was considered the history of all living beings—plants, animals and people.[36] Thus within the widespread practice of collecting the natural history of Australia early European settlers did not usually form any distinction between the Aboriginal people, their culture and the natural environment.[37] In this period natural history collections were a conglomeration of natural objects and ethnographic artefacts curated with the intent to study nature. Collectors and scholars focused on the rare or unusual person or artefact, plant, animal or other aspect of the natural environment. Non-European people were visually represented in the same manner as plants and animals as idealised typical specimens rather than individuals and for basically the same reason: to allow their documentation,

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[34] Ibid., 143.

[35] Smith, *Imaging the Pacific: In the Wake of the Cook Voyages*, 2.

[36] Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 140.

[37] Richard Neville, *A Rage for Curiosity* (Sydney: State Library of New South Wales Press, 1997), 42.

naming and classification.[38]   The concept of race at this time was humanistic and synonymous for variety of type or nation, another example of the diversity of naturally occurring objects and phenomena. The 'scientific' concept of the distinction of race and its associated derogatory connotations of 'permanent, inherited physical differences between circumscribed human groups' developed in the mid-nineteenth century subsequent to increasing imperialistic confrontations.[39]

The cultural significance of natural history illustration flourished subsequent to its use in Cook's three voyages from 1768 to 1779. Cook's legacy was enhanced by his innovative insight into the value and necessity of creating visual records to augment the textual records and discoveries of his voyages.   As natural history illustration is concerned with directly observing and recording the distinctive and defining characteristics of its subject, it became an integral part of the investigation of the potential scientific, economic or cultural value of novel species. The significance of this imagery extended beyond its scientific value. Images of the different and unusual provided the visual alphabet which allowed Europeans to develop constructions of foreign countries and peoples. Natural history illustration allowed the 'other' to be visualised, imagined and desired. The translation and embellishment of field imagery into engravings permitted their wide circulation in published journal accounts of these voyages. Cultural imaginings of the distant exotic 'other' were exemplified in many of the cartouches that frequently literally and metaphorically framed maps of voyages of 'discovery' of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries or acted as frontispieces to journals recounting various journeys. The voyages were described and promoted as the exciting quest for knowledge; the underlying imperialistic nature of these activities was rarely publicly acknowledged. Natural history illustrations created on these voyages fulfilled several functions: documentary record, article of propaganda and marketable commodity.

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[38] This point is illustrated in the later discussion regarding the Sydney Parkinson sketch and the Chamber's engraving
[39] Douglas, 'Art as an Ethno-Historical Text: Science, Representation and Indigenous Presence in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Oceanic Voyage Literature,' 69.
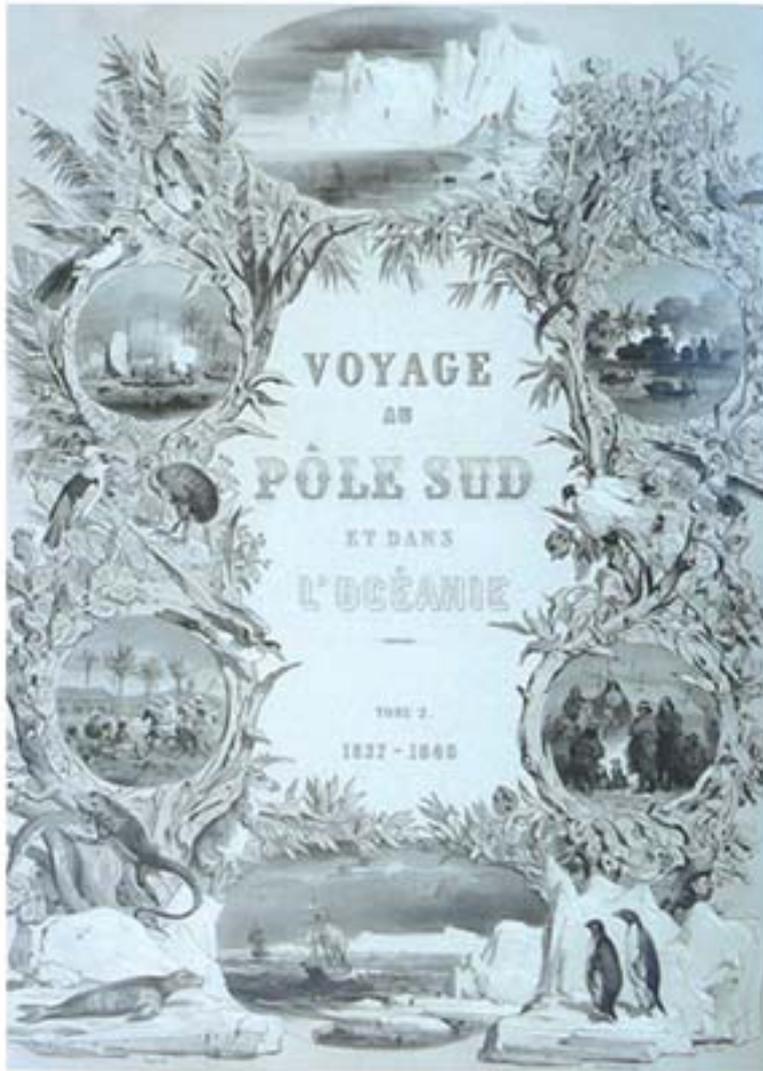
Figure 1: Adolphe Jean Bapiste Bayot, Frontispiece to Dumont d'Urville's journal, *Voyage au Pôle Sud et dans l'Océanie sur les corvettes….* **Volume 2**

Figure 1 is the Frontispiece to Dumont d'Urville's journal of his voyages in the early nineteenth century.[40] This image is an example of how natural history illustration provided a means for Western societies to construct and imagine the exotic, which was then used to publicly promote and contextualise exploration. Within this image the text is framed by a series of vignettes. The top and bottom images depict the foreign landscape of the frozen Antarctic continent. Presumably the *Astrolabe* and the *Zélée*, d'Urville's two vessels of his 1826-1829 voyage to explore the South Pole are those within the lower vignette. The tilting ships are represented as actively and heroically searching the icy limits of the Southern Ocean in the face of an approaching storm. The remaining four vignettes show views of various Pacific races and aspects of their

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[40] Susan Hunt, Martin Terry, and Nicholas Thomas, *Lure of the Southern Seas: The Voyages of Dumont D'urville 1826-1840* (Sydney: Historic Houses Trust, 2002), 22.

material culture. In each image a gathering of people is depicted. Dwellings, clothing, boats and the landscape are described in detail to emphasise the cultural distinctiveness of each race and their land. Drama is enhanced by the inclusion of active volcanoes, smoking fires, and galloping horses. The excitement of the exotic is palpable, its lusciousness further suggested by the use of a framing device composed from a conglomeration of plant forms. Cacti, banana, bamboo, hibiscus and perhaps cocoa leaves are melded into a shelter for a variety of both land and sea birds and animals. Easily identifiable are a kookaburra, kiwi, penguins, a seal, monkey, iguana and kangaroo. Their assembled representation is a fantasy but it depicts the notion that a lush and wonderful cornucopia of unusual creatures and people of unknown possibilities exist elsewhere. They are depicted on the Frontispiece to entice the reader to look and buy. The publishers are manipulating popular notions of the exotic and the heroic explorer to market their book. The circulation of these notions was critical to the establishment of positive public opinion and support for imperial expansion as well as the generation of a receptive market for travel and the resources and goods obtained from foreign shores.

Natural history illustration and presenting the exotic: case studies of the illustrations of Sarah Stone and Ferdinand Bauer and the Leverian Museum

In my examination of how the exotic was provided with a visual form in the process of natural history illustration it is necessary to tease apart the distinction between presentation of the exotic 'other' and its representation. Both processes occurred to a varying degree within this empirical form of imagery. A comparison of the imagery created by the British illustrator Sarah Stone (1760-1844), and Austrian Ferdinand Bauer (1760-1826) illuminates this blend and how the formal characteristics of natural history illustration fostered the perception of the exotic. The conventional natural history illustration represents the isolated subject whether plant, animal, artefact or person, devoid of a contextualising background. This isolated representation of the subject allows it to act as innocent signifier, absorbing and projecting the exotic. The upper images in Figures 2 and 3 are part of an album of 31 original watercolour drawings completed by Stone in 1789 to 1790 in London from specimens sent by John

White, the first Surgeon-General of the Australian colony.[41]   These drawings were translated into engravings (lower image) and published in White's *Journal of a Voyage to New South Wales* in 1790.[42]   Well aware of the level of public interest in the bizarre natural history of Australia, several publishers astutely commissioned first-hand accounts of the British settlement in Australia before the First Fleet had departed. Governor Phillip, Lieutenant-Governor John Hunter, Captain David Collins, Captain-Lieutenant Watkin Tench and John White were all commissioned to send back to Britain first-hand accounts of the process of settlement for publication.[43]   The British public's notions of the fledging colony were strongly informed by the text and imagery of these accounts.

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[41] Richard Neville, 'Album of 31 Original Watercolours of Australian Fauna, C. 1790/ Sarah Stone,' (State Library of NSW, 2000).

[42] John White, *Journal of a Voyage to New South Wales: With Sixty-Five Plates of Non Descript Animals, Birds, Lizards, Serpents, Curious Cones of Trees and Other Natural Productions* (London: J. Debrett, 1790).

[43] Tim Flannery, ed., *Watkin Tench 1788* (Melbourne: Text Publishing Company, 1996), 2.

Figure 2: Above**: Sarah Stone,** *Poto Roo***, c.1790, watercolour on paper, 23 x 17 cm.** Below**: Unknown engraver, A Poto Roo, hand coloured engraving, 22.5 x 17.5cm.**

Figure 3: Above**: Sarah Stone, *The Variegated Lizard*, c. 1790, watercolour on paper, 23 x 17cm.** Below**: Unknown engraver, The Variegated Lizard, hand coloured engraving, 17.5 x 22.5cm.**

The following statement was included in the preface of John White's journal and indicates that the editor was aware of the value in substantiating the veracity of the images.

> The Public may rely, with the most perfect confidence, on the care and accuracy with which the drawings have been copied from nature, by Miss Stone, Mr. Catton, Mr. Nodder, and other artists; and the Editor flatters himself the Engravings are all executed with equal correctness, by, or under the immediate inspection of Mr. Milton. The Birds, etc. from which the drawings were taken are deposited in the Leverian Museum.[44]

The imagery within the journal asserted the authority of the first hand witness. This had important connotations for claims of European discovery and ownership and fostered the process of exoticism for two reasons. Firstly as Peter Mason stresses, that within all

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[44] White, *Journal of a Voyage to New South Wales: With Sixty-Five Plates of Non Descript Animals, Birds, Lizards, Serpents, Curious Cones of Trees and Other Natural Productions.*

exotic representations there is an element that acts as a metonymic link between the representation and what it represents. An illustration produced by direct observation of an exotic subject is an example of such a link.[45]

> The exotic is produced by a process of decontexualization: taken from a setting elsewhere (it is this 'elsewhere' which renders it exotic), it is then transferred to a different setting, or recontextualized. It is not the 'original' geographic or cultural contexts which are valued, but the suitability of the objects in question to assume new meanings in a new context.[46]

Secondly the empirical documentary nature of the images strongly reinforces the authority of an actual observer. Such images exist as evidence of a first-hand witness's report of the subject and have sufficient credibility to sustain a degree of embellishment or distortion and still appear to be authentic. The level that this occurred was dependent on the artist's technical capabilities, available subject matter both primary and supporting, the intention for the work and the level of current scientific knowledge. The process of translating the primary drawings into engravings for publication and circulation also caused a variable degree of transformation to occur. The contribution of such modifying effects to the process of exoticism may be examined if the illustrations of Austrian born Ferdinand Bauer (1760-1826) and the British illustrator, Sarah Stone (1760-1844) are compared.

Stone was a self-educated illustrator whose drawings were well regarded and frequently included in a variety of natural history publications.[47] Her subjects for the illustrations in White's journal were skins sent from Australia that were then prepared as mounted specimens by British taxidermists with limited or no knowledge of the living creature's soft tissue structure, posture and habits. The reconstruction process was aided by the examination of some entire specimens sent from Australia which were preserved in spirits and skeletal remains, particularly skulls, of some of the animals that were collected.[48] So although these illustrations were produced by directly viewing specimens, a degree of fabrication was necessary by the taxidermist and then Stone. The full title of White's journal- *Journal of a Voyage to New South Wales: With Sixty-Five Plates of Non descript Animals, Birds, Lizards, Serpents, curious Cones of Trees*

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[45] Mason, *Infelicities: Representations of the Exotic*, 2.

[46] Ibid., 3.

[47] Christine E. Jackson, *Sarah Stone: Natural Curiosities from New Worlds* (London: Merrell Holberton Publishers and The Natural History Museum, 1998), 10.

[48] White, *Journal of a Voyage to New South Wales: With Sixty-Five Plates of Non Descript Animals, Birds, Lizards, Serpents, Curious Cones of Trees and Other Natural Productions*.

and Other Natural Productions emphasises the interest and value ascribed to these novel and supposedly accurate visual records. The primary purpose of the images Stone created was to describe the distinctive appearance of the specimen. The engraved images developed from Stone's drawings exemplify the subtle but definite transformations that occur in this reproductive process. These transformations most conspicuously involved a more developed description of the foreground as well as subtle changes in texture, form and colouration, co-existent with a loss of visual information regarding markings and colour variation in each of the specimens. Most significantly the transformations endeavoured to render the drawing more suitable for commercial distribution, altering its aesthetic qualities where this was considered necessary.

The formal characteristics of each illustration are similar. The subject is represented within the conventions of contemporaneous natural history illustration where the specimen is shown typically as an isolated 'living' creature placed theatrically on a foreground suggestive of an outdoor setting. There is an absence of any contextualising middle or distant spaces. Instead the subject is depicted on the flat space of the paper support. The various specimens are rendered tonally to indicate volume with fur, feathers and claws reproduced with a high degree of verisimilitude of form and colour. The main function of a foreground appears to be the provision of a surface to aid the depiction of the stance of the imagined live specimen. The illusion of reality however is diminished as the grimacing creatures appear frozen in stiff, unnatural poses. The awkwardness of the illustrations by Stone provides a glimpse to the viewer familiar with these creatures of the perception of oddness they would have provoked when initially exhibited. Also striking is the fact that the vegetation described in the foreground bears no relation to that within the normal habitat of the bird or animal. There was no notion of a necessary equivalence between a subject and its habitat at this stage in history. Disciplines such as anthropology, ethnography and ecology had not been construed and the conception of the interrelated structure of all living things was undeveloped. Rather, this is an example of what was considered an acceptable level of creative fantasy within the natural sciences of the period. Within the genre of botanical illustration it was not until the nineteenth century that depiction of specimens within their specific habitat occurred, a process that coincided with an expansion of the scientific concept of

ecology.[49]   Without the opportunity to observe the living subject and insufficient information about their usual habitat it was unavoidable that Stone resorted to her imagination and existent knowledge pertaining to other species of birds and animals in order to complete these images. The exotic was conceived here, within the necessary imaginative reconstruction of the subject.

The more overt expression of the exotic due to elastic intentions and a degree of invention in Stone's illustrations becomes apparent if her work is contrasted with that of Ferdinand Bauer. Bauer received some formal education within the natural sciences and worked as a professional botanical illustrator in Vienna prior to being employed by the Professor of Botany at Oxford University from 1787-1801. He was appointed in 1801 as natural history painter to the *Investigator* captained by Matthew Flinders, under orders to map the east coast of Australia and record its natural history. Bauer approached the process of illustrating plants and animals in a highly scientific manner. He was actively involved in the landing parties that collected most of the specimens recorded, providing him the opportunity to observe his subjects within their normal habitat. The usual time constraints involved in visually recording his observations were compounded by the staggering volume of novel specimens collected. He devised an intricate coding system to improve the accuracy of his records. An example of this coding system is shown in the upper image of Figure 4. He completed over 2000 field sketches aboard the *Investigator* with this code of over a thousand numerical symbols, each representing a different colour.[50]   Approximately one-fifth of the sketches were completed in London, using his code together with dried and living specimens stored at Kew gardens. Working alongside Robert Brown a distinguished natural scientist, Bauer produced botanical drawings that depicted not just the general structure of the specimen but also its flowers, leaves and the minutiae of seeds, stamens, pollen and roots. This degree of detail, evidenced in Figure 5, allowed the Linnaean classification of specimens. His high level of technical skill and aesthetic sense of composition, created illustrations of exquisite detail perceived as beautiful rather than exotic.[51]

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[49] Charlotte Klonk, *Science and the Perception of Nature: British Landscape Art in the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1996), 37.
[50] Peter Watts, Jo Anne Pomfrett, and David Mabberley, *An Exquisite Eye: The Australian Flora and Fauna Drawings 1801-1820 of Ferdinand Bauer* (Glebe: Historic Houses trust of New South Wales, 1997), 26.
[51] Ibid., 27.

Figure 4: Above**: Ferdinand Bauer***, Blue Swimmer Crab,* **Portunus pelagicus, 1802, field drawing, pencil. Below Portunus Pelagicus, Blue Swimmer crab, 1802, watercolour, 34 x 51.1cm.,**

Figure 5: Ferdinand Bauer, *Cycas media*, 1802, watercolour on paper, 52.6 x 36 cm.

Bauer's expertise, scientific training, mode of production and direct observation of the living specimen ensured that there was virtually no necessity for embellishment on his part. He also was the creator of the limited number of engraved plates produced from his images at that time. The degree of empirical naturalism is so strong in Bauer's images that the exotic enters only in the decontextualisation and presentation of the foreign specimen. As a body of work these images construct the notion of a distant land filled with plants and animals of unusual and fantastic forms with the implication that the land itself is exotic and distinct from the homeland. Despite Bauer's endeavours, only a minuscule proportion of these images were used in the official report of Flinders' voyage. He was unable to gain financial support for further publication of his work from Sir Joseph Banks, who had previously acted as his sponsor, and attempted to finance publication himself. His unsuccessful endeavours have been attributed to an 'already cluttered market' for botanical illustration.[52]

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[52] Ibid., 29.

Natural history illustration was practiced in conjunction with the collection and display of natural history artefacts. The amalgamation of these processes in imperial natural history museums of this period was extremely influential in constructing notions of the exotic. Sarah Stone was employed by Sir Ashton Lever (1729-1788) to create a visual record of many of the natural history and ethnographic specimens in the Leverian museum which was established in 1774 in London. This museum contained an extensive collection of curiosities that included specimens from Cook's Voyages and those sent to London by John White. The mode of presentation of the Leverian Museum collection exemplifies the relationship of both wonder and curiosity to the construction of the exotic. Lever was not a scientist but rather an enthusiastic collector who bankrupted himself in the process of amassing this collection. Prior to the establishment of the museum in Leicester House, Lever stated that his ambitious intentions for the museum were to 'pursue Natural History and carry the exhibition of it to such a height as no one can imagine and to make the most wonderful sight in the world.'[53] Not surprisingly as Lever primarily focused on obtaining a high quantity of artefacts perceived as wonderful or curious, his collection was considered unsystematic and criticised contemporarily by other naturalists who commented: 'Mr. Lever wants anything that he happens not to have in his Museum, whether it tends to illustrate science or not.' Although Lever's collection was considered to defy optimal scientific practice, his collection rivalled that of the British Museum.[54] Lever labelled and innovatively attempted to create a visual record of the collection by employing Stone, Charles Catton (1756-1819), Edward Donovan (1768- 1837) and Sydenham T. Edwards (1768-1819). The museum survived after Lever's death until 1806 when the collection of specimens and natural history illustrations created by Stone and other artists were dispersed.[55]

A visitor to the museum in 1778 described witnessing a staggering array of items collected from many countries; listed were a mélange of peacocks, hummingbirds, flamingos and a penguin, fossils, animals including a tiger, elephant, bears, a wolf, leopard, 'Lizzards, [sic] bats, toads, frogs, scorpions and other filthy creatures in abundance, the complete dress of a Chinese mandarin and a suit of armour that

[53] Hugh S. Torrens, 'Natural History in Eighteenth-Century Museums in Britain,' in *Enlightening the British: Knowledge, Discovery and the Museum in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. R. G. W. Anderson, et al. (London: The British Museum Press, 2003), 82.

[54] Neil Chambers, 'Joseph Banks, the British Museum and Collections in the Age of Empire,' in *Enlightening the British: Knowledge, Discovery and the Museum in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. R.G.W. Anderson, et al. (London: The British Museum Press, 2003), 107.

[55] Jackson, *Sarah Stone: Natural Curiosities from New Worlds*

belonged to Oliver Cromwell'.[56] Uppermost in Figure 6 is an illustration by Stone of the collection within the original Leverian museum. The image illuminates how the large number of artefacts that were presented was grouped in a seemingly haphazard manner. Within the closest room depicted, the visitor dwarfed by an open-mouthed elephant, is confronted by a jostling display that includes a kayak, moose antlers, antelope and rhinoceros horns and shells. The visual cornucopia of artefacts, revealed through a series of open archways is continued throughout the suite of rooms. The immersive experience was intensified when the collection was re-housed in a purpose-built Rotunda from 1787 onwards, shown in the lower image in Figure 6.[57] In this location the visitor occupied a central viewing position and was surrounded by the specimens.[58] This panoptic manner of display reflected the development of cultural interest in visual spectacles such as the painted panorama which was also developed in 1787 by the Irish artist Robert Barker.[59]

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[56] Ibid., 40.
[57] Torrens, 'Natural History in Eighteenth-Century Museums in Britain,' 82.
[58] Jackson, *Sarah Stone: Natural Curiosities from New Worlds* 54.
[59] Martin Terry, 'A Pacific Panorama,' in *Les Sauvages De La Mar Pacifique: Manufactured by Joseph Dufour Et Cie 1804-1805 after a Design by Jean-Gabriel Charvet*, ed. Susan Hall (Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2000), 27.

Figure 6: Above**: Sarah Stone, *Interior of Leverian Museum as it appeared in the 1780's,* c. 1835, watercolour on paper, 40x 42.6cm.** Below: **W. Skelton, The Interior of the Rotunda where the Leverian Museum was housed when owned by James Parkinson from 1787 until 1806, Sarah Stone and C. Ryley, (del).**

The grotesque, the unusual and occasionally the beautiful were included in the search for the unsystematised novel artefact by Lever. Novelty although short-lived is inherent in the process of exoticism which in this case was primarily constructed from the presentation of objects. The direct presentation of objects from elsewhere rather than

the display of representations of the 'other' imbibed a degree of veracity due to their tangible connection to distant locations. Mason states that the exotic artefacts could evoke the exotic culture 'by virtue of the principle *pars pro toto*: the exotic culture was the whole of which they were the (fragmentary) parts.'[60] The overarching perception generated by the collection however is greater than the sum of the various fragmentary individual components as the magnitude of the presentation invariably yielded to a form of representation.[61] The scale of the installation and the unusual juxtapositions created in the display of artefacts detached from their geographic and cultural context inundated the viewer visually and intellectually. The overwhelming nature of the presentation provided a metaphoric impression of diversity, richness and abundance of the 'other' located elsewhere and available for possession.

Figure 7: Mr. Seaman's advertisement using the name 'The Leverian Museum', c. 1806.

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[60] Mason, *Infelicities: Representations of the Exotic*, 72.
[61] Ibid., 67.

The 'perishable' nature of the commodity of the curious was partly overcome within the Leverian Museum by the sheer size of the collection and the manner of its presentation. To counter familiarity and boredom in what was ostensibly a commercial venture the Leverian Museum collection was continually supplemented and advertised sensationally. Figure 7 shows an advertising broadsheet created by the travelling museum owner, Simpson Seaman who purchased parts of the Leverian collection after Lever's bankruptcy.[62] The opening paragraph states:

> To see God in all things in the mirror of the creation to behold and adore the reflected life of the Creator, is no mean attainment; and it possesses this advantage, that thus we sanctify our pursuits, and instead of loving the creatures for themselves, are led, by the survey of them and their instincts, to the love of HIM who made and endowed them.

The text makes clear the overt moral justification that sanctioned popular interest in the exotic 'other' offered for display in this period in Britain. The broadsheet boasts that 'Quadrupeds, birds, fish, reptiles, insects, minerals, shells, fossils and coins from every part of the world' together with 'The heads of two Chieftain Warriors' are on view. The text elaborates:

> From the South Pacific Ocean, curiously Tattooed according to the custom of their country, and embalmed with such admirable style, as to preserve the natural character of those Islanders. The first is the Head of an Otaheitan [sic] Chief, where the benignity of the countenance peculiar to the tribe is finely expressed; the silky black hair and olive complexion, and the Tattooing of the whole face presents one of the most interesting objects ever beheld. The second is the Head of a New Zealand Chieftain: the ferocity of his countenance, the short bristly hair on the front, contrasted with the long silky curls on the back part of the head, the high cheek bones, and thick lips of this Warrior, have an effect that no language can describe.[63]

The sensational objectification of the 'other' is striking, operating as a key mechanism to engender public interest. The general public was little concerned about the feelings of members of the races displayed and certainly did not expect the exotic 'other' to question any aspect of its representation.[64] The negation of the 'other's' individuality (subjectivity) encourages the perception of a 'generic being that can be exchanged for

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[62] Jackson, *Sarah Stone: Natural Curiosities from New Worlds* 66.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Mason, *Infelicities: Representations of the Exotic*, 130.

any other native'.[65] The loss of individual identity enables the pervasive operation of the Manichean allegory throughout the entire colonialist discursive system.

It is pertinent to reiterate the point made earlier in this chapter, that the exotic is the result of a specific mode of aesthetic perception within the acquiring culture. Exoticism or the manufacture of the 'other' is the systematic assimilation of cultural difference where familiar meanings and associations are ascribed to strange and unfamiliar things. In this context exoticism can be understood as a 'kind of semiotic circuit that oscillates between the opposite poles of strangeness and familiarity'.[66] However as the complete domestication of the exotic eliminates the aligned pleasure of wonder the process of assimilation is usually subverted. The subversion may exist for a range of commercial and political reasons however it is also an inherent result of the fact that

> the presentation of the exotic necessarily entails displacement and detachment…This process of decontexualization and recontextualization is an act of translation; like all translations, it is characterized by varying degrees of transparency and opacity, of success and failure.[67]

This slippage in translation between unfamiliar signifiers and acquiring culture produces varying degrees of distortion which effectively limits assimilation of the 'other'; a process that causes the exotic to be characteristically self-referential or self-empowering.[68] Mason states that limitations and imperatives within the process of translation contained by exoticism impart particular structural qualities of the exotic that could be described variously as empty, opaque or full; terms which describe the resistance of the exotic to comprehension.[69]

The impenetrability of exoticism is exacerbated by the manner of presentation of the signifiers to the public. The presentation of specimens in an overwhelming clutter of illogical associations in natural history museums such as the Leverian was similar to the construction of the imagery depicted on the Frontispiece of Dumont d'Urville's journal. The vast volume of natural history illustrations created and modes of presentation of artefacts in the eighteenth century initiated a form of visual bombardment that contributed to the aesthetic perception of the exotic. The nature and magnitude of such presentations contributed to the conception of an engulfing sensory seduction in the

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[65] JanMohamed, 'The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonist Literature,' 83.
[66] Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*, 13.
[67] Mason, *Infelicities: Representations of the Exotic*, 148.
[68] Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*, 14.
[69] Mason, *Infelicities: Representations of the Exotic*, 147.

confrontation of the distant 'other'. The process of amassing overwhelming, multitudinous displays of natural and cultural artefacts similar to Lever's emerged in the sixteenth century where they either were housed within cabinets or displayed for a select audience.[70] The process was perpetuated in the world fairs and expositions of the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. The enormity of these exotic presentations prevented the ability to meaningfully scrutinise the individual 'other' person or artefact. Meg Armstrong writes:

> The hysterical jumble of non-European 'cities', objects, and peoples in the context of fairs – spectacles meant to promote the hegemony of European or American 'civilisation' in all things — provokes thought about the role of the exotic in such magnificent public displays of power.[71]

This jumble was described by contemporary writers as 'gorgeous with colour, pulsating with excitement, riotous with the strivings of a battalion of bands, and peculiar to the last degree.'[72] The aesthetic presentation of the exotic as a 'sublimely grotesque and bawdry array of colours sights and sounds' within such fairs reinforced the perception of foreign 'other' as chaotic and sensory.[73] This was a dichotomous presentation to valued Western notions of the superiority of order and rationality and provides an apt example of the operation of the Manichean allegory. Akin to the natural history museum the sum total of the overwhelming presentation of decontextualised fragments created a metaphoric representation of exotic 'otherness'; one which reinforced the sensibility of empire.[74] The hegemony inferred by such exotic constructions was firmly spliced with hedonism. Robert J. C. Young's text, *Colonial Desire*, elaborates how any colonial discourse (of which exotic representations are an integral element) operated as conscious body of 'scientific' knowledge in conjunction with unconscious ambivalent protocols of fantasy and desire; the psychoanalytical concept of ambivalence implying a continuum between attraction and repulsion.[75] The perceptual experience of early settlers in Australia mirrored the aesthetic perceptions initiated by the manner in which the exotic other was represented in displays such as the Leverian museum and world fairs. The bizarre, unknown natural environment presented as a similar chaotic mix of unsystematised signifiers that was contrary to Western ideals of rational order.

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[70] Ibid., 69.

[71] Meg Armstrong, 'A Jumble of Foreignness: The Sublime Musayums of the Nineteenth Century Fairs and Expositions,' *Cultural Critique* 23, no. Winter 1992-1993 (1993): 201.

[72] Ibid.: 199.

[73] Ibid.: 201.

[74] Ibid.: 207.

[75] Robert J. C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 161.

Unsurprisingly the sustained and inescapable nature of exposure to such an overwhelming environment and the actuality of indigenous encounters informed the evolution of the cultural experience of these perceptions differently. The experience of early European settlers in Australia was likewise an overwhelming immersion into foreignness.

Natural history illustration and representing the exotic: case study of the translation of Sydney Parkinson's illustration

The primary motivation of nations to initiate voyages of discovery was economic gain. Exploration was overtly aimed at the discovery and exploitation of natural resources; the display of documentary images of new plants and animals of possible economic value (including as the exotic commodity) readily promoted public acceptance of the process. Covertly, land and people were acknowledged as an even greater resource. The circulation of the images of races encountered however was much more politically sensitive. Curiosity was tempered with the knowledge of previous disastrous outcomes for the racial victims of European conquests.[76] It was essential for governments to create the notion that these voyages would impact positively on other races that were receptive and open vessels to the spread of Christian salvation rather than venereal disease and smallpox. It was also vital that the new and distant person or place would be considered as 'other' with different needs and sensibilities than the more economically powerful European. It was for these reasons that representations of other races greatly stimulated exoticism as both a political and aesthetic practice. With historical hindsight it is evident that the wonder stimulated by exotic peoples often preceded their violent subjugation and the perception of the exotic splendour of newly colonised lands disguised the brutal circumstances of their gain. The process of constructing the attractive 'other' effectively masked the inequality of the power relations without which the public presentation of the discourse would not have been acceptable.[77]

Although the intention of natural history illustration is to faithfully observe and document, artists who created these illustrations did so within the boundaries of their

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[76] Smith, *Imaging the Pacific: In the Wake of the Cook Voyages*, 202.
[77] Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*, 14.

training and co-existing conventions for representing their subject – whether plant or person. These boundaries influenced how artists selected, interpreted and transformed their observations into imagery. The intended empirical visual records would shift from a presentation into a representation of the unusual distant 'other'. Few conventions existed for plants or animals as opposed to the human body whose representation had aesthetic and technical precedents. One of these was a convention based on allegorical associations and assumptions that postulated that the nature of lands was reflected in the animals, plants and peoples inhabiting them.[78] This convention had minimal impact on the artists aboard the voyages of discovery. However it surfaced after European settlement of Australia in cultural attitudes and judgements of the harsh Australian continent in which resided inexplicable animals and unfriendly natives. More significant were the ethnographic conventions for the representation of foreign people and their material culture. Despite the imperative given to artists aboard exploratory voyages to create documentary graphic records they were unconsciously influenced by these conventions due to their own cultural and educational backgrounds. This influence was reinforced by the practice, initiated on Cook's voyages, of 'completing' field drawings by referencing engravings within earlier natural history journals and classical texts contained within a substantial library on board ship.[79] The resultant imagery was informed by a meld between neoclassical theories that stressed the perception of an underlying unity of mood and expression and analytical, empirical observation. This innovative blend of influences was highly influential on the subsequent evolution of European artistic conventions.[80] The incorporation of classicising conventions in ethnographic presentations and representations persisted into the nineteenth century particularly in ethnographic photography.[81]

The ethnographic convention for representing distant races in this period focused on the description of hair type, skin tone, costume and adornment as the visual clues to identify the foreigner. This was the extent of the naturalism within such images. Individual differences and unattractive details such as emaciation would be omitted.[82] This convention influenced the work of Sydney Parkinson and Alexander Buchanan, the artists aboard the voyage of the *Endeavour,* (1768-1771) and ensured that they

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[78] Rudiger Joppien and Bernard Smith, *The Art of Captain Cook's Voyages*, vol. One: The Voyage of the Endeavour 1768-1771 (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1985), 3.
[79] Smith, *Imaging the Pacific: In the Wake of the Cook Voyages*, 81.
[80] Mason, *Infelicities: Representations of the Exotic*, 57.
[81] Ibid., 127.
[82] Douglas, 'Art as an Ethno-Historical Text: Science, Representation and Indigenous Presence in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Oceanic Voyage Literature,' 75.

represented the human subject in the same manner as other natural history subjects – as type specimens rather than as individuals.[83] In comparison to numerous images made of Pacific people, Parkinson created only two drawings of Australian Aborigines. Certainly this is in large part due to the fact, as Smith alludes, that Parkinson's primary duty was to record flora encountered but also significant was the fact that the behaviour of the Australian Aboriginals was initially reclusive, rendering the establishment of the necessarily friendly relations between artist and human subject difficult.[84] The only image that Parkinson executed of Australian Aborigines is shown in Figure 8. This image consists of nine quickly drawn pencil studies of canoes, shelters, weapons and two native figures in upright natural poses. This drawing is consistent with his earlier field studies conducted in various Pacific locations and makes no reference to classical statuary.[85] His journal entries place the production of this image at the point of initial contact at Botany Bay. The encounter with Aboriginals at Botany Bay was described by Parkinson as hostile. He interpreted the speech and actions of the Aboriginals as clearly attempting to drive the Europeans away. In subsequent days the natives were elusive and avoided close contact. These were obviously not conducive conditions in which to conduct field studies.

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[83] Joppien and Smith, *The Art of Captain Cook's Voyages*, 7.
[84] Robert Hughes, *The Fatal Shore: A History of Transportation of Convicts to Australia, 1787-1868* (London: The Harvill Press, 1987), 53.
[85] Joppien and Smith, *The Art of Captain Cook's Voyages*, 48.
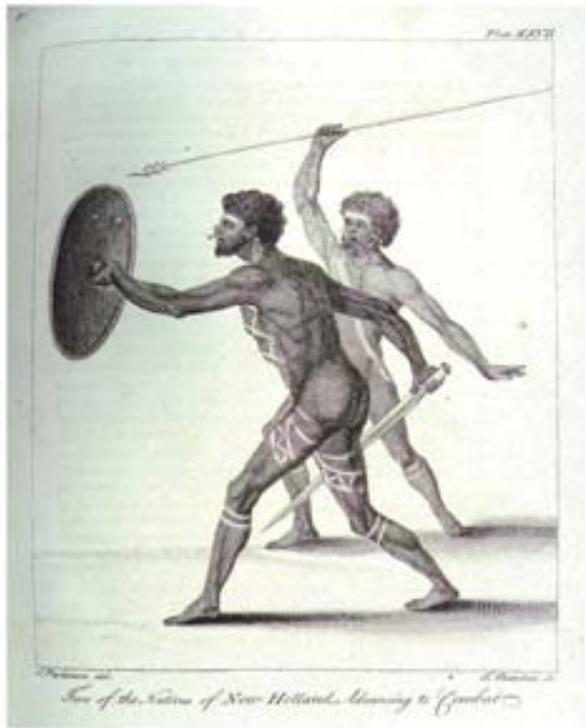
Figure 8: Above**: Sydney Parkinson,** *Two Australian Aborigines and other drawings*, **1770, pencil, 18.4 x 23.5cm.** Below**: T Chambers, Two of the Natives of New Holland Advancing to Combat, Sydney Parkinson (del.), engraving, 27.2 x 22.5 cm**

Within the posthumously published journal of Sydney Parkinson, *Account of the Country, Natives and Natural Produce of New Holland* Parkinson described the natives of Botany Bay as follows:

> We had seen a number of people … some of whom were painted white, having a streak round their thighs, two below their knees, one like a sash over their shoulders, which ran diagonally downwards, and another across their foreheads. Both men and

women are quite naked, very lean and raw-boned; their complexion
dark, their hair black and frizzled, their heads unadorned, and the
beards of the men bushy.'[86]

Figure 8 also conveys this information about facial and body markings and weapon
usage. The resemblance between the body markings on the chest of the figure on the
left and a crucified body have been described by Smith. Smith offers the explanation
that the actual chest markings observed were suggestive of this form, and in a process of
sympathetic identification the devout Parkinson exaggerated the form somewhat. [87] An
alternative interpretation is offered by D. J. Carr who suggests the form on the chest is
in fact a basket for collecting fish.[88] The significance of the differing interpretation is in
the example it provides of the range of widely divergent readings offered by such
simple drawings. The indeterminate nature of many field drawings necessitated a
process of European interpretation and translation in order to produce an image suitable
for publication. The transformation from the simple unpublished field drawing to the
Thomas Chambers engraving in the *Account*, shown in the lower image in Figure 8, is
remarkable and exemplifies the process of exoticism that occurred within these
foundations of incomplete knowledge and pre-existing understandings and conventions.

The claim that Chambers' engraving is based on Parkinson's field studies appears
fantastic until the entire context of its production is considered. Hair texture, facial
structure and body markings are derived from the sketch and the text of the *Account* but
additional coded visual information has informed the production of the engraving to
direct the audience's reading of the image. The most striking modification from the
field drawing is the depiction of well-defined musculature, at odds with Parkinson's
description of 'raw-boned' and adoption of theatrical combative body postures. The
similar classical combative position of the two idealised figures has precedents within
history painting and fine book publishing. The use of such classical allusions reflects
the attempt to interpret positively the Aboriginal hostility as commendable bravery and
nobility. This image is an example of a combination of the classicism which
incorporated historically established modes of interpretation of character designed to
enable the European viewer to 'understand' the native's actions and ethnographic
conventions focusing on adornment to represent difference. As Smith points out 'it is

[86] Sydney Parkinson, *Account of the Country, Natives, & Natural Produce of New Holland* ed. John
Currey (Malvern: Banks Society Publications, 2003), 16-17.
[87] Smith, *Imaging the Pacific: In the Wake of the Cook Voyages*, 92.
[88] D. J. Carr, ed., *Sydney Parkinson: Artist of Cook's Endeavour Voyage* (Canberra: Australian National
University Press, 1983), viii.

important to realize that the 'noble savage mode of presentation' was not a visual stereotype applied indiscriminately but a conscious aesthetic decision to give homage to a person.'[89]

While the primary intention of field studies completed aboard voyages was documentary, their translation onto engravings for publication added a commercial imperative to the function of the images. Once these images became commodities they were consciously embellished and edited in order to cater to taste or political imperatives. Within this process the often negligible degree of exoticism created by the formal properties of natural history illustration and the cultural and educational background of the individual artist was expanded and reflected diverse ideologies of the European audience. The imagery and intentions directing the production of the French scenic wallpaper *Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique* created by Joseph Dufour et Cie in 1804 provides an apt example of the multiple influences of ideologies, commodity, popular taste, and technology on the construction of the desirable exotic 'other' at the time of European settlement of Australia. This case study provides insight into the cultural imperatives that directed the unique evolution of this perception in Australia.

Exotic Transformations: *Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique*

The expansive visual impact of the mural wallpapers developed in France at the end of the eighteenth century differed from the subtle subliminal influence of repetitive patterned wallpaper routinely encountered in the domestic interior. Their development was contiguous with the widespread public interest in extravagant visual spectacles such as the hot air balloon, the panorama and magic shows.[90] These ambitious mural or scenic wallpapers which depicted a continuous scene with no repetition were produced for an affluent and influential market throughout Europe and America. Hung within the social domestic spaces of salons and dining rooms, their acquisition and display implied discernment and good taste. Entertainment, didacticism, and spectacle were combined within the perceptual experience offered.

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[89] Smith, *Imaging the Pacific: In the Wake of the Cook Voyages*, 85.
[90] Terry, 'A Pacific Panorama,' 27.

It is not surprising that this unique decorative form was developed in France. French technological advances in wallpaper and textile production and design enabled the manufacture of these papers which essentially are a manifestation of the social upheaval and challenges to intellectual thought initiated by the French Revolution. The Revolution initiated widespread confrontation to pre-existing hegemonies while fostering the establishment of social ideals such as the right to education. Scenic paper manufacturers sought to produce a product of excellent technical and aesthetic qualities that would rival any other form of wall adornment including painting.[91] Sales were promoted heavily on this point and the supposed didactic capabilities of the work. Not surprisingly their voluble challenge to established forms of wall adornment attracted criticism directed towards their existence as either decorative or fine art.[92] Despite the technical complexity and innovation in production, the material and formal qualities of the medium and historical precedents in the determination of what constitutes an art object, firmly prevented their acceptance as fine art. In addition, as with other forms of ornamentation, their characteristically mimetic imagery placed them squarely within the intense debate focusing on notions of appropriate decoration and design in the second half of the nineteenth century.[93]

Critical controversy and enormous production costs were countered by astute marketing and research in regard to current popular taste for imagery considered appropriate for the home. As a result the imagery depicted on these papers, of which there were over one hundred, manufactured between 1800 and 1865 reflected cultural preoccupations of the period. These focused on the re-enactment of famous literary works, military campaigns and voyages of discovery. The total image of each paper was designed in a modular format to allow it to accommodate a variety of architectural spaces. Presentation of these subjects was considered to contribute towards a family's cultural and moral education acting as an adjunct to the private library.[94] Certain caveats operated however and many of the traditional subjects of history painting — toil, death, religion and the sublime were considered improper for the home and were not included.[95] The imagery of most scenic papers was based on an assemblage of existing

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[91] Odile Nouvel-Kammerer, 'Reasons for Silence,' in *French Scenic Wallpaper 1795-1865*, ed. Odile Nouvel-Kammerer (Paris: Musee des Arts Decoratifs Flammarion, 1990), 30.
[92] Odile Nouveal-Kammerer, *French Scenic Wallpaper 1795-1865* (Paris: Flammarion, 1991), 16.
[93] E. A. Entwistle, *French Scenic Wallpapers 1800-1860* (Leigh-on-Sea: F. Lewis, Publishers Limited, 1972), 50.
[94] Odile Nouvel-Kammerer, 'Scenic Wallpaper, Social Mirror,' in *French Scenic Wallpaper 1795-1865*, ed. Odile Nouvel-Kammerer (Paris: Musee des Arts Decoratifs, 1991), 104.
[95] Ibid., 108.

engravings or occasionally small paintings. The formal linear qualities of engravings were readily transferable to wood-blocks for production of the scenic papers. Individual images were edited and transformed often creating flamboyant and exotic constructions in order to produce an entire image that was anticipated to satisfy popular taste in regards domestic decoration. This design process of compilation ensured that the known popularity of the previously published engravings offered a valuable predictor of the scenic paper's commercial success.
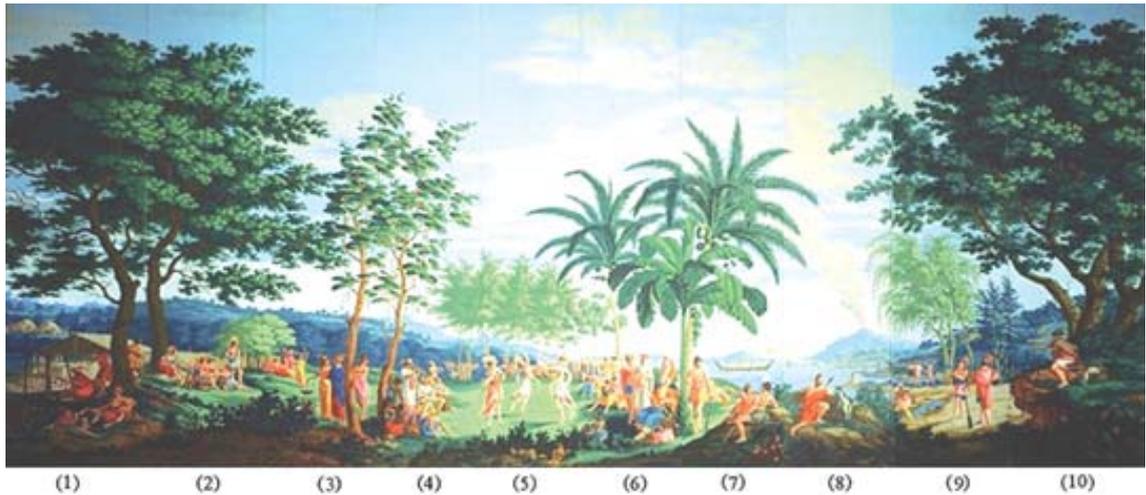
Figure 9: Jean-Gabriel Charvet, designer. Joseph Dufour et Cie, manufacturer, *Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique*, **Panels 1-10, 1804-1805, woodblock, printed in colour, from multiple blocks, hand-painted with gouache through stencils, each panel 250 x 54cm.**

Figure 10: Jean-Gabriel Charvet, designer. Joseph Dufour et Cie, manufacturer, *Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique*, **Panels 11-20, 1804-1805**

The strident visual impact of this work, typical of the French scenic papers is in complete contrast to the usual function of wallpaper to provide an unobtrusive background. *Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique* was manufactured by Joseph Dufour et

Cie 1804-05 after a design by Jean-Gabriel Charvet and is shown in Figures 9 and 10. It consists of twenty panels each 61 x 249 cm constructed from small rectangular hand-made sheets of paper. A light blue ground of water-based pigment was applied by brush to the entire surface on which the overlying image was printed using a combination of wood-blocks and stencilling. Each panel required up to sixty individual blocks to be carved in order to print the naturalistically coloured image.[96] The 20 drops of wallpaper were designed to be installed as a domestic panorama, with the viewer occupying a central viewing position. However in order to increase sales, the paper was designed to be visually coherent in a variable number of panels. This was enabled by the use of a use of a uniform horizon line and the incorporation of a variety of tree forms to break the composition into a series of smaller vignette-like scenes each describing a separate narrative. The illusion of depth in the image was created using the same techniques employed in painting, namely atmospheric perspective, diminution of scale, overlapping of forms as well as the construction of a series of vanishing points. Volume of forms was suggested by the separate printing of abutting blocks of tonally gradated colours, which created the impression of volume due to the large scale of the work. The scale and complexity of the entire work demanded a viewing distance similar to a large format painting rather than the engravings from which it was derived. However close inspection of scenic wallpaper is less rewarding than a similar scrutiny applied to either a painting or intricate engraving. This is due to the large scale of marks used in the woodblocks and the lack of surface complexity.

The heavily populated composition is not ordered geographically or chronologically but aesthetically. Dufour states that 'artistic licence has been taken, not only in the juxtaposition of different places and events, but in the gathering of peoples from different times and lands, such that only the most indulgent reason will forgive it in the interest of the success of the design.'[97] Similar to the natural history museum and the world fair the chaotic jumbled assemblage of factual information in this crowded composition contributes to the perception of the exotic. There already exists a substantial body of scholarship concerning this work which was the subject of a focus exhibition at the Art Gallery of New South Wales in 1999. The accompanying catalogue edited by Susan Hall contains a translation of Dufour's original catalogue by

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[96] Robert Futernick, 'Conservation of Scenic Wallpapers: 'Sauvages De La Mer Pacifique',' *Journal of the American Institute of Conservation* 20 (1981): 139.

[97] Joseph Dufour, 'Les Sauvages De La Mer Pacifique: Tableau Pour Decoration En Papier Peint,' in *Les Sauvages De La Mer Pacifique:Manufactured by Joseph Dufour Et Cie 1804-05 after a Design by Jean-Gabriel Charvet*, ed. Susan Hall (Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales, 1804), 32.

Peter Rudd, aspects of its provenance, the cultural context of the work and technical information regarding its production.[98] The work was also the subject of a Master of Philosophy sub-thesis by Timothy S. Ringsmuth in 2004 who primarily examined the work's status as a commodity.[99]

The vast cinematic image *Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique* reflects public interest surrounding the concepts of primitivism, neoclassicism and exoticism in the nineteenth century. The original promotional catalogue records Dufour's ambitious intentions:

> This decoration has been designed with the object of showing to the public the peoples encountered by the most recent explorers, and of using new comparisons to reveal the natural bonds of taste and enjoyment that exist between all men, whether they live in a state of civilisation or are at the outset of their natural intelligence.[100]

This sentence succinctly states the philosophical considerations that directed its construction and sought to direct the reading of the panorama. Subsequent to the Renaissance, European society had become increasingly interested in the differences between other races and their own. Julia Kristeva states that this 'modern taste and mentality' was shaped by a succession of popular 'geographic' texts that described encounters with distant 'others'. In this period a philosophical concept of the universality of humanity developed. This concept is exemplified by Kristeva in a quote by Marc Lescarbot who wrote in the *Historie de la Nouvelle-France* (1609)

> If only out of consideration for mankind, and because the people we are to discuss are men just like us, there is enough to prompt our desire to understand their ways of life and their mores.[101]

The construction of the 'noble savage' flourished during the eighteenth century. This construct that idealised a notion of a universal humanity uncorrupted by the influence of civilisation originated in Greco-Roman images of the Golden Age, and the positive accounts of contemporary tribal societies.[102] The fantasy of the Antipodes that had captivated European society was fulfilled in part by the experience of Polynesia. Europeans, delightfully shocked by the discovery of atheistic peoples in a state of nakedness inconceivable in their own society, idealised the goodness of the 'savage'.[103]

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[98] Susan Hall, ed., *Les Sauvages De La Mer Pacifique: Manufactured by Joseph Dufour Et Cie 1804-1805 after a Design by Jean-Gabriel Charvet* (Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales, 1999).
[99] Timothy S. Ringsmith, 'A Community of Taste' (Australian National University, 2004).
[100] Dufour, 'Les Sauvages De La Mer Pacifique: Tableau Pour Decoration En Papier Peint,' 32.
[101] Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, 124.
[102] Trilling, *Ornament: A Modern Perspective*, 145.
[103] Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, 124.

Within this neoclassical mode of humanism the notable cultural similarity that Dufour seeks to emphasise is that of the urge to please, evidenced by the female drive to adorn her body to please her male partner who is subject to a corresponding impetus to better himself; an 'instinctive' drive for which he is rewarded by his heart being 'elevated heavenward by the passion excited in him by a beautiful woman.'[104] Dufour states that this point is reinforced by the multitude of costumes that were witnessed by explorers. Consistent with the ethnographic convention for representation of other races at this time, attention is given to the visual and textual representation of aspects of dress and adornment on bodies; faces however lack individuality.

Additional evidence regarding the similarity of all humankind that Dufour offers is the fact that the various activities represented in the image are those that were considered as admirable by the European. Civilisation is alluded to with the presentation of a range of recognisable cultural pursuits; dancing, wrestling, playing music, discussion, sailing or eating by simply picking fruit from trees. The European viewer was able to readily empathise with the activities depicted and could assume shared pleasures and interests. Further empathetic identification is provided by the various poses of the figures that reference classical statuary. As I discussed in the previous section in relation to Chambers' engraving, the use of classical quotations lucidly directed how the Pacific people represented were to be interpreted. The only work shown being performed are a woman and girl hanging fish to dry on racks (panel I) and preparations for departure for battle (panels VIII and IX). Throughout the entire image the subjects are young and desirable. Interest is further piqued by the frequent inclusion of dignitaries from various locations. The impression is one of ease and leisure, in a distant land where abundant food is for the taking from the sea or the land and acts of heroism occasionally necessary. The image promotes the construction of the well-ordered, hedonistic Pacific location amenable and sympathetic to European contact. The construction, consistent with the notion of 'soft primitivism', is further reinforced by the catalogue text which describes the people, land and activities represented in each panel.[105] The text is dominated by descriptions of the dress and ornamentation of the various races together with a Eurocentric analysis of observed behaviour. Races are described as being 'strong and well-proportioned', 'brave and war-like' with 'women who are gentle, pretty and

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[104] Dufour, 'Les Sauvages De La Mer Pacifique: Tableau Pour Decoration En Papier Peint,' 32.
[105] The concept of the Noble Savage evolved as a critique of the effects of civilisation on humankind. Associated with it is the concept of Primitivism which assumed two distinct forms; soft and hard which fundamentally related to the ease of material existence of the people in their environment

tender and men who are merry and kind.' Textual references to less socially acceptable practices such as human sacrifice and cannibalism are also made perhaps to emphasis the 'primitive' state of these peoples. These events are not depicted on the wallpaper despite being illustrated in journals of this time. Dufour repeatedly refers the reader interested to expand their knowledge of these people to Jean-Francois La Harpe's 32 volume French text *The Abridged General History of the Voyages* published in 1780 as evidence for the authenticity of the presented visual information.

La Harpe's text was more readily available in France than the original British Journal accounts of the exploratory voyages of the Pacific. The engravings within La Harpe's work are clearly derived from those of the British accounts. However they are fewer in number, omitting images such as those of Australian Aboriginals. The individuals and their clothing depicted in *Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique* do not appear closely related to the imagery produced either by Parkinson, Hodges, Webber or that within the Journals of Cook, Parkinson, Hawkesworth or La Perouse. Rather it appears that Charvet appropriated and modified the images by Jacques Grasset de Saint-Sauveur (1757-1810) who produced the drawings and text for his publication *Encyclopédie des voyages* published in 1796 in Paris. Many of the images were further published in a composite image entitled, *Tableau des Decouvertes du Capn. Cook & de la Perouse,* shown in Figure 11.

Figure 11: Antoine Phelippeaux, (sculp.) *Tableau des decouvertes du Capne. Cook & de la Perouse*, c 1798, J. G. St Sauveur (del.), hand coloured engraving, 45.5 x 53.1cm.

The visual representations of the clothing of different races by Saint-Sauveur are not consistent with earlier published images or textual accounts. The images show a greater degree of exoticism as the clothing become more colourful and fantastic. In addition physical attributes assessed as too odd or shocking have been modified or omitted. An example of this editing process is shown in Figure 12 which compares the original image from La Perouse's journal with an image above by Saint-Sauveur. The lower lip mutilation (seen in the figure second on the left and the far right) which was depicted in several images in La Perouse's journal derived from this region is not recorded by Saint–Sauveur despite its distinctive nature. This omission of unsightly details occurs to a greater degree in *Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique* which omits features such as facial tattoos and distorted ear lobes though referred to in the text. This was qualified by Dufour who states that 'We have permitted ourselves to suppress the absurd parts of a picture which is only intended to offer pleasant objects to the eyes of the public.'[106]

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[106] Dufour, 'Les Sauvages De La Mer Pacifique: Tableau Pour Decoration En Papier Peint,' 38.

Figure 12: Above**: Antoine Phelippeaux,** *Tableau des decouvertes du Capne. Cook & de la Perouse*, **(detail) c 1798, J. G. St Sauveur (del.), hand coloured engraving, 45.5 x 53.1cm.** Below**: L. Aubert,** *Costume Des Habitans du Port Des Français, sur La Côte Du Nord-Ouest de L'Amérique* **(detail), Duché de Vancy (del.), engraving, 25.6 x 39.5cm.**

The didactic capabilities that Dufour claimed in reality reside in the conceptualisation and promotion of existent notions surrounding primitivism and the nature of the exotic Pacific person and place. It may be assumed due to the well researched nature of these works that Charvet and Dufour had knowledge of and access to images from the French journals of La Perouse and La Harpe at least. Both journals contain images of encounters and interactions with Europeans that are directed by indigenous people, but these are avoided in *Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique*. Likewise the uncomfortable images of the Easter Island monuments and the Chief Mourner's costume, which provide evidence of a sophisticated alternate theology, are not referred to despite their visual impact. The omission of any image from these journals that represented indigenous people in any other manner than that of a desirable noble savage is marked. There is only a slight visual reference to the semi-naked Tasmanian aboriginals in the middle ground of Panel XIX. Their inclusion is no doubt for the sake of completeness, however the negligible visual reference could be considered to be indicative of the difficulty in including these usually less adorned naked people into the overall thematic of the work. The construction presented is of an Arcadia in the Pacific, which speaks most clearly about how the European desired to conceive both the 'other' and themselves. Similar to the presentation of a vast volume of natural history subjects devoid of a contextualising background within illustrations of the period, the exotic in this paper is enhanced by a process of decontextualisation and recombination. The Dufour paper displays the froth and bubble of a contemporary soap opera; the driving force of popular taste dominating its content and formal structure in order to deliver the exotic 'other' at its most desirable. Nonetheless, the Dufour paper, manufactured in 1804 in the period of early European settlement of Australia, clearly reveals the contemporaneous desired outcomes of explorations. The disparity between this desirable early nineteenth century construction and the actual experience of the 'other' person and place in Australia is enormous.

Indeed, Australia presented a problematic concept of the exotic and the primitive. Rather than the delectable soft primitivism perceived in Polynesia, the Australian land and native displayed a form of 'hard primitivism' that was less than desirable and odd to the point of unclassifiable. The Polynesian races were considered the last survivors of a classical golden age living in a situation of material plenty. They demonstrated a clear hierarchical society structure, practiced agriculture, decorative arts and architecture and had systems of trade in place. In stark comparison the Australian aboriginal had

> no property, no money or any other visible medium of exchange;
> no surplus or means of storing it, hence not even the barest
> rudiment of the idea of capital; no outside trade, no farming, no
> domestic animals except half wild camp dingoes; no houses,
> clothes, pottery or metal; no division between labour and leisure,
> only a ceaseless grubbing and chasing for subsistence foods.[107]

In short, Robert Hughes states, there was nothing 'noble' about these savages who exemplified a distasteful manifestation of the European concept of hard primitivism. The doctrine of hard primitivism, namely that humanity is happiest when not burdened by art and science, surviving with the fewest possible needs and is satisfied with the simplest of lives is a far less attractive lifestyle than that conceived within soft primitivism. The desire to enjoy a lifestyle without toil in a land that was spontaneously productive with a gentle climate was thwarted by the realities of existence within Australia.[108]

Although Aboriginals were often attributed with admirable characteristics such as courage, 'manly behaviour' and competence and faith in their weapons, this was insufficient to render them or their lifestyle desirable to Europeans.[109] Although use of allegorical conventions within visual art was no longer practiced, settlers were strongly influenced by the conception that they had found themselves in a debased and deviant land. Settlers attempted to construct familiar interior and exterior environments, endeavouring to shape the Australian landscape into an aesthetic suited to the picturesque tastes of the period. The difficult and disappointing realities of sustained contact with the Australian continent and its people ensured that there was a dearth of exotic constructions created post-settlement to describe an exciting and desirable 'other'. In addition, no strong political imperatives operated initially to direct the production of constructions of the 'other'. This was due to the initial Indigenous tendency to retreat rather than actively confront settlers and the low Aboriginal population density declining further due to contact with European diseases. The deliberate disregard of settlers for the 'other' fostered the progressive physical and social marginalisation of the Aboriginal population and the aligned removal of indigenous plant and animal.[110] Like a poorly made bed, the notions that settlers

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[107] Hughes, *The Fatal Shore: A History of Transportation of Convicts to Australia, 1787-1868*, 14.
[108] 'The Dictionary of the History of Ideas: Studies of Selected Pivotal Ideas.' ed Philip P. Wiener. (Place Published: Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1973-74), http://etext.virginia.edu/cgi-local/DHI/dhi.cgi?id=dv3-72 (accessed 21/10/2007).
[109] Hughes, *The Fatal Shore: A History of Transportation of Convicts to Australia, 1787-1868*, 15.
[110] Adrian Franklin, *Animal Nation: The True Story of Animals and Australia* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press Ltd, 2006), 79.

formed regarding this country based on a rejection of its physical features and indigenous people came back to irk them, rendering them uncomfortable in their constructed 'home'. The cultural significance and role of ornamental imagery in constructing such notions of home through the identification of self and 'other' is explored in Chapters Two and Three.

Chapter Two: Dissecting the Anatomy of Ornament

Ornamentation as a cultural constant

This chapter explores the practice of ornamentation, the context of its production and its formal qualities that are aligned with contemporaneous philosophies and perceptions regarding humanity and the natural world. The implications that may be drawn from examination of this responsive, malleable visual language, universally practiced amongst cultures throughout history are particularly salient regarding cultural perceptions of nature and identity. Cultural values and perceptions were transformed in response to the colossal impact of modernity and the associated rise of industrialisation. The stylistic trends and discourse that surrounded ornamentation in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries reflected and informed many of the fundamental beliefs that underpinned the process of modernity. Within Australia, a struggling graft of the Western world, these same factors were superimposed on a unique formative social and natural environment. Indeed, ornamentation produced and consumed by Australian settlers may be considered indicative and informative of perceptions of self and nation. Such perceptions, developed within modernity's sway, were formed in alignment to constructions of home and the exotic 'other'.

The notion of Western cultural superiority that evolved with modernity was based on a relational process of self (national) definition in contrast to the 'other'. The contribution that natural history illustration made in developing and perpetuating public perceptions of the exotic 'other' was discussed in Chapter One. Among the dualistic oppositions that operated within the Manichean allegory, Western societies equated societal change with assumptions of cultural superiority and interpreted pre-modern societies as locked in the past and thus primitive and uncivilised. This narcissistic reasoning provided the justification for European nations to subdue and subjugate other cultures. Aspects of the predominating western teleological basis of history, progress, and artistic achievement were called into question in the early twentieth century by the German-born anthropologist Franz Boas (1858-1942). Boas contested established anthropological theories which had interpreted cultural differences on an assumption of broad evolutionary stages. Embedded western dogma considered the difference in cultural practices that existed between races as evidence of racial disparity. Boas

argued that cultural practices were only explicable when examined within their cultural context.[111] Boas' book, *Primitive Art,* examines the universality of the practice of producing work which gives aesthetic pleasure. The fact that the varieties of work produced were usually added to a primary form meant that such works were frequently ornamental in character. Within this context, Boas stated that the observed differences within such cultural practices were attributable to historical events not racial inequality as the mental processes involved and cultural forms produced by all races were fundamentally identical.[112]

Boas concluded that the universality of the practice of ornamentation was due to the fact that aesthetic pleasure is experienced by all humanity and is coexistent with a universal desire for artistic expression. The basis for such a deduction was his observation that all races, no matter the amount of time devoted to material survival, produce artefacts or processes designed to provide aesthetic pleasure. Cultures create objects of aesthetic value when sufficient technical expertise is acquired so that 'typical forms' can be produced. A relationship between technique, the expression of thoughts and emotions and a cultural concept of beauty may then develop. Artistic practices developed as the forms produced were able to convey meaning either by past or symbolic association, both form and content contributing to the artistic effect. The degree of development of ornamental art within cultures was determined by the variety of available materials and the numbers of industries practiced in the production of a particular society's material culture. In general the narrower the industrial range, the higher the degree of development of technical skill and associated artistic practice.[113] Boas noted that within the development of decorative patterns the features of symmetry and rhythmic repetition were common to all art forms and cultures.[114] The ubiquity of this occurrence suggests possible additional factors inherent to all humanity that influenced the creation of basic patterning. The most likely explanation of this universality of ornamental forms is offered in the linkage that has been suggested between the principles of aesthetic pleasure alluded to by Boas and the mode of operation of the visual perceptual system.[115]

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[111] Jerry D. Moore, *Visions of Culture: An Introduction to Anthropological Theories and Theorists* (Walnut Creek: AltaMira press, a division of Sage Publications, Inc, 1997), 42.
[112] Franz Boas, *Primitive Art* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc, 1955), 17.
[113] Ibid., 40.
[114] Ibid 40
[115] David Brett, *On Decoration* (Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 1992), 90.

For the majority of people the possession of the sense of sight is taken so much for granted that the process of visual perception of the physical world is not questioned. However this process is a result of the functioning of a complex biological system developed genetically and influenced by learnt experience throughout life. Visual perception of our environment is based on a process of pattern detection rather than the act of the eye recording images in a manner similar to a camera that are then transferred to the brain.[116] The ability to interpret patterns in order to make sense of the world is complicated as sensory data always possesses a degree of ambiguity, perception involving 'a kind of inference from sensory data to object reality.'[117] The human visual system actively searches for significant patterns, responding strongly to both vertical and two-fold symmetry.[118] John D. Barrow suggests the pleasure derived from the visual perception of patterns organised around a vertical axis of symmetry can be interpreted as a genetic trait which promoted species survival by allowing recognition of other organisms. Traits that have a high survival value such as the ability to recognise such symmetry, eating the correct foods or returning home, are reinforced by pleasurable sensation.[119]

Although the underlying human impulse to create and aesthetically appreciate ornamentation may be innate, the often painstaking technical production of ornamentation is not. Rather it is a cultural practice bound by set conventions initially established in an arbitrary manner. Such conventions, controlled by local tastes and traditions, favour the production of artefacts within the established formal bounds of practice and have the effect of reducing the possibility of either a rapid evolution or novel development of style.[120] The ability to create culturally specific forms is dependent on the development of appropriate skills and the propagation of the knowledge of such techniques usually to the exclusion of other methodologies. The development of distinctive forms of ornamentation in cultures aided the formation of cultural identity. Most significantly prior to industrialisation and increasing trade, only a narrow market or social need for such work existed which discouraged the production of forms which occurred outside of set conventions. These factors acted to constrain the

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[116] The use of the term pattern here refers to a 'set of inputs, in space or time at the receptor used to indicate and identify external objects giving rise to sensory data' R. L. Gregory, *The Intelligent Eye* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1970), 15..[116]
[117] Ibid., 30.
[118] John Ross, 'Perceptual Worlds,' in *Man and Landscape in Australia: Towards an Ecological Vision* ed. George Seddon and Mari Davis (Canberra: Australian UNESCO, 1976), 25.
[119] John D. Barrow, *The Artful Universe* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 105.
[120] Trilling, *Ornament: A Modern Perspective*, 29.

influence of idiosyncratic artists and workshops, discouraging experimentation with novel materials, techniques and imagery.

The Austrian art historian Alois Riegl (1858-1905) argued that the evolution of ornamental style was the result of modifications in a culture's corresponding artistic impulse or *Kunstwollen* (literally, will to form).[121] The artistic impulse of a specific culture directs the formal development of art and influences aesthetic valuations. Shifts in styles of ornamentation strongly reflected fluctuations in cultural priorities that were often associated with social change and manifest by alterations in taste. Modernity, industrialisation and imperial expansion were profound factors that shaped the cultural milieu and hence *Kunstwollen* of cultures. The geographic mobilisation of ornamental motifs, due in part to migration but primarily by the establishment of commercial trading of ornamentally embellished artefacts acutely influenced the evolution of ornamental forms. Although the process of appropriation of aspects of exotic 'other' visual cultures has occurred since Roman times the voyages of 'discovery' from the fifteenth century acted as a catalyst in this process.[122] Public appeal for exotic ornament was not based wholly on aesthetic criteria.[123] Acquiring cultures valued various novel forms produced elsewhere, as these forms would also convey the connotation of exciting, attractive 'otherness'.

The point was emphasised earlier in Chapter One that the empirical nature of natural history illustration and its cultural context of production enabled the presentation and representation of the distant person or place. This imagery was seminal in forming Western visual conceptions of the exotic 'other'. Illustrations were subsequently transformed into various forms for circulation which fuelled the exotic constructions further. *Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique* was the product of the convoluted transformation of original field studies and into a decorative object intended for consumption and provides an example of the process of exoticism. The more usual operation of exoticism in Western ornamentation however was the enthusiastic appropriation and assimilation of decorative imagery from 'elsewhere.' Similarly to natural history imagery which contributed to an encyclopaedic visual alphabet from which the exotic was imagined, ornamentation in its multitude of forms performed the

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[121] Ibid., 55.

[122] Michael Snodin and Maurice Howard, *Ornament: A Social History since 1450* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996), 181.

[123] John Irwin, 'Origins of the 'Oriental Style' in English Decorative Art,' *The Burlington Magazine* 97, no. 625 (April 1955) (1955): 109.

role of a conduit along which visual manifestations of the exotic entered the European imagination. Designers were receptive to the incorporation of aspects of foreign imagery as this enabled the extension of taste and the language of design. A rapidly escalating affluent middle class desired the fantastic exotic, intensifying the trade and production of exoticised ornamental imagery. Absorbed motifs suffered the loss of their cultural significance as well as altering decorative iconography of the appropriating culture. Many designers incorporated them however as they sought to revolutionise ornamental form and technique while advocating a rejection of industrial mass production of ornament.[124] The complex critical debate that developed surrounding ornamental imagery, due largely to the progression of modernity is examined later within this chapter.

It is pertinent to note that within the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries although Western painting and sculpture would represent the exotic subject it did not adopt any of the pictorial strategies used in exotic 'other' cultures.[125] This was not the case with ornamentation which continually incorporated aspects of form, technique and design.[126] The metamorphic formal nature of ornamentation responded readily to the novel visual forms within the material culture and practices of adornment of distant races. Ornamental design fostered the visual representation of exotica in a differing way to the narrative based fine arts. Illogical spatial and scale relations were able to be composed without interfering with the integrity of the work. Ornamental surfaces readily conveyed a multitudinous jumble of novel motifs that was consistent aesthetically with other exotic representations. The process of exoticisation that occurred within the production, trade and consumption of wide range of ornamented artefacts functioned in subtly differing manner compared to that within imperial natural history museums and the production of natural history illustrations. Aspects of the specificity of the mode of operation of ornamental signifiers of the exotic 'other' will be discussed with reference to the following case study.

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[124] John M. MacKenzie, *Orientalism: History, Theory and the Arts* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1995), 118.
[125] However in the last decades of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth centuries early Modernist artists used pictorial strategies derived from exotic sources to develop new paradigms for representation.
[126] MacKenzie, *Orientalism: History, Theory and the Arts*, 106.

Exotic Ornament: case study of Indian cottons of the Coromandel Coast

Indian textiles have been produced for trade for over two thousand years. Fragments dating from the sixth century AD have been discovered in China along the silk route and evidence exists of centuries of cultural and artistic exchange between Indian and Indonesian textile production.[127] A range of textiles were produced in India including strong cheap calicos, higher grade printed cottons, fine muslins and silks.[128] European trade in Indian cottons was established originally as a form of exchange within the lucrative spice trade that was established in the sixteenth century. Indian textiles were one of the primary bartering items involved in commodity exchange between Indonesia and European trading companies.[129] Western companies attempted to control the market and maintain supply of this 'currency' by establishing strategically located textile production and distribution centres primarily on the Coromandel Coast of north eastern India. The size, quality and fastness of the Indian chintzes (painted and dyed cotton fabrics) also attracted attention in Europe where the technical production of similar fabrics was relatively primitive. However the designs produced by the cotton painters of the Coromandel Coast were too unrelated to current taste and engendered only minimal commercial interest. In order to counter this, directives from the British East India Company were given to the cotton painters to modify their production to suit British tastes.[130] The British East India Company also manipulated and fostered the domestic market by strategically supplying gifts of chintzes to the members of the upper classes who informed popular taste and by ensuring supply of a range of goods to suit all economic niches of the market.[131]

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[127] Robyn Maxwell, *Sari to Sarong: Five Hundred Years of Indian and Indonesian Textile Exchange* (Canberra: National Gallery of Australia, 2003), 1.

[128] John Guy and Deborah Swallow, eds., *Arts of India: 1550-1900* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1990), 156.

[129] Maxwell, *Sari to Sarong: Five Hundred Years of Indian and Indonesian Textile Exchange*, 111.

[130] John Irwin and Katherine Brett, *The Origins of Chintz* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1970), 16.

[131] Audrey W. Douglas, 'Cotton Textiles in England: The East India Company's Attempt to Exploit Developments in Fashion,' *The Journal of British Studies* 8, no. 2 (May) (1969): 43.

Figure 13: Section of Indian Cotton bed-hanging, c. 1700-1725

Figure 13 depicts a section of Indian cotton bed-hanging or palampore, dated c. 1700-1725 within the Victoria and Albert collection, IS. 182-1965. The imagery on the bed-hanging is an example of the highly variable yet distinctive flowering tree motif which dominated Indian chintz designs created for export to Britain.[132] Figure 13 is typical of this design which is based on a serpentine tree form that often was represented with exposed roots, growing from a stylised mound of rocks or vegetation. A variety of unfurling leaves and fantastic fruit and flower motifs sprout from branches growing from the trunk. Apart from the trunk, the various elements of the design are not modelled tonally but filled with an array of patterned units. The overlapping composition of these units within the fruit, flowers and leaves suggest a shallow volume. The main flowering tree motif is surrounded by a frame or border based to a

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[132] Irwin and Brett, *The Origins of Chintz*, 16.

varying degree on the primary motif. The characteristic framing of the motif is a derivation of the influence of the framing devices used in Persian manuscripts, a relic of the fact that prior to the establishment of European trading the dominant market for large furnishing fabrics was that of Islamic Persia.[133]

The development of this hybrid design was a product of multiple cross-cultural influences operating under trading conditions during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The origins of the diverse and disparate formal elements range from Hindu, Islamic, Chinese and European ornamental traditions.[134] John Irwin examines the development of this hybrid design and provides evidence of directives from London importers to Indian craftsmen to modify their pre-existing designs in 1662. Sample patterns were dispatched to Indian craftsmen who were instructed to develop textiles with the 'printing of large branches for hangings'. Irwin argues that this directive was based on a precedent of the flowering tree form that existed in England from the late sixteenth century. However these directives were understood and implemented by the Indian craftsmen within previously absorbed Persian conventions for depicting sinuous tree trunks arising from rocky hillocks. Irwin postulates that this is the origin of what was labelled as the 'Tree of Life' palampore designs which as usually considered being purely of Oriental origin.[135] Further evidence of the influence of British ornamental conventions exist in the fact that the scroll-like leaves do not resemble Indian forms, but rather appear to be derived from the uncurling leaves of found in British tapestries of the period which were a development of Gothic influences.[136] Figure 14 is an example of the pre-existing Mughal conventions for depicting vegetative forms in this period. Plant motifs were typically of a single plant, centrally placed within a vertical rectangular framing device. In this case the overall design is basically naturalistic.[137] Irwin states that the concurrent Indian convention of naturalism is at odds with the abstracted patterning within the leaf and flower forms. The infill designs are in fact aligned to Elizabethan and Jacobean embroidery patterning.[138]

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[133] Ibid., 5.
[134] Ibid., 16.
[135] Irwin, 'Origins of the 'Oriental Style' in English Decorative Art,' 110.
[136] Ibid.
[137] Guy and Swallow, eds., *Arts of India: 1550-1900*, 88.
[138] Irwin, 'Origins of the 'Oriental Style' in English Decorative Art,' 110.

Figure 14: Mughal wall-hanging, c 1650-1700, Victoria and Albert Museum, IS 168-1950.

It is significant that the hybrid components exemplified in Figure 13 are not the result of directly copying the black and white pattern-books sent out to inform the Indian designers; rather they are interpretations of the resource imagery within the pre-existing conventions, Hindu and Mughal, which the cotton painters practiced. The imagery that had been sent out to direct the Indian craftsmen towards current conventions of English taste returned in manner that fed the current British appetite for the new and exciting ornamental exotic artefacts. A dual process of exoticism occurred — at the level of interpretation and production of the textile imagery, and also at its market reception. The Indian modifications imparted a distinction to the cotton imagery which ensured it acted as a carrier of a conception of the exoticised Indian. It is ironic however that the flowering tree palampore designs that developed seemed no less exotic to Indian eyes.[139]

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[139] Irwin and Brett, *The Origins of Chintz.*

Figure 15: Indian Cotton Bed-hanging, c.1760-70.

At the peak of the taste for Indian chintzes in the early eighteenth century consumers demanded change in pattern, colour and design nearly annually.[140] The ability of ornamental pictorial structures to readily incorporate novel forms ensured rapid transformation of exoticised presentations of the 'other' within the chintz designs. Prior to travelling becoming widespread in the nineteenth century few Europeans distinguished between the various oriental origins of exotic ornamental artefacts that were imported into Britain.[141] The unquestioned market acceptance of the amalgam of the motifs presented to be defining of the Indian 'other' provides evidence of how the 'other' was conceived of to be simply distant and different. The active guidance of the British East India Company on these designs is also discussed by Gill Saunders who points to the relationship between the flowering tree designs of Indian chintzes, Chinese

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[140] Maxwell, *Sari to Sarong: Five Hundred Years of Indian and Indonesian Textile Exchange*, 113.
[141] Irwin, 'Origins of the 'Oriental Style' in English Decorative Art,' 109.

wall-papers and English embroideries.[142]   Figure 15 is an example of an Indian chintz (c. 1750-60) whose design is based on Chinese wallpaper.[143]   The multiple cultural influences which are evident in this design include the European neo-classically derived border of garlanded floral elements tied in bows surrounding the central motif of the palampore.   The central panel in this case is comprised of two tortuous tree trunks. From the base of the tree a variety of plant forms are depicted and a pair of peasants struts.   There is a profuse scattering of a variety of leaf and floral elements suggestive of the peony rose, cherry blossom and pomegranate attached to the tree branches through which flit a myriad of birds.   The imagery recalls the fashionable Chinese wallpapers deliberately constructed for the British market.   Indeed, it is the influence of the highly popular Chinoiserie style, an exotic manifestation in its own right that dominates this particular sample.   Another overt example of multiple layers of exoticism is shown in Figure 16.   The central motif in this textile (also c. 1750-60), of Chinese woman in traditional dress adjusting her hairpiece, was derived from a Chinese painting or print of the period.[144]   Chinoiserie as the European interpretation of Chinese decorative iconography is re-presented a second time by Indian craftsmen for the British market.

The range of cultural influences informing the Indian chintzes produced between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries provide an excellent example of exoticisation driving the processes of fusion and metamorphosis of imagery within ornament. Removed from their original context these ornamented artefacts represented a non-specific aesthetic of difference measured against normative classicist aesthetic ideals. The structure of ornamental imagery allowed chaotic presentations of de-contextualised 'innocent signifiers' to be produced for consumption.   Such imagery engendered a representation of the 'other' completely empty of authentic cultural meaning.   Although ownership of exotic commodities implies mastery of the 'other' caution should be exercised against attributing purely imperialist motives for the aesthetic appeal of such imagery.   Certainly all 'innocent signifiers' are offered for consumption, however I would argue that a distinction exists between the markedly overt process of exoticism in the decorative arts as opposed to other more covert sites of its operation in culture.   This distinction is related to the marked hybridity of the ornamental exotic representations, their utter emptiness as signifiers and a higher level of agency exhibited by foreign

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[142] Gill Saunders, 'The China Trade: Oriental Painted Panels,' in *The Papered Wall: The History, Patterns and Techniques of Wallpaper*, ed. Lesley Hopkins (London: Thames and Hudson, 2005), 44.
[143] Rosemary Crill, *Chintz: Indian Textiles for the West* (London: V & A Publishing, 2008), 28.
[144] Ibid.

manufacturers, importers and consumers.[145]   Disparities of economic and political power are re-negotiated in trading relationships.   John M. MacKenzie points out that there is no chronological relationship between levels of artistic appropriation of the ornamental imagery of distant cultures and imperial rule.   Rather, exoticism in ornamentation should be viewed as a 'yearning for transcultural inspiration' within the operation of complex social and political factors.[146]

Figure 16: Indian Cotton Bed-hanging, c.1750-60.

The 'collective desire' of the consuming culture for the novelty implied by the 'other' displayed in ornamentation is complicated by issues of taste and social identity.[147] David L Porter's examination of the origins and cultural significance of the aesthetic

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[145] David L. Porter, 'Monstrous Beauty: Eighteenth-Century Fashion and the Aesthetics of Chinese Taste,' *Eighteenth -Century Studies* 35, no. 3 (2002): 401.
[146] MacKenzie, *Orientalism: History, Theory and the Arts*, 133.
[147] Porter, 'Monstrous Beauty: Eighteenth-Century Fashion and the Aesthetics of Chinese Taste,' 402.

mode of presentation of the ornamented 'other' in eighteenth century England makes the interesting linkage between social change, the moral debates associated with issues of taste and the exoticised 'other'. Porter states that the fantastic and bizarre 'other' presented in ornamental imagery provided one of the few coherent alternative aesthetic presentations to the dominate discourse of classicist ideals of 'universality, just proportion and the disinterested contemplation of form articulated by Shaftesbury, Hume, Reynolds and others.'[148] These aesthetic ideals as evidenced in the material culture of the eighteenth century were associated with judgements of morality and social position. The choice to consume and display exoticised artefacts may be argued to be a protest 'against the strictures of classical taste…and against the narrowly conceived forms of privileged and predominately masculine social identity associated with it.'[149] Porter considered that the fact that women of all social ranks were the main consumers of this imagery was a reflection of the ability of exotic ornamental imagery to provide an alternative to the hegemonic social strictures of taste.[150] The operation of ornamentation as social language is discussed further in this chapter. In Chapter Three the association between taste and concepts of morality, national identity and ornamentation are expanded.

Ornament: a visual language and signifier of prestige

The ubiquitous and often commonplace nature of ornamental imagery ensures that its influence on cultural values, perceptions and constructions is predominantly subliminal. Further examination of the social functions of ornament is worthwhile in order to consider its role in cultural definition. James Trilling's definition of ornamentation as 'decoration in which the visual pleasure of form significantly outweighs the communicative value of content,' indicates his conception that the primary function of

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[148] Ibid.: 397.
[149] Ibid.
[150] Ibid.: 408.

ornamentation across all cultures is to provide aesthetic pleasure.[151] The point is further emphasised in his statement that 'ornament can and does have representational, narrative and symbolic content, but visual pleasure must be paramount.'[152] Trilling's assertion concurs with Boas' observations regarding the universality of ornamentation and the human desire for aesthetic pleasure. However the fact that ornamentation has been the focus of heated debate during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries demonstrates that its creation and social usage have been linked in Western society with a broader range of cultural issues. Examination of additional functions and meanings attributed to ornamentation provides indications why this has occurred.

Ornament's provision of visual pleasure eloquently communicates prestige as evidenced by the widespread incorporation of ornament within many ritualistic social practices. Although ornamental forms may be derived from symbolic and iconographic vocabularies, ornament is most voluble as an implicit social language able to denote class and power.[153] Prior to the industrial revolution the cost of producing handcrafted ornament meant that the possession of ornate objects unequivocally implied wealth. The clear communication of holiness or high social status by luxurious ornamentation was disrupted by the production of more affordable machine-made ornament. The association of ornament with prestige is closely allied to its association with expressions of reverence for the sacred. In this context the cost and luxury of ornament are related to veneration and worship with the underlying assumption that any less significant display of luxury would be interpreted as 'unworthy to the deity or the worshipper.'[154] Aligned to ornament's social communicative function is its ability to embellish or 'complete' an artefact by its addition to a primary form. This practice is integral to the acquisition of social meaning for many objects. The significance of completion of an artefact extends beyond the provision of choice and variety of form both for the creator and consumer into the transformation of ordinary goods into luxurious, ritually significant or sacred objects.

These transformative properties of ornament are evidenced in a wide range of processes and embellished objects. Examples range from the body and rock painting of Australian Aboriginals, the creation of fetish objects of African and South American tribal people

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[151] The provision of visual pleasure as a mechanism of exoticism is shared with Western painting of the nineteenth century that sought to represent the Oriental 'other'. This relationship is explored in my exegesis.

[152] Trilling, *Ornament: A Modern Perspective*, 23.

[153] Ibid., 84.

[154] Ibid., 81.

to the embellishment of sacred buildings venerated by many faiths. In all such instances it was crucial that the ornament was 'real' and not artificial –gold must be gold and not just gliding. Processes that employ imitation materials or construct surfaces that resemble more costly materials are commonly considered fraudulent practices.[155] The degree to which the imitative capabilities of ornament have been considered as morally dubious has varied over time and between cultures however a commonly held distrust of ornament exists as indicated by the popular expressions such as 'all that glitters is not gold' and the metaphorical association that tinsel, stucco and gilding have with eye-catching deception.[156] Interpretations of ornamentation have vacillated between it being considered a vital embellishment to a mode of deception as a primary form is transformed or 'disguised.' Assessing ornament as extravagant or deceptive is associated with conceptions of lavish excess derived from aesthetic ideals of restraint linked to classicism.[157] This was evidenced in the Italian Renaissance and the development of Neo-classicism in the eighteenth century in response to the perceived excess of the Rococo. The rejection of 'excess' ornament as a symptom of the deterioration of Western society due to modernity was associated with a correspondingly higher evaluation of unadorned functional form. This judgment in conjunction with the disruption of ornament's ability to clearly communicate social status due to the production of cheaper machine-produced objects was responsible for initiating much of the discourse that developed concerning ornamentation at the close of the nineteenth century.[158]

The adoption of various positions within the discourse surrounding ornamentation at this time was influenced by the development of divergent beliefs related to philosophies concerning humanity's relationship to the natural world. These Enlightenment philosophies stemmed from the increasing influence of science, technology, European imperialism and commercial expansion. During the progressive establishment of modernity the philosophy of positivism dominated much Western thought expounding a conception of domination of nature by the human mind which influenced humanity's

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[155] This notion formed the basis for much of the criticism aimed at wallpapers that resembled other materials such as marble or wood panelling as well as imagery that would 'deny the two dimensional nature of the wall.

[156] E. H. Gombrich, *The Sense of Order: A Study in the Psychology of Decorative Art*, *Wrightsman Lectures* (Oxford: Phaidon Press, 1979), 17.

[157] Ibid., 18.

[158] The transformation of an artefact's monetary value, social function and social meaning are dependant on ornamentation. The very act of embellishment is associated with labour, cost and usefulness. Cultural criticism of the human cost in production of excessive ornament formed the basis of Adolf Loos' polemical essay Ornament and Crime which will be discussed later in the chapter.

interactions, perceptions and constructions of nature.[159]   These discourses influenced the corresponding evolution of ornament which, similarly with many other cultural practices, became a visible reflection and manifestation of current critical thought. As such a manifestation, it was influential in developing cultural perceptions of the natural world.

Wallpaper: a case study of the discourses associated with ornamentation

Wallpaper is one of the most ephemeral forms of ornamentation incorporated within the domestic environment. The use of wallpaper became popular in the second half of the eighteenth century, peaking in the late Victorian era and appeared in great quantity in Australia in the wake of technical advances in industrial production in Britain.[160] The popularity of wallpaper was associated with a growing commercialism which stimulated a vast eclecticism and proliferation of wallpaper styles by the mid-nineteenth century.[161] In comparison to textiles or furniture, replacing wallpaper regularly was relatively affordable and allowed households to display current fashionable designs. The desire to ornament the domestic interior reached such a degree by the middle of the nineteenth century that all but the poorest homes incorporated wallpapers.   Underlying this profusion of wallpaper imagery several strands of often passionate public debate developed concerning the social implications of taste.

The following four chronological case studies are presented to examine the influence of opposing philosophical positions within this debate of taste and wallpaper imagery which were influenced to a large degree by various conceptions regarding the natural world and humanity. Floral motifs have been frequently used throughout history and are found on the earliest surviving wallpaper samples from the mid-sixteenth century.[162] The stylistic changes that occurred in the use of this motif reflected shifts in priorities in their representation. The rise of naturalism that occurred in the late eighteenth century due to the expanding interest and knowledge of the natural sciences ensured that the use

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[159] J.J. Clarke, *Nature in Question: An Anthology of Ideas and Arguments* (London: Earthscan Publications Ltd 1993), 166.

[160] Jessie Searle, 'British-Australian Domestic Interiors,' in *The Australian Dwelling*, ed. Peter Freeman and Judy Vulker (Red Hill: The Royal Australian Institute of Architects 1991), 14.

[161] Gill Saunders, *Wallpaper in Interior Decoration* (London: V&A Publications, 2002).

[162] Francoise Teynac, Pierre Nolot, and Jean-Denis Vivien, *Wallpaper: A History*, trans. Conway Lloyd Morgan (London: Thames and Hudson, 1982), 127.

of floral motifs in the decorative arts and painting became widespread.[163] Popularity of floral motifs was further enhanced by contemporary philosophical linkages made between the perception of beauty in nature and art with morality. The significance of this linkage will be discussed in Chapter Three.

Figure 17: Unknown designer, wallpaper, 1849, block printed by Williams Woollams & Co.

The first study shown in Figure 17 was printed in 1849 by William Woollams and Co. This wallpaper is comprised of loosely grouped naturalistic bunches of cabbage roses, lilies, irises, buttercups and cornflowers curving sinuously along multiple vertical axes. The individual flowers are depicted in considerable detail enabling their identification. Colour is used naturalistically and incorporates the use of three or four tonal values on each petal and leaf to provide an illusion of three-dimensional form. Spatial depth is further enhanced by the overlapping of stems, leaves and flowers and the use of a light blue ground which appears to exist in a deeper position in space than the modelled flowers. The floral motifs posses a high degree of verisimilitude, the manner of their representation implies direct observation from nature. Although obvious patterning devices such as symmetry are not present the imagery exhibits a high level of selection and arrangement of the motifs within the delivery of a naturalistic formal style.

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[163] Ibid., 142.

The imagery of the William Woollams wallpaper is an example of the highly representational pictorial style of wallpaper popular in Britain throughout the nineteenth century derived from precedents established in French wallpapers for the three dimensional modelling of forms.[164] The development of representational imagery within ornamentation contested traditional modes of constructing imagery within the decorative arts. Historically ornament, bastion of the non-mimetic, possessed a degree of contrived formalism and artificiality compared to representations of the natural world made within traditional fine art practices of the period. The 'excessive naturalism' of the William Woollams wallpaper was considered a form of 'deceptive' wallpaper, offending notions of good taste propounded by those artists advocating design reform.[165] The argument offered most ardently against such naturalistic imagery exhibiting spatial depth was the inappropriateness of its use on a flat wall; a practice considered suggestive of artifice and by implication a corresponding lack of moral judgment. The long history of spatial illusionism in Western fine art renders this argument somewhat incongruous and suggestive of additional covert concerns. As discussed in regard to the production of French scenic wallpapers, in the nineteenth century the traditional hierarchies established between fine and decorative arts and the formal strategies deemed appropriate of each were challenged. This challenge was exacerbated by the associated erosion of the ability to determine class on the basis of external material distinctions due to the affordability of machine produced wallpapers.

Although the wider choice of wallpaper due to the technical advancements and eclecticism of wallpaper design was welcomed by middle class consumers, critics perceived a serious deterioration of the quality of wallpaper imagery. The decline in standards was attributed to both the poor education of British wallpaper designers and deficiencies in public taste.[166] A widespread critical appeal for design reform was headed by the British architect and designer Owen Jones (1809-1874) in the mid-nineteenth century. Consistent with many other theorists of this period, Jones believed that a scientific mode of investigating and interpreting the world held the key to progress and the advancement of society. He attempted to systematically collect, describe and classify the ornamentation practiced by European and non-European countries in *The Grammar of Ornament*, published in 1856. In this highly influential

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[164] Brett, *On Decoration*, 12.
[165] Trilling, *Ornament: A Modern Perspective*, 167.
[166] Lesley Hoskins, ed., *The Papered Wall: The History, Patterns and Techniques of Wallpaper* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2005), 145.

book Jones sought to invest his arguments with the character of science, his deductions offered as evidence for the 'laws of ornament.' He considered that decorative form was a defining characteristic of a civilisation and as such it was necessary to strive for progress in the field of ornamentation using a global resource of decorative imagery to develop new forms.[167] This form of decorative imperialism which removed patterning from its cultural origin succeeded in emptying motifs of their specific iconographic significance as well as disrupting the traditional iconography of the importing culture. The logical consequence of this was a loss of traditional symbolism as novel forms of decoration based on a synthesis of sources became devoid of traditional cultural values.

Figure 18: Owen Jones, wallpaper, 1865, manufactured by Jeffrey & Co

Figure 18 depicts a stylised floral pattern designed by Jones in 1865, manufactured by Jeffrey & Co. which exemplifies many of the concepts he propounded.[168] The flatness of the design is striking compared to the spatial depth of the pictorial imagery of the William Woollams wallpaper. The choice of a mid-tone tertiary red as the ground ensures that the motifs and ground are both situated at the same depth in the picture plane. The non-naturalistic white, beige and olive browns used to represent the petals and leaves, are modelled only marginally by the addition of gold which, due to its reflective qualities, disrupts the intended flatness. The stylised motifs employed are

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[167] Owen Jones, *The Grammar of Ornament* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1982).
[168] Hoskins, ed., *The Papered Wall: The History, Patterns and Techniques of Wallpaper*, 147.

obviously based on flowers and leaves and although evocative of the English Tudor rose they are not easily identified; rather they suggest aggregations of flat circular, triangular and diamond motifs. The stiff individual motifs of Jones' wallpaper imply not an aesthetic response to the natural world, but rather an attempt to deconstruct, analyse and order the natural world by mathematical principles – an impulse consistent with thought of this period.

Jones' rationale for the development of his imagery was founded in part on the theological principle that nature provides evidence of God's existence and glory. Jones stated that 'Man appears everywhere impressed with the beauties of nature which surround him, and seeks to imitate to the extent of his power the works of the Creator.'[169] Jones is describing the foundation for the choice of imagery that had existed in the Christian world for hundreds of years based on the doctrine that study of the natural world provided a revelation of God's omnipotence. This belief explains in part the widespread practice of selecting motifs derived from nature to form the basis of patterning, reflecting the premise that cultures derive patterns from units that hold iconographic significance for them.[170]

The debate regarding appropriate forms of decorative imagery headed by Jones illustrates aspects of the cultural manifestation of the mingling of Christian theology and a scientific interpretation of the natural world. Jones insisted on the necessity of an analytical reinterpretation of observed natural forms rather than a process of imitation. He bases his polemical position on not only the need to create decorative imagery to revere God's creation, but also importantly, to celebrate humankind's creativity. The philosophy of positivism influenced Owen Jones and his associates such as the Scottish designer Christopher Dresser (1834-1904). These philosophies informed their intentions to use the formal elements of line, colour, and form to create harmonious and symmetrical decorative imagery which would create aesthetic pleasure by engagement of the human mind, rather than symbolic, narrative or pictorial associations.[171] Dresser argued that order can only arise from human intelligence and thus 'the merit of an ornament is dependent on the extent to which mind is embodied in it.'[172] His philosophies also were derived from the ubiquitous notion that contemplation of natural

[169] Jones, *The Grammar of Ornament*, 13.
[170] Paula Wynell Bradley, 'Miriam Schapiro: The Feminist Transformation of an Avant-Garde Artist' (University of North Carolina, 1983).
[171] Brett, *On Decoration*, 36.
[172] Christopher Dresser, *The Art of Decorative Design* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc reprint of the 1862 edition published by Day and Son, London, 1977), 70.

forms encouraged the formation of elevated taste, evoked a sense of a life force and aided the development of ornament that was suitably adapted to the form of the artefact to be embellished.[173]   Dresser's writings exude a quasi-religious zeal for botanical forms, particularly the floral as the basis of decorative design.

> One great work of the ornamentist is that of refining his mind in order that he may be enabled to discover and fully appreciate those delicacies of form and line which are unperceived by the untutored and careless observer: to this end the formation of an intimacy with nature will be found most conducive, as it inevitably leads to the cultivation of taste; and the ministrations of plants to the production of the more exalted forms of ornament are in this particular manifest and salutary.[174]

The linkage of the process of design with 'laws of nature' originates in the concept of natural theology. Natural structures, in particular botanical morphology, provided an analogy for human decorative design. These concepts lead to the concept of 'art-botany' and strongly influenced the work of Dresser who published several books on the subject. The translation of his intellectually investigative illustrations into wallpaper design is shown in Figure 19.

Figure 19: Christopher Dresser, wallpaper, 1866

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[173] The influential association between beauty, nature, art, morality and taste will be discussed in Chapter Three.

[174] Dresser, *The Art of Decorative Design*, 116.

Similarly to Owen Jones' work in Figure 18, the most striking features of Dresser's wallpaper design is its lack of spatial depth and strong symmetry exhibited within the motif and the repetition of the patterning. In this example Dresser incorporates heightened naturalistic colour to represent a stylised floral motif, suggestive of the scotch thistle, arranged about a vertical axis. The motif is printed in simple solid blocks of colour giving no suggestion of three-dimensional form. The rigid symmetry is further enforced by the enclosure of each motif in a repeated yellow diaper pattern. The slightly more representational nature of the motif in Dresser's work may reflect his strong interest in 'art-botany.' Dresser wrote:

> We are not to draw particular plants as they really exist—blown about and deformed, but as we know them to be…what (Nature's) productions would be were they unmodified by external influences…these representations should not be of objects in their mutilated or deformed state but of the given plant in a perfect state.[175]

Dresser was concerned not with the observation and reinterpretation of the natural world as it was experienced, but rather an intellectual idealisation of nature. He considered that knowledge of the 'rules and laws' of nature should be the basis of the creative development of ornament by the mind. The fixed botanical laws governing plant morphology provided not only a resource for imagery but a metaphor for the construction of ornament. His studies of plant morphology aimed at establishing 'laws that govern the development of form…and an increasing concern with the process by which form is achieved.'[176]

> The designer's mind must be like the vital force of the plant, ever developing itself into the forms of beauty, yet while thus free to produce, still in all cases governed by unalterable laws; and in the action of the mind being controlled by rules we rejoice, and not mourn – for he is obedient to the great parent laws of nature is the freest man.[177]

Both Dresser and Jones were exponents of modernity, actively seeking progress, Dresser particularly welcomed the implications of the machine for humanity.[178] A critical counterpoint against many aspects of this position was presented by the British writer and draughtsman John Ruskin (1819-1900) who promoted within the practice of

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[175] David Brett, 'Design Reform and the Laws of Nature,' *The Massachusetts Institute of Technology Design Issues* 11, no. 3 (1995): 40.
[176] Ibid.: 44.
[177] Dresser, *The Art of Decorative Design*, 189.
[178] Widar Halen, *Christopher Dresser* (Oxford: Phaidon - Christies Limited, 1990), 9.

drawing and design the natural experience of form unmediated by cultural conventions or scientific understanding.

Figure 20: William Morris, *Rose,* **wallpaper, c 1880s, unknown manufacturer**

As discussed earlier industrial technology allowed ornamentation to be widely available for the first time. But the shift from hand produced decoration to that of the machine had intolerable conceptual associations for many critics. Ruskin proclaimed that mass-produced ornament lacked authenticity due to its removal from human agency and the associated imperfections of production.[179] The use of mechanised processes to create ornament fuelled the association of ornament with artifice. The gravity of such an association may be contemporarily understood if it is considered that artifice in this period was believed to represent 'human creativity added to nature or substituted for nature.' In the nineteenth century when Protestant ideals occupied a more dominate

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[179] Trilling, *Ornament: A Modern Perspective*, 124.

position in the formation of life values, 'to reject nature in favour of artifice is to lose touch with God as he manifests himself in the physical world; at worst, it is to set oneself above God as a creator.'[180] This statement illustrates the irreconcilable position of positivism to that of fundamental Protestantism. Ruskin considered that artifice in ornament was deleterious for both religious and secular reasons. British designer William Morris (1834-1896) was influenced strongly by Ruskin's theories and both men contested the rapidly rising materialism and instead advocated a reappraisal of nature, insisting that nature rather than human innovations form the basis of ornamentation. In their view nature was not an object to be investigated and exploited merely for economic purposes 'but rather a home which accommodated and enhanced our most spiritual aspirations'.[181] Morris's work as a designer stressed the traditional and craft aspect within the work as well as the natural derivation of the elements used within his patterns.[182] Figure 20, is an example of a wallpaper design by Morris.

Morris's design is a more complex image than either Jones' or Dresser's. The recognisable form of a climbing rose spreads vertically and horizontally across the picture plane, resembling the growth pattern of an actual rose. The individual flowers and leaves although detailed are somewhat simplified and idealised. Within each form, colour is used in two tones to allow a degree of modelling. The harmonious colours chosen are close to naturalistic hues but are significantly subdued compared to the colour of a rose and its foliage in nature. Similar to the William Woollams wallpaper there is an avoidance of obvious symmetry and the motif is of such complexity that the repeat patterning is hard to discern. Spatial depth within Morris' wallpaper is shallow and is constructed by two overlapping layers of patterning. The background to the prominent climbing rose is a darker toned blue-grey and black pattern of arcing leaf fronds. The smaller dimension of the individual motifs and cooler colours employed ensures that this layer of patterning lies in a slightly deeper but flat spatial plane.

The image *Rose* is typical of the patterns developed by Morris who developed his decorative imagery from recognisable plants, birds and animals of British origin. The forms of Morris' subjects are altered minimally to fit the geometric structure of the pattern. In opposition to the attempt by Jones and Dresser to create an intellectually based aesthetic appreciation of form, Morris considered that aesthetic pleasure derived

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[180] Ibid., 150.
[181] Clarke, *Nature in Question: An Anthology of Ideas and Arguments*, 131.
[182] Brett, *On Decoration*, 38.

from the decorative arts occurs when the forms incorporated are based firmly on nature and thus able to act as metaphors (metonymic links) for the natural world. Morris' personal philosophies regarding humanity's relationship with the natural world were disseminated through a profusion of written texts and public lectures. The publication *Hopes and Fears for Art* was based on a series five lectures delivered in the late 1870s. Within the first lecture entitled 'The Lesser Arts*,'* Morris passionately advocates the value of the decorative arts. He declares that decoration:

> has, or ought to have, a use and meaning. For, and this is the root of the whole matter, everything made by man's hand has a form, which must be either beautiful or ugly; beautiful if it is in accord with Nature, and helps her; ugly if it is discordant with Nature, and thwarts her; it can not be indifferent: we, for our parts, are busy or sluggish, eager or unhappy, and our eyes are apt to get dulled to this eventfulness of form in those things which we are always looking at. Now it is one of the chief uses of decoration, the chief part of its alliance with nature, that it has to sharpen our dulled senses in this matter; for this end are those wonders of intricate patterns interwoven, those strange forms invented, which men have so long delighted in: forms and intricacies that do not necessarily imitate nature, but in which the hand of the craftsman is guided to work in the way that she does, till the web, the cup, or the knife, look as natural, nay as lovely, as the green field, the river bank, or the mountain flint.[183]

Morris considered that the practice of decoration that was 'in accordance with Nature' allowed the viewer on contemplation of its form to forge mystical bonds of appreciation of Nature through the revelation of natural forms and the purity of human nature as expressed through the decorative object. Thus Nature could be embodied within the decorated object itself.

Fundamentally the two major opposing factions in this debate both argued for Nature to be the foundation for the development of decorative imagery. However it was the irreconcilable position regarding the relations between humankind, the natural world, mechanisation and the divine and how such notions should be embodied within ornament that ensured the separation of ideals. It is significant though that both positions sought a disruption to established decorative imagery thus causing re-evaluation of historical and nationalistic traditions.[184] The work and philosophies of each of the design reformers discussed evolved during their working lives. Although the Arts and Crafts movement associated positive aspects of pre-industrial culture with

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[183] William Morris, *Hopes & Fears for Art. Five Lectures by William Morris*, 7th Edition reprinted 1921 ed. (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1921), 3-4.
[184] Brett, *On Decoration*, 25.

hand-crafted ornament, ornamentation in the early twentieth century became increasingly associated with the notion that its practice was symptomatic of a cultural inability to adapt to modernity and as such should be abandoned.[185]   Dresser progressively advocated for greater stylisation and abstraction of motifs eventually arguing that ornament should be subservient to form. This argument resulted in the motif becoming absorbed into the form of the object. It was these sentiments that contributed to the wide critical reassessment of the nature and role of ornamentation in the early twentieth century.

A clear articulation for the abolition of ornament and its replacement with an appreciation of pure form was made by Adolf Loos in 1908. Loos, an Austrian architect was a highly influential moralist and cultural reformer and is credited with influencing the nature of Modernist architecture and design.   Loos' main arguments that ornamentation was now a cultural anachronism due to its severance with authentic cultural meaning within its design, coupled with its lack of economic viability, resonated with critical contemporary thought. Loos stated that the 'evolution of culture is synonymous with the removal of ornamentation from objects of every day use.' He argued that the revival of ornament had interfered with society's aesthetic development and as the production of unnecessary ornament was a waste of human labour, money and time and in this context it should be considered a crime.[186] Loos' evaluation of the work of the craftsman is in direct contrast to the theories of Ruskin and Morris regarding the dignity and value of the craftsman. Both arguments called for developing simplicity of taste; however the solutions offered of how to achieve this clashed. Loos considered that not only did the consumer of ornamented goods waste money but the craftsman produced work for which he did not receive sufficient payment. He also considered that the addition of ornament to form contributed to an increase in consumption due to shifts in taste and fashion. His dogmatic and autocratic approach declared that ornament should no longer be produced by contemporary culture. These notions together with an increasing cultural appreciation of efficiency and simplicity, due to the industrialisation of Western material culture, enabled the doctrine of modernist design to develop – that efficient function possesses aesthetic value.

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[185] Trilling, *Ornament: A Modern Perspective*, 117.
[186] Adolf Loos, *Ornament and Crime Selected Essays*, trans. Michael Mitchell (Riverside California: Ariadne Press, 1998), 167.

Within the reforms to design that Loos advocated he maintained an awareness of the human need for visual stimulation and replaced machine or handcrafted decoration with natural materials to provide visual interest. In this case the use of naturally occurring textures, surfaces and patterning of various materials provided a form of modernist ornament which dominated Western decorative art in the twentieth century. The modernist paradigm of pure undecorated surfaces that produced pleasure by contemplation of medium and form was established. Such modernist ornament exists without images, pattern, motif or history and in fact hides its existence as ornamentation at all.[187]

Underlying these discourses, decorative practices existed and continued past the attempted abolition of ornamental imagery. Decorative wallpapers, patterned textiles and ceramic goods were consistently designed, manufactured and purchased for domestic use. Individual consumers continued to make purchasing decisions based on their locality, economic prosperity, education and personal background – factors which informed the cultural taste exhibited by these groups. The formation and influence of cultural taste in Australia from the mid nineteenth to early twentieth century will be examined in the next section.

Taste and social identity

The confounding of ornament's ability to communicate economic and cultural wealth by the disruption of established external markers of class distinction was alluded to earlier. Much of the complex debate concerning the practice of ornamentation, which gathered momentum with expanding industrialisation, was a result of subtle shifts in the perceived relationship of humanity to the natural world and its resources. Britain was the origin of much of this debate which attempted to dictate the use of ornament in Western societies. However the various forms of imagery used in the commercial production of decorative artefacts were determined primarily by the tastes of the rapidly expanding middle class. It was such tastes that design reformers sought to enlighten in order to implement their theories. Additional factors, many locally specific, operated in

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[187] Trilling, *Ornament: A Modern Perspective*, 136.

conjunction or in opposition to the innovations of design reform. This section examines the complexity of factors influencing taste and notions of identity and hence production and consumption of decorative imagery in Australia.

Concurrent with the discourses that arose regarding what constituted appropriate decorative imagery in this period was strident public debate surrounding the notion of good taste. The subjective concept of taste is the ability to perceive what is considered both fitting and aesthetically pleasing (beautiful) in a particular context. The ability to discern the cultural value of the items available for choice is implicit in the concept of taste which ultimately directs choice in consumption of items of material culture. Taste implies more than astute expenditure as its exercise provides an external means of distinguishing between social classes. The French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002) suggested that individuals adopt tastes that allow them to make choices consistent of their class. Thus taste functions as

> a sort of social orientation, a 'sense of one's place,' guiding the occupants of a given place in social space towards the social positions adjusted to their properties, and towards practices or goods which befit the occupants of that position. It implies a practical anticipation of what the social meaning and value of the chosen practice or thing will probably be, given the distribution in social space and the practical knowledge the other agents have of the correspondence between goods and groups.[188]

Thus taste is not innate but an acquired cultural competence or social knowledge that is informed by an individual's upbringing and educational opportunities. Taste acts as a mechanism that preserves interests by enhancing social distinctions – the arbitrary relational differences evident between classes. The striving for distinction, being a fundamental trait of social life, may be equated with the desire for increased power, necessary in the competitive struggle for scant or prized resources within any particular social context or field.[189]

The formative educational and social environment in which individuals develop the cultural competence of taste is elaborated by Bourdieu within the concept he describes as 'habitus.' This is a dynamic system of acquired dispositions and values which are the product of social conditions, experiences and education. Although the habitus allows individuals to respond to cultural rules and contexts in a variety of ways any response is

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[188] Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd, 1984), 466-67.
[189] David Swartz, *Culture and Power: The Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), 6.

always determined by their cultural situation.[190] A habitus tends to be self-perpetuating, altering only marginally with time. Such acquired values and dispositions are long-lasting and tend to perpetuate or reproduce themselves.[191] The cultural mechanism of taste results from the interaction between the social position of individuals (the amount of capital possessed) and habitus (personal history forming disposition).[192] Bourdieu's concepts of taste and habitus underlie my examination of the development of taste within Australia where cultural and historical factors created a unique habitus that informed taste and consumption and thus the development of domestic decorative artistic practice.

The Australian habitus

Of the various aspects of Australia's natural and cultural history integral to an Australian habitus, the British identity of the majority of early European colonisers was one of the predominant influences on taste until the mid twentieth century. The British Empire at the end of the eighteenth century generated a high degree of national pride and a corresponding sense of British cultural supremacy due to its imperial conquests and profound economic wealth.[193] The colonisation of Australia by the culturally assured Britons ensured the establishment of a society whose cultural values and aspirations were fundamentally those of Britain modified by the peculiarities of living in Australia.

Confronted by indigenous people who did not conform to a previously encountered or imagined desirable exotic constructions provoked the assumption by early settlers that the Australian continent was without a cultural identity. This ensured an unimpeded immediate transplantation of British cultural tastes and values. The perception of British cultural supremacy by both convict and settler despite social disparity was instrumental in engendering cultural standards of taste and the establishment of Australia's social structures on a British model. The English-speaking colony of Australia was subject to the British monarchy and observed the same social customs and laws that Britons obeyed. It is significant that not only did Australia's economic capital

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[190] Tony Schirato and Jen Webb, *Reading the Visual* (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2004), 17.
[191] Pierre Bourdieu, 'Habitus,' in *Habitus: A Sense of Place*, ed. Jean Hillier and Emma Rooksby (Hants: Ashgate, 2005), 45.
[192] Ibid., 47.
[193] Linda Colley, 'The English Rococo: Historical Background,' in *Rococo: Art and Design in Hogarth's England*, ed. Michael Snodin (London: Trefoil Bools/Victoria & Albert Museum, 1984), 17.

originate in Britain but so did Australia's cultural capital.[194] British economic wealth and perceived cultural superiority ensured that the display of ornamentation with its implicit associations to wealth and prestige was considered to be 'natural, necessary, civilised, enjoyable and positively elevating surmising that as even the most primitive societies exhibit a desire to ornament themselves, that their great society would therefore exhibit a feast of ornament to revel in.'[195] This historical foundation of Australian tastes was a dominant influence until the early twentieth century when shifting migration patterns and an increasing desire to become part of an international community shifted the emphasis of tastemakers away from a British standard.

Additional factors particular to the Australian cultural and natural environment modified the transplanted social structures and values and influenced the development of cultural taste. The foundation of a colony based on the progressive displacement of its indigenous people has had unsettling reverberations on the ability of contemporary Australians to form or feel attachments to land and nation. Of greater initial significance was Australia's status as penal colony and opportunistic settler society. Within the denigrated convict settlement social anxieties and aspirations flourished owing to the intense competition for scarce material and cultural resources and the loss of historically established British social hierarchies due to opportunities for class mobility by wealth accumulation. For the first fifty years of Australian colonisation convicts, ex-convicts and their families outnumbered free-settlers and officials until the discovery of gold in 1851. Settlers strived to remove themselves and families from the 'convict stain' by adopting strict codes of appearance to establish respectability.[196] The biological determinism of the late nineteenth century with its associated notions of purity of race and stock meant that acknowledgement of the convict heritage of Australia was actively avoided. Instead settlers persistently argued their respectability based on their 'Britishness'. Advancement of Australian society was measured by its adoption of British standards of taste in fields such as decorative design. These anxieties about the social worth of both an Australian identity and living in Australia formed the foundation for the 'Cultural cringe' which variably but persistently

[194] Geoffrey Blainey, *The Tyranny of Distance: How Distance Shaped Australian History*, Revised 1983 ed. (Sydney: Pan Macmillan Australia, 1983).

[195] Suzanne Forge, *Victorian Splendour: Australian Interior Decoration 1837-1901* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1981), 11.

[196] Eleanor Hodges, 'The Bushman Legend,' in *Intruders in the Bush: The Australian Quest for Identity*, ed. John Carroll (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1982), 4.

influenced notions of national identity.[197] This active disavowal of cultural identity was compounded by the low 'evolutionary value' commonly ascribed to the Australian natural environment and its indigenous peoples. The implication of this disavowal of the worth of an Australian heritage was that many tastemakers sought to construct identity based on imagery from abroad.

From a foundation of British values fluctuations in taste for exoticised imagery of the Australian natural environment occurred during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The appearance of the ornamental exotic 'other' corresponded to a cultural shift from disavowal to if not desire, at least interest in the peculiarities of a natural environment perceived as distant and different. A striking example of this inter-relationship occurred subsequent to the discovery of gold in 1851. The associated accumulation of social and individual wealth initiated a widespread desire to celebrate a sense of place. The reappraisal of the natural environment was evidenced in the design of colonial metalwork presentation objects (jewellery, epergnes, inkstands, trophies) that were created as testimonials of achievement and status in the late nineteenth century. These objects were awarded a high cultural status, evidenced by the fact that they were frequently included in colonial and international exhibitions where they were widely acclaimed.[198] The cessation of the production of these elaborate works can be correlated to the exhaustion of many goldmines and the Depression of the 1890s.

The silver inkstand produced by J. M. Wendt shown in Figure 21 is an example of these decorative works which were created within British and European design precedents and incorporated motifs based on Australia's indigenous people, flora and fauna. It presents a small diorama celebrating the bounty of an exotic natural environment and features a solitary bearded aboriginal man wearing a loin cloth holding a boomerang and club. His right arm is raised in what could be considered a gesture of triumph or celebration and his left foot is placed firmly on the body of a kangaroo. The figure is an integral part of the environment he is presented in, standing on a flat silver base of repousse grasses, ferns and wildflowers adjacent to a large tree trunk. Two emus are situated on the other side of the trunk. The tree is constructed from a horizontally mounted emu egg perforated on one side to reveal an inserted silver tableau of a running emu and hopping kangaroo within a tiny landscape. A silver finial of a cockatoo with

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[197] Hughes, *The Fatal Shore: A History of Transportation of Convicts to Australia, 1787-1868*, xii.
[198] Eva Czernis-Ryl, 'Australian Gold and Silver, 1851-1900,' in *Australian Gold and Silver, 1851-1900*, ed. Eva Czernis-Ryl (Sydney: Pwerehouse Publishing, 1995), 33.

outstretched wings, seemingly observing the scene, is attached. Emu eggs were popular inclusions within such pieces and acted as a metonymic 'souvenir from nature ... as proof to the existence of the other exotic people, animals and plants depicted in small-scale silver representations in the design.'[199]

Figure 21: J.M. Wendt, Silver and emu egg presentation inkstand with hunting scenes, c.1875, height 27cm.

Such pieces were commissioned, manufactured and displayed in urban areas distant to contemporaneous often violent land disputes with Aboriginal people. The notion of the noble savage popular at the time of initial colonisation had been replaced with the concept of social Darwinism which considered that the aboriginal race were in decline and soon would be extinguished within the struggle of survival of the fittest.[200] Such decorative pieces provide evidence of the perception that Aborigines were synonymous of the exotic natural environment. These mythic representations did not appear incongruous to urban settlers but rather evoked a sense of national pride and identity.

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[199] Paul Donnelly, 'Tarnished Silver,' in *Australian Gold and Silver 1851-1900*, ed. Eva Czernis-Ryl (Sydney: Powerhouse Publishing, 1995), 57.
[200] Ibid., 64.

For the majority of settlers such values were unconsciously absorbed and rarely questioned, the Australian habitus operated subconsciously – below the level of 'introspective scrutiny or control of the will.'[201] However the purposeful manipulation and establishment of cultural processes designed to engineer a national identity in Australia (discussed in Chapter Three) often initiated passionate debate regarding the decorative use of Aboriginal people, their cultural artefacts or native flora and fauna. Contested valuations of the Australian natural environment and a mercurial process of exoticisation contributed to the nature of this debate. The role and form of domestic ornamental imagery was the focus of much of this discourse that is examined subsequently.

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[201] Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, 466.

Chapter Three:

Domestic Decorative imagery: taste, nature and identity

Aesthetics, morality and taste: wallpapering a world

The social significance and function of taste was further inflated by the philosophical linkage made between beauty and moral goodness in the nineteenth century. The foundation of the association between aesthetics, morality and taste was made by the German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804). In the *Critique of Judgment* Kant analysed the nature and implications of beauty and its perception. He argued that beauty as experienced in art and nature is a symbolic or intuitive presentation of the rational idea of morality; taste acted as an evaluative faculty for to the establishment of morality. The implication that an interest in natural beauty was indicative of a good soul and the imperative that an active interest in the beautiful with the implicit obligation to cultivate taste was extremely influential on the practice of tastemakers and their audiences at this time.[202]

The implication of taste being evidence of one's moral nature as well as social identity ensured that the topic of interior decoration in the Victorian era in Britain and socially anxious Australia was treated with a gravity that is unimaginable today.[203] As the responsibility for home decoration shifted from a male to female preserve in the nineteenth century the philosophical linkage between beauty and morality became focused on feminine identity. Women were considered to be the moral custodians of the family through tasteful decoration.[204] Manufacturers marketed their products with a variety of strategies to tempt women to buy their products. Choice of wallpaper became a focus of attention as manufacturers competed with the tastemakers and design reformers for the attention of the female consumer.[205]

In an 1844 edition of *The Builder* an article published by Arthur Cowtan, the proprietor of a London decorating firm, exemplified the nature of the discourse.

> It is by this very means of ill-judgment in furnishing apartments
> that the true taste of the person is unthinkingly betrayed; those little

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[202] Anne Margaret Baxley, 'The Practical Significance of Taste in Kant's *Critique of Judgment*: Love of Natural Beauty as a Mark of Moral Character ' *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 63, no. 1 (2005): 33.

[203] Forge, *Victorian Splendour: Australian Interior Decoration 1837-1901*, 8.

[204] Jan Jennings, 'Controlling Passion: The Turn-of -the -Century Wallpaper Dilemma,' *Winterthur Portfolio* 31, no. 4 (1996): 234.

[205] Ibid.

and seemingly distant things offer the clue which leads to discovering the whole mind, and undoes perhaps all that character of being a true judge of the polite arts which they are so fond of establishing. It seems impossible that any mind truly formed can, without distaste, be capable of letting such objects in on it through the eye; where the internal senses are well-proportioned and just, these monstrous objects of the eternal must be displeasing and offensive.[206]

The displeasing objects that Cowtan referred to were 'vulgar and gaudy patterns frequently selected instead of tasteful and harmonious designs'. The authoritarian stature of an 'expert' like Cowtan, who delivered this address before the British Decorative Art Society and which was then further disseminated via this journal, outlines what must have been a source of concern for many socially aspiring nineteenth century families.

Acceptance of such dire implications of poor taste developed further gravity as physical and emotional well-being became associated with the medium of wallpaper and its imagery in the second half of the nineteenth century. In Australia the repapering of walls on previously applied layers was referred to as a 'most insanitary [sic] and pernicious habit' the buried paper hangings capable of harbouring 'germs of consumption, diphtheria, scarlet fever and other contagious diseases.'[207] Washable 'sanitary' papers which had a varnished coating were developed in Britain in the 1870s in order to counter such arguments and preserve markets.[208] An article in the 1858 November edition of *The Builder* linked the slow recovery of a patient with the particular imagery on his bedroom wallpaper. Based on the assumption that 'the constant fatigue which must be caused by inharmonious and harsh colours and forms' the writer advocated the use of harmonious simple and refined tints and patterns in the bedroom.[209] The accepted association between mental health and aesthetic response to wallpaper was evidenced within literature written in this period. 'The Yellow Wallpaper' written by the American Charlotte Perkins-Gilmore in 1892 is a renowned example of early feminist writing which metaphorically incorporated this assumption in order to explore the nature of the restrictive societal conventions and feminine identity.[210] Wallpaper choice became fraught with dilemmas. Rather than depend on personal preference women relied on authoritative sources to ensure their purchase of

[206] Arthur Cowtan, 'On Paper-Hangings,' *The Builder* 2 (1844): 526.
[207] 'Unsanitary Paperhangings,' *The Australasian Painter and Decorator*, no. January 1 (1908).
[208] Hoskins, ed., *The Papered Wall: The History, Patterns and Techniques of Wallpaper*, 154.
[209] 'The Effects of Wallpaper,' *The Builder* November 6 (1858).
[210] Charlotte Perkins Gilman, 'The Yellow Wallpaper,' in *The Charlotte Perkins Gilma Reader: The Yellow Wallpaper and Other Fiction*, ed. Ann J. Lane (London: The Woman's Press, 1980).

wallpaper was appropriate for their desired or actual class.[211]   The most readily available source of information regarding 'good taste' in the home was within exhaustive home management manuals. The most widely read of these was Charles L. Eastlake's *Hints on Household Taste*, first published in 1868.[212]

The combination of design reforms of the nineteenth century and the notion that art could act as a moral and aesthetic force capable of improving society led to the formation of the aesthetic movements of this period. By the 1880s in Australia Aestheticism was 'perceived as a fusion of art, nature and beauty, materialising in the ornamentation of objects and interior art decoration.'[213]   The ideals of Aestheticism were promoted by William Morris and J. McNeill Whistler who criticised the 'false degraded taste displayed in contemporary commercial wares' and advocated instead a 'discriminating eclecticism guided by artistic sensibility.'[214]   The development of the Art Movement in Australia in the late nineteenth century stemmed from the transplantation of aestheticism and British reforms into the natural and cultural environment of Australia. The movement advocated for the use of ornamentation in middle class and to a lesser extent lower class domestic interiors and was linked to the idea 'that art was for all'. The beautification of the urban, civic and domestic environments was considered a manifestation of progressive moralising modernity, colonial maturity and wealth.[215]   The Kalizoic Society, which was considered synonymous with good taste, was founded in Melbourne in 1884 in response to the developing perception of the need to beautify the 'land we live in so as to improve the individual and national character'. Aesthetics, morality and public health were perceived to be related issues. Members of this society sought to influence community thought on a wide range of aesthetic issues on both a public and domestic scale.[216]   The domestic environment was aesthetically enhanced by a combination of 'feminine' craft processes particularly embroidery and a flamboyant display of decorative imperialism. Exotic mementos, fans, silks and ostrich feathers jostled for space in rooms as the expanding commodity culture of the late nineteenth century enabled the consumption of diverse array of decorative motifs and objects derived from both historical Western and

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[211] Jennings, 'Controlling Passion: The Turn-of -the -Century Wallpaper Dilemma,' 243.

[212] Brett, *On Decoration*, 50.

[213] Andrew Montana, *The Art Movement in Australia: Design, Taste and Society 1875-1900* (Carlton South: The Miegunyah Press, 2000), 15.

[214] Terence Lane and Jessie Serle, *Australians at Home: A Documentary History of Australian Domestic Interiors from 1788 to 1914*
 (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1990), 36.

[215] Montana, *The Art Movement in Australia: Design, Taste and Society 1875-1900*, xvi.

[216] Tim Bonyhady, *The Colonial Earth* (Carlton South: The Miegunyah press, 2000), 221.

Eastern cultures that were appropriated and incorporated into products for the expanding middle class.[217]

The dependency between the construction of individual identity and material consumption is explored by the British anthropologist Daniel Miller. Miller considers that modernity's increasingly material culture relies on objects for self definition; a concept which he considers to exist in addition to Bourdieu's concept of taste which guides consumption of objects to establish social distinction. The material objects that individuals consume are transformed into 'expressive environments, daily routines and often cosmological ideals: that is ideas about order, morality and family and their relationship with the wider society.' The site for such transformations is predominantly the private domestic space which thus may potentially be both a reflection and a tool for defining perceptions and values.[218] The Art Movement was associated with a marked rise of commercialism which continues today with unabated zeal. This has ensured that although domestic interiors may be considered as expressions of a desired persona they also reflect pervasive contemporary cultural values.

In the attempt to fuse beauty, morality, art and nature that occurred within the Art Movement it is pertinent to question what particular construction of nature was being presented. In the late nineteenth century Australian notions of nature were beginning to evolve in numerous forms. The perception of the Australian natural environment as a site of hardship and 'weird melancholy' that persisted since initial settlement developed further as explorers told of an interior that was harsh and dry with inhospitable aborigines. These perceptions were articulated by Marcus Clarke who was able to convey a sense of alienation between settlers and nature in Australia.[219] His popular writings expressed the perceptions of many in isolated communities within a vast and often physically challenging continent.[220] Although such perceptions were common, they were not universal and alternative constructions of nature in Australia were offered. One of the most influential was the construction of 'The Bush Legend' in *The Bulletin* by urban writers such as Henry Lawson and Banjo Paterson in the 1890s. This construction interpreted the city as the centre of moral degeneracy in opposition to the

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[217] Montana, *The Art Movement in Australia: Design, Taste and Society 1875-1900*, xvi.
[218] Daniel Miller, *Material Culture and Mass Consumption* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), 8.
[219] Bernard Smith, ed., *Documents on Art and Taste in Australia: The Colonial Period 1770-1914* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1975), 129.
[220] Roslynn D. Haynes, *Tasmanian Visions: Landscapes in Writing, Art and Photography* (Sandy Bay: Polymath Press, 2006), 64.

purity of 'The Bush' which was to be celebrated.[221] Nature in this context however was the rural pastorale of successful agricultural settlement of the land. The natural environment was also reassessed and promoted within civic movements such as the Kalizoic Society, Wattle League and the Australian Natives Association whose establishment was founded on the association of nature within the context of the natural environment and morality within that of civic and national obligation.[222]

Figure 22: Above**:** *Interior of a Victorian Drawing room, Melbourne*, **c. 1914,** Below**, Interior of the parlour of the Royal Victorian Institute of the Blind, c. 1897**

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[221] Graeme Davison, 'Sydney and the Bush: An Urban Context of the Australian Legend,' in *Intruders in the Bush*, ed. John Carroll (Melbourne Oord University Press, 1982).
[222] Libby Robin, 'Nationalising Nature: Wattle Days in Australia,' *Journal of Australian Studies* 73 (2002).

While literary models were being developed by writers such as Clarke, Lawson and Paterson, the construction of nature presented by decorative imagery remained firmly within British precedents. In the domestic environment wallpaper provided the most frequently encountered form of imagery derived from nature. The examples of interiors shown in Figure 22 provide an example of the popular taste for profuse floral wallpaper imagery in late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The fundamental perception communicated to most viewers by imagery of fecund floral forms is that of a 'life force'.[223] It may be surmised that the profusion of imagery derived from floral elements within the domestic interior due to widespread use of wallpapers affected the perceptions and thoughts, even if subliminally, of the occupants of these interiors concerning conceptions of the natural world.

Assessing the social history of wallpaper use is problematic using surviving fragments examined out of their context of use. This difficulty is compounded by the fact that collections of material culture privilege remnants from more affluent households due to their perceived greater cultural value.[224] Within Australia there are several archived wallpaper collections collated with reference to the date and location of use. The Caroline Simpson Research Collection of the Historic Houses Trust contains a wide range of materials from houses in New South Wales from the late nineteenth century until the present. Within their collection of wall-coverings, 245 samples of wallpapers used between 1880 and 1920 have been retrieved from the walls of a variety of dwellings. The samples are assembled with information concerning the form and location of the housing and often the identity of the occupants which enables the formation of a linkage between socio-economic status and wallpaper imagery. Another valuable resource is the Price Collection assembled in Kyneton, Victoria. This collection consists of remnants from rolls of wallpapers that were used to decorate Australian homes in this area between 1850 and 1960. The remnants were collected by the local decorating firm, Price and Sons which was in continuous operation during this time.[225]

[223] Oleg Grabar, *The Mediation of Ornament*, *The A.W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts, 1989* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 224.
[224] Saunders, *Wallpaper in Interior Decoration*, 7.
[225] Phyllis Murphy, *The Decorated Wall: Eighty Years of Wallpaper in Australia C. 1850-1930* (Sydney: Historic Houses Trust, 1985), 4.

Figure 23: Samples of Wallpaper fragments dated from 1880 to 1925 from the Caroline Simpson Museum collection. I: Wallpaper Frieze and Wallpaper c.1870-1880s from a single storey stone cottage Pyrmont; II: Wallpaper, c. 1880 from the same location; III Page from Wallpaper sample book c. 1885, from, the Hunter Valley Region NSW; IV Wallpaper, c. 1883, from a timber slab hut in Berrima, NSW; V Wallpaper c. 1890, museum number L90/9.1:2 from a house in Chatswood; VI Wallpaper 1890, museum number L90/10-1, from a house in Waverley

Figure 23 depicts samples of wallpaper fragments from the Caroline Simpson Research Collection retrieved from a range of dwellings from differing social classes. The dates of their installation have been recorded in either household records or by the fact that newspaper was used as the lining paper for the application of a particular layer. All the wallpapers in the Collection were imported except for the wallpaper used in Swift's mansion which was the product of the Australian firm Morrison's. Within the sample of 245 papers retrieved, 207 incorporated a floral design, ten were of imitation marble or wood, 26 were based on geometric patterning and two were figurative papers commonly used in nurseries. The predominance of the floral pattering across differing social classes provides an indication of the popularity of this form of imagery. The floral wallpapers shown depict a range of floral motifs and various stylistic interpretations. In the examples shown the motifs tend to be constricted or contained with other decorative devices such as a repeat diaper pattern or a dado border. The degree of naturalism varies but is of a sufficient degree for the recognition of the species of flower represented. In this sample of 207 wallpapers roses were predominate, but the chrysanthemum, nasturtium, water lily, and fern also occurred. There were no Australian flowers. The presence of the chrysanthemum reflects the interest in Japanese imagery that occurred in the 1870s onwards while the other flowers are those aesthetically valued within a European construction of nature. It is inevitable that this was the only construction of nature offered to fill Australian interiors as until the 1930s wallpapers manufactured in Britain to cater specifically for British taste dominated the Australian market. With such Europeanised visual constructions of nature filling the Australian cultural consciousness in the late nineteenth century it may be speculated that it contributed to a construction of nature at odds with the reality of the natural environment in Australia.

Nation from nature

The anticipation of Federation inspired nationalistic sentiment and the desire for a distinctive Australian identity. Myths, heroes, rituals, imagery and symbols were sought to give form to the abstract notion of a national self.[226] The political nature of the process of Federation ensured that much imagery of this period was designed to project an identity centred on economic wealth and colonial advancement to the world.

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[226] John Carroll, ed., *Intruders in the Bush: The Australian Quest for Identity* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1982).

The public art of this period consisted of heroic explorers or idealised national allegorical figures.[227] There was a 'striking absence of natural or indigenous cultural symbols' at Sydney's inaugural Federation Day as there was at the opening of the First Parliament in 1901.[228]

Reassessment of accepted Europeanised concepts of nature occurred with the progressive adoption of British Arts and Crafts principles within Australia at the close of the nineteenth century. These principles of truth to materials, the value of functionality and the promotion of local designs, manufacturing techniques and materials became increasingly influential. Such values underpinned the evolution of an Australian Arts and Crafts movement which attempted to express both a sense of place and national identity within decorative arts practice. One of the most vocal and active protagonists for the need to develop an Australian national art was the French immigrant, Lucien Henry (1850-96). Henry's background as a former French political prisoner was significant in the formation of his personal philosophies that called for the development of a democratic national art that would reflect society and be appreciated by all within its everyday use. His theories were based on the premise that in the context of cultural progress the symbolic forms of decorative art develop similarly to language – they are generated and evolve as a result of the intimate daily contact of people with this art form. He advocated that the basis of such an Australian national art should be its flora and fauna whose forms would decoratively evolve into symbols of national character.[229]

Henry lived in Sydney for only a short period (1879-1891) during which he actively promoted his philosophy concerning a national art. Most of his artistic production was not fully realised existing only as a series of illustrations for an unpublished book that was to be entitled *Australian decorative arts: one hundred studies and designs*.[230] He created decorative designs for a range of architectural structures which included electric lamps, medallions, ceiling plaster work, pillars and fountains. Two designs are shown in Figure 24.

[227] Charles Pickett, 'Lucien Henry and Sydney Architecture: Motives for the Decoration of Any Construction,' in *Visions of a Republic: The Work of Lucien Henry*, ed. Ann Stephen (Sydney: Powerhouse Publishing, 2001), 96.
[228] Robin, 'Nationalising Nature: Wattle Days in Australia,' 14.
[229] Smith, ed., *Documents on Art and Taste in Australia: The Colonial Period 1770-1914*, 231.
[230] Ann Stephen, 'Introduction,' in *Visions of a Republic : The Work of Lucien Henry*, ed. Ann Stephen (Sydney: Powerhouse Publishing, 2001), 10.

Figure 24: Above**: Lucien Henry, *Sternocarpus panel*, c. 1889, watercolour and gouache over pencil, 52.2 x 34.4 cm;** Below**: *Dado Design***, c. 1889, watercolour and gouache over pencil, 56.5 x 35.1 cm**

The upper image in is a wallpaper design based on a detailed and naturalistic representation of the waratah. Both the colour and form of the flowers and leaves in the wallpaper design have a high degree of botanical accuracy. Henry's consideration of the perceived need to develop easily recognisable symbols for a national art informed

the development of such highly representational decorative motifs. The major modification to the natural form of the plant is the adaptation of the individual plants into rocaille forms which are then organised around a central geometric sun motif. The three-dimensionally modelled motifs are arranged on a uniformly flat sky blue background. The Dado design shown as the lower image in Figure 24 is split into an upper gold and lower black band separated into a repeat pattern of semicircles and horizontal lines. A motif consisting of three symmetrically grouped naturalistic waratahs with their stems passing through a gold circular motif is placed within the semicircular repeat. Four white stars representative of the Southern Cross are placed within the same spatial field as the waratahs. Similar to the wall paper design, Henry has incorporated a mix of naturalistic and geometric devices on a flat, brightly coloured background.

Henry's work was distinctive in his attempt to combine classicism with locally derived iconic imagery.[231] Henry advocated the use of the waratah particularly, considering that the form of the plant allowed its successful adaptation into ornamental forms.[232] In addition to the waratah, Henry used the forms of the sternocarpus and lyrebird repeatedly within designs. His methodology for the construction a national art met a mixed and at times hostile critical response.

Henry addressed his critics in an essay written in 1888 for *Australian Art* in which he declared that the decorative arts would be the most suitable basis for a national art and claimed that the rejection of his ideas was due to a deep set prejudice against Australian flora and fauna.

> According to their dictum the flowers have no perfume, the Waratah is brutal in form and colour, the Banksia is stiff, prickly and like an egret, the Sternocarpus belongs to engineering, and gives a splendid idea of an unsuccessful attempt at perpetual motion, the Kangaroo is stupid and a pest, as for the Lyre Bird, a bad pun with some allusion to press men or politicians. [233]

Bernard Smith notes that neither Henry's designs nor philosophies attracted much critical support when conceived. Smith ascribes this to the fact that for most designers of that time,

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[231] Pickett, 'Lucien Henry and Sydney Architecture: Motives for the Decoration of Any Construction,' 86.

[232] Ann Stephen and Charles Pickett, ''To the Youth of Australia',' in *Visions of a Republic: The Work of Lucien Henry - Paris - Noumena - Sydney* ed. Ann Stephen (Sydney: Powerhouse Publishing, 2001), 68.

[233] Lucien Henry, 'Australian Decorative Arts. An Essay,' in *Designing Australia: Readings in the History of Design*, ed. Michael Bogle (Annandale: Pluto Press Australia, 2002), 242.

the idea of incorporating kangaroos, wattle and waratah into their designs was as embarrassing as asking them to cultivate a broad Australian accent. It was safer, less culturally déclassé to follow European modes of design – and that is the way it has largely remained.[234]

Henry's work had one significant advocate after his death in Richard T. Baker (1852-1941) who also supported the development of a 'distinct national style of ornamentation' which would individualise 'Australian Art with the character of its own surroundings and aid appreciation of the Australian natural environment.'[235] Baker also considered that a decorative art practice derived from the natural environment would be able to imbibe a particular Australian personality. He strongly promoted the use of the waratah, considering that its form could suggest attributes such as health, strength, vigour, independence and endurance – qualities determined highly suitable for the Australian national character.[236] Interestingly his arguments were directed most strenuously towards fellow nationalists seeking to promote the wattle as Australia's floral emblem.[237] Baker was appointed director of the Technological, Industrial and Sanitary Museum in Sydney (the forerunner of the Powerhouse Museum) in 1898, remaining in that position until 1921. He curated one of the permanent displays entitled *Australian Flora in Applied Art* at the Museum which was on view from 1906 until 1939. This exhibition was designed to provide inspiration for the incorporation of Australian floral motifs in industrial arts and crafts.[238] Strong support of this conception for a nationalistic style was given by the numerous Arts and Crafts societies that formed in the post-Federation period and many of the major art schools and technical colleges.[239] Despite the importance of Baker's position and influence and the accompanying community support the general public tended to prefer familiar British and European designs.[240] The Australian nationalistic style existed predominately in a range of non-commercial craft practices including china painting, embroidery, jewellery, weaving, furniture and studio pottery. These artefacts were usually created

[234] Smith, ed., *Documents on Art and Taste in Australia: The Colonial Period 1770-1914*, 231.

[235] Richard T. Baker, *The Australian Flora in Applied Art: Part 1 the Waratah* (Sydney: Department of Public Instruction, N.S.W., 1915), 12.

[236] Ibid., 57.

[237] Wattle most likely achieved this status when it was included in the Australian Coat of Arms in 1912. Its visual attributes were the association with its colour with sunshine but more significantly its small repetitive form lent itself well to design within the background of this insignia.

[238] Margaret Betteridge, 'Australian Flora in Art,' in *Designing Australia: Readings in the History of Design*, ed. Michael Bogle (Annandale: Pluto Press Australia, 2002), 227.

[239] Ibid., 230.

[240] Ibid., 231.

by female amateur craftspeople in the home.[241] An article in *The Australian* in 1928 commended the newspaper for publishing Australian crochet designs but questioned the scarcity of Australian designs in commercially manufactured decorative items such as textiles, wallpapers, crockery, and linoleum despite design tuition in technical colleges.[242] The exclusion of the Australian nationalistic style from commercial production and consequently advertising gave it a marginal status within prominent debates on taste.

Contemporary critics had criticised Henry's work as too self-conscious and artificial to be of enduring use.[243] Decorative works made in this period influenced by Henry and Baker's philosophies have been often evaluated as 'kitsch' due to their 'highly self-conscious nature and aggressive nationalistic overtones.'[244] The term kitsch is generally applied to pretentious art forms that suggest a high level of civilised taste but are in fact 'florid, superficial, pleasing at first; but … soon pall[s] on the taste.' The kitsch work uses subject matter which has well known emotive, religious or patriotic sentiments or aesthetic associations in the attempt to manipulate the viewer's response to the work.[245] The concept of kitsch is firmly linked to that of taste as it is applied to an object which deliberately makes inappropriate claims for its cultural value as determined by the bounds of accepted good taste. Henry and Baker's attempts to develop an Australian nationalistic visual language were overwhelming judged as kitsch by tastemakers for a number of reasons beyond the highly self-conscious nature of their endeavours. It is likely that the use of Australian flora and fauna to describe a national character was derided because these highly recognisable features of the natural environment did not have strong iconic emotive significance for settler Australians. As Bernard Smith noted, the Australian identity that was most cultural desirable for many people was that of an international nature as far removed as possible from the cultural and biological cringe evoked by the Australian continent.[246]

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[241] Christopher Thompson, *Style: Change in the Decorative Arts* (Sydney: The Pot Still Press Pty Ltd, 1990), 7.

[242] 'Woman's Mirror,' *The Australian*, no. November 27 (1928).

[243] Pickett, 'Lucien Henry and Sydney Architecture: Motives for the Decoration of Any Construction,' 104.

[244] George Seddon, *The Old Country: Australian Landscapes, Plants and People* (Port Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 151.

[245] Denis Dutton, *Kitsch* (Oxford University Press, [cited 7/07/2006 2006]).

[246] The concept of a 'biological cringe' is related to the persistent manner that settlers perceived the unique Australian flora and fauna, unable to be classified within European biological taxonomic conventions, as indicative of a deviant and bizarre national character.

Furthermore the cultural status of the Australian nationalistic style was diminished by the fact that the majority of the practitioners of the movement were women in the home. The emphasis on the creation of art objects within the home by the Art Movement served to channel culturally challenging feminine social ambitions for social autonomy into artistic home decoration. Women were seemingly offered choice and their choice had supposed gravity as taste in interior decoration was promoted as socially and morally significant.[247] The increasing momentum of the Arts and Crafts Movement ensured the availability of Australian motifs incorporated in the crotchet and embroidery patterns sold in newspapers as well as fostering enrolments of women in technical colleges and arts and crafts societies.[248] Although the purchase and creation of objects for the domestic interior was deemed important, the social value of the objects created was marginal.[249] The low cultural value of these craft items further trivialised the use of Australian flora and fauna as subject matter. The incorporation of Australian motifs in decorative arts occurred in a field of cultural production that was considered to be inappropriate for a national art. Not surprisingly the historically established gravitas of landscape or history painting was believed by many to be the more appropriate mode of delivery for a visual construction of national identity. This position was aided by the fact that the land as represented in landscape or in actuality may be overwhelming in its immensity and it provides a subject capable of being interpreted as myth or narrative. Indeed, the magnitude of the aesthetic experience presented by the land as compared to the single small living creature renders representations of flora and fauna more appropriate for discrete symbolic use rather than for the construction of a national identity.[250]

The massive social and political upheaval associated with World War I further disrupted the faltering impetus of the Australian national style. Australians increasingly sought internationally derived motifs and designs rather than those based upon their British heritage or local environment. In addition suburban expansion, technological and industrial innovations radically altered the urban landscapes where the bulk of the population now lived. This initiated a reinterpretation of both exterior and interior environments. Aspirations of home ownership and the accompanying increasing

[247] Jennings, 'Controlling Passion: The Turn-of -the -Century Wallpaper Dilemma,' 243.
[248] Jennifer Isaacs, *The Gentle Arts: 200 Years of Australian Women's Domestic and Decorative Arts* (Sydney: Lansdowne Press, 1987), 171.
[249] Montana, *The Art Movement in Australia: Design, Taste and Society 1875-1900*, 19.
[250] Mary Eagle, 'Painting an Australian Identity,' in *Intruders in the Bush: The Australian Quest for Identity*, ed. John Carroll (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1982).

material consumption became important to the definition of the Australian identity. Australia's squatter aristocracy which had previously possessed dominate social status was replaced by internationally focused tastemakers whose values were circulated in various influential publications, many of which were under the control of Sydney Ure Smith (1887-1949). Smith's publications included *Art in Australia* (1916-42), *The Home* (1920-42), *Australian National Journal* (1939-47) and *Art and Design* (1949).[251] He employed many artists and designers whose profiles were elevated by association with his journals. These included Hera Roberts, Thea Proctor, Roy de Maistre, Michael O'Connell and Dorothy Wager. Although his dominant influence on visual art was criticised as conservative, his position on design was liberal and modernist.[252]

The notion that a unique and defining national art should be based within decorative artistic practice was rekindled by Margaret Preston (1875-1963) in the 1920s. Her philosophies were similar to Henry's in the consideration that it is the art that people are in contact with everyday that will develop and exhibit a national ethos.[253] A significant difference in the polemics that Preston presented was her notion that Australian flora and fauna would not provide a suitable source of imagery, but rather the source of a national art should be based on the visual forms created by Australian Aboriginal people. Preston wrote disparagingly on several occasions on the use of Australian flora and fauna as a basis for a national art. Why she should do so when her own artistic practice was based heavily on these sources appears contradictory however examination of the language and examples she uses in stressing their unsuitability illuminates her position. Preston's most frequently quoted criticism published in the 1924 *The Home* journal stated 'Taking native flowers etc. of any country and twiddling them into unique forms will never give them a national decorative art.'[254] The implication of trivial futility within the concept of 'twiddling' is strong and it is founded in her belief that realism within decorative art is both dull and inappropriate.[255] Additional derogatory remarks she made regarding the use of naturalistic imagery within ornamentation reiterated her theory that illusionism in craft was banal.[256]

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[251] Michael Bogle, *Design in Australia 1880-1970* (North Ryde: Craftsman House, 1998), 58.
[252] Ibid., 58-59.
[253] Elizabeth Butel, *Margaret Preston* (Sydney: Penguin Books, 1985), 54.
[254] Margaret Preston, 'Art for Crafts: Aboriginal Art Artfully Applied,' *The home* 5, no. December (1924): 30.
[255] Ibid.
[256] Elizabeth Butel, ed., *Art and Australia: Seleced Writings 1920-1950 Margaret Preston* (North Sydney: Richmond Ventures Pty Ltd, 2003), 73.

Elizabeth Butel states that much of Preston's polemic writing from 1920 to 1950 concerning her motivations for the incorporation of indigenous designs within Australian decorative art is contradictory and at times racist.[257] Nicholas Thomas considered that her advocacy for the incorporation of Aboriginal motifs to form an Australian national art was based on a form of Ruskinian localism to express a national character by an art of simplicity and directness, invigorated by a primitive spirit.[258] Despite Margaret Preston's status as a prominent and vocal tastemaker of the early twentieth century her appropriations and subsequent adaptations of Aboriginal work received a lukewarm response. However despite not achieving recognition as a national art her work did attract public attention to indigenous cultural traditions.[259] Thomas attributes the general lack of interest in Aboriginal visual traditions prior to this time as a reflection of a long history of harsh denigration of Indigenous Australians.[260] This was compounded by the fact that there was little opportunity for those interested to actually see examples of Aboriginal visual culture. There was a paucity of publications and scholarship in this area and only small museum collections of Aboriginal material artefacts.[261]

By the 1930s however there were a substantial number of designers and artists of varying capabilities that adapted Aboriginal visual forms in to domestic artefacts and architectural ornament.[262] In 1941 a major exhibition 'Australian Aboriginal Art and its Application' was held at the David Jones Gallery in Sydney. The impetus for this exhibition, organised by Frederick D. McCarthy, curator of Anthropology at the Museum of Applied Arts and Technology, was elaborated in the forward of the accompanying catalogue. Here McCarthy stated his hope that the development of the general public's aesthetic appreciation of Aboriginal art would improve race relations within the country.[263] This influential catalogue was reprinted eight times until 1974

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[257] Butel, *Margaret Preston*.
[258] Nicholas Thomas, *Possessions: Indigenous Art/Colonial Culture* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1999), 116.
[259] Ibid., 143.
[260] Ibid., 112.
[261] Ibid., 114.
[262] Ibid., 119.
[263] A. P. Elkin, ''Foreward', Australian Aborignal Decorative Art, 1938,' in *Modernism & Australia: Documents on Art, Design and Architecture 1917-1967*, ed. Ann Stephen, Andrew McNamara, and Philip Goad (Melbourne: The Miegunyah Press, 1938), 377.

when its approach was superseded by events within the contemporary Aboriginal art movement at Papunya.[264]

As I have suggested above, the aesthetic foundations of visual constructs of Australian identity oscillated between those based on British heritage, nationalistic sentiment and the attraction of international modernism. The effect of these competing influences on domestic decorative imagery in Australia has been discussed in terms of an active lobbying for an Australian nationalistic style. There was however additional factors operating that influenced decorative Australian visual culture. An examination of the wallpaper imagery developed and manufactured by two small Australian companies in the early twentieth century, Gilkes & Co. and Morrison's Wallpaper Company, provides an example of the pathway negotiated by manufacturers between taste and desired national identity within commercial decorative imagery of that period.

Due to financial imperatives manufacturers of wallpaper were acutely aware of market demands and attempted to both inform and conform to such tastes in order to remain viable. Both companies were established in the first decade of the twentieth century in Sydney. The founders Arthur Gilkes and Charles Morrison were both originally from Britain. Gilkes was of the third generation in his family to be involved in the production, marketing and design of wall coverings. Despite the geographic isolation of Australia, there are strong similarities in the designs produced by these wallpaper manufacturers to their peers in Britain, indicating an awareness of current taste in wallpaper design and consumption in Britain. Amongst Arthur Gilkes' estate an annotated copy of Owen Jones', *The Grammar of Ornament* was found, indicating Gilkes' knowledge of and interest in Jones' theories. It is highly likely that both men were in regular communication with family members in Britain. An example of this is given in *The Builder's Merchant's Journal* which has an article written about J. Harry Gilkes, brother of Arthur Gilkes and treasurer of the United Wallpaper Merchants Association of Great Britain, describing his contribution to the wallpaper industry and details of his working life, commenting on his travels which included Australia.[265] These companies, like other industries producing consumer items susceptible to rapidly evolving trends, needed to be able to produce a steady supply of new products that could be promoted as examples of the current fashionable taste. Their claim to

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[264] Ann Stephen, Andrew McNamara, and Philip Goad, eds., *Modernism & Australia: Documents on Art, Design and Architecture 1917-1967* (Melbourne: The Miegunyah Press, 2006), 375.
[265] Unknown, 'Mr J. Harry Gilkes,' *The Builder's Merchant's Journal* (1923): 251.

progressiveness in regards taste and 'sanitary science' may be seen in an article in the 1907 issue of *Art and Architecture* which states that the Australian home decorator now gives more consideration to issues of cleanliness, light and harmony and 'has abandoned the floral wall-fillings of Dr Dresser, Walter Crane and Voysey.' The implication of the marketing was that the tastefully designed narrow wall friezes of Gilkes and Co. had the advantage of being more hygienic than the larger papers formerly in vogue.[266]

Figure 25: Interior of Gilkes Factory 1907

From the early 1900s until the 1930s the use of wallpaper friezes in the upper part of the wall became fashionable.[267] This form of wall decoration with a much shorter width meant that it could be produced by a simple manufacturing process of block or screen printing and stencilling. Figure 25 provides an indication of the production process in the Gilkes factory. Two men are using an ink-impregnated wad to apply colour inside a stencilled area on a continuous roll of paper. Each stencil was cut for a colour field within a single motif as evidenced by the variety of stencils hanging to dry on the wall. The patterned frieze was formed as each stencil was repeatedly inked and applied. The relatively smaller investment in capital and workforce needed to produce this form of wallpaper enabled the development of an Australian wallpaper industry between 1905 and 1935.

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[266] 'Gilkes Friezes: A New Australian Industry,' *Art and Architecture* IV, no. 3 (1907): 86.
[267] Michael Lech, 'Handmade Wallpaper: An Australian Story,' *Insites*, no. Autumn (2003): 2.

Both companies capitalized on the notions of the exclusive value of the hand-crafted product as well as the promotion of local industry as advocated by the Arts and Crafts Movement. The greatest marketing asset of these companies for the sale of a higher priced product was the ability to cater for individual taste and demands due to the process of hand-printing. The 1908 March issue of the journal *Building* provides a typical example where within an advertisement for Arthur Gilkes & Co. is the statement that 'We make our own designs, and if you desire something exclusive, some original harmony, you can say no other home possesses, we can please you at minimum expense.'[268]

There are no known original samples of the Gilkes' friezes available although reproductions of the friezes are frequently found in advertisements in journals of that period. The Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales possesses four original Morrison's sample books which allow appraisal of the use of colour and materials in their friezes. Within the sample books variation in each design is achieved through the use of different colours within the designs as well as a variety of papers each with a differing textures and colour. The fact that the nature of the paper support is incorporated as part of the design by the use of transparent colour application and significant areas of unprinted paper appears a response to modernist design reforms which encouraged truth to materials. The accusation of an 'imitative character' was avoided by the use of non-representational imagery. The promotion of this modernistic influence is reinforced within the 1920 edition of *The Australasian Decorator and Painter,* which informs readers of 'how the innovative wallpaper designs of the period have abandoned the use of flat tone for transparency and are increasing the variety of surface effects of the paper.'[269]

The imagery incorporated in these friezes had strong British precedents. The British William Shand Kydd Wallpaper Company was renowned for the development of hand-blocked friezes characterised by simple designs of brightly coloured stylised flowers and leaves in which the individual elements were outlined by a darker colour.[270] The Shand Kydd friezes incorporated lush Art Nouveau designs, based on acanthus scrolls, lilies and poppies and marketed their products internationally, including Australia.[271]

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[268] 'Arthur Gilkes & Co.,' *Building* March 20 (1908).

[269] 'Tendences of Modern Decoration,' *The Australasian Painter and Decorator*, no. April 1 (1920): 175.

[270] Michael Lech, 'Morrison's Wallpaper: An Australian Story,' *The Wallpaper History Review* (2004/2005): 20.

[271] Hoskins, ed., *The Papered Wall: The History, Patterns and Techniques of Wallpaper*, 195.

Morrison's chose to strongly align their product with what was considered a market leader in good taste in wallpaper friezes rather than attempting to create novel imagery suggestive of the Australian natural environment. Examination of Australian journals associated with the decorative arts of this period reveals the wide and extensive advertising and promotion of these companies. The imagery created by these firms was based on consumer demand, which the companies attempted to actively inform. The linkage of production and taste is further reflected by the fact that Morrison's closed in the 1930s as the more affluent classes, which were this company's client base, began to reject wallpapers in favour of painted and textured walls.[272]
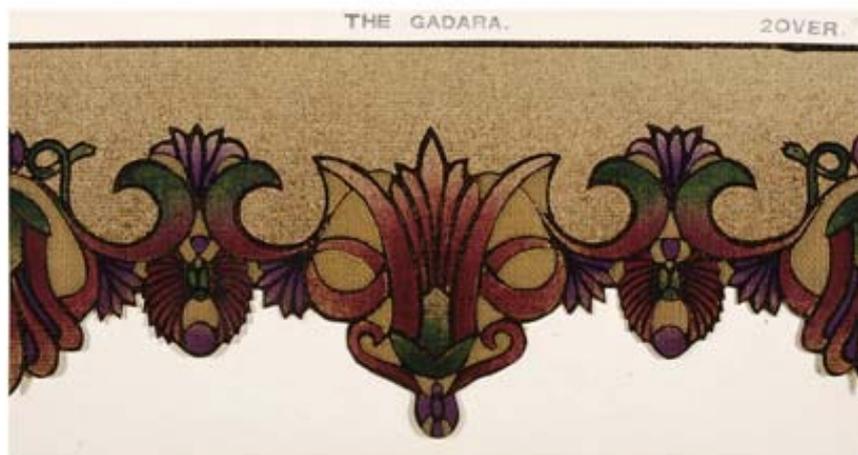

Figure 26: Above**: *The Uralla;* below**: *The Gadara.* **Both wallpaper friezes from the 1925 Morrison's Sample Book**

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[272] Lech, 'Morrison's Wallpaper: An Australian Story,' 18.

One of the most striking features of these friezes is the incorporation of motifs with a long and varied cultural history. *The Uralla* and *The Gadara* friezes, 1925, shown in Figure 26 are typical of the friezes within the four pattern books. The upper image, *The Uralla* frieze shows an unmistakable palmette motif which although originally developed from botanical observation, has been incorporated persistently since ancient Greece into the decorative arts. Both friezes display the use of linearly repeated flat symmetrical motifs but are generally less intricate and sinuous than those of Gilkes which reflected the influence of Art Nouveau more strongly. Although the use of botanical source material is evident, it is reduced to such a degree that it is recognisable only as a flower or leaf. There is no record that either company designed motifs based on Australian flora despite Baker's advocacy and the rise of production of designs incorporating Australian flora and fauna within the technical colleges.[273] An element of nationalism exists subtly within the names given to each of Morrison's friezes. Australian rural locations such as Kandos, Kelso, Hartley, Cooma, Eden and Forbes have been used for the friezes rather than larger urban areas perhaps to imbibe a nostalgic sense of nation located within former idealisations of 'The Bush' of the later part of the nineteenth century. The imagery constructed for the product range is strongly suggestive of the influence of British design reform, modernism and Australia's historical cultural and trade associations with Britain.

It could be surmised that wallpaper usage in Australia in the early twentieth century was more successful in conveying a sense of historical continuity with Britain than a current sense of place in Australia. Despite the broad embrace of imagery derived from nature within the philosophical basis of aestheticism, the Art Movement and Arts and Crafts practice the degree of reference to nature became more minimal as modernism was progressively adopted. Modernism's immense, global nature impacted on the possibility of constructing an Australian national decorative art based on either the natural world or its indigenous people. Regardless of the efforts of Lucien Henry, Richard Baker and their extensive community support, the Australian natural environment was deemed to partly provincial, partly trivial and to an extent embarrassing if considered a reflection of the national character. Australia within this

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[273] The guardianship of Australian taste was further contested by the commercial interests of the British wallpaper industry exemplified in the fact that one of the few records of the waratah being used commercially as a motif in a wallpaper frieze was as the product of the British firm, the Wall Papers Manufacturers Ltd, made specifically for an Australian market.

period looked resolutely outside of its own country in the attempt to define self and nation within the process of consumption.

Uncanny constructions

The term uncanny is etymologically derived from the antonym of the German word *heimlich.* *Heimlich* refers to that which belongs to the house, the familiar and homely. *Unheimlich* or the uncanny is translated most clearly as eerie or unhomely. Sigmund Freud explored the aesthetic and psychoanalytical basis of this aesthetic perception in his essay *The Uncanny* written in 1919. Freud's semantically based definition of the perception is intrinsic to the concept as it metaphorically illustrates that the uncanny is felt where the homely (*heimlich*), the familiar and intimate are transformed into their opposites of uncanny strangeness within the *unheimlich*.[274] Freud describes the experience as a specific form of fear or dread that is initiated by a variety of specific circumstances to which individuals vary in sensitivity. These circumstances are located or concealed within those that were formerly perceived as familiar and safe. This perception is more nuanced than strangeness or unfamiliarity as it arises from the dynamics of the unconscious itself.[275] Julia Kristeva expands on the Freudian notion of the unconscious, to locate the uncanny as the unsettling perception of foreignness within the familiar self. Kristeva emphasises that the 'other', the construct formed by the unconscious by transference, is fundamentally located within the construction of the self. The implications of Australia's status as a post-colonial nation and the pervasive experience of the uncanny are explored by the Ken Gelder. Gelder states that the re-evaluation of the rights of the formerly dispossessed Australian Aboriginal implies a reassessment of settler's notions of ownership. Concepts of home and self must be reconsidered.[276] It may be argued, in the circumstance of the purposeful construction of individual and national identity which has been a hallmark of Australian quest for self, the uncanny resides closely within the aspects of cultural and natural history which have been either persistently ignored or deliberately forgotten.

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[274] Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, 182.
[275] Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, trans. 2003 David McLintock (New York: Penguin Books, 1919).
[276] Ken Gelder and Jane M. Jacobs, *Uncanny Australia: Sacredness and Identity in a Postcolonial Nation* (Carlton South: Melbourne University Press, 1998), 24.

The extensive establishment of Australian domestic interiors on British standards of taste in regards wallpaper imagery emphasised notions of British heritage and shaped conceptions of national identity with an associated British aesthetic valuation of the natural world. Examination of the contribution of wallpapers in forming conflicting views of Australian identity is of particular relevance due to the widespread use of this form of interior decoration across all social classes in the late nineteenth century. The affect of the overwhelming visual fields formed by wallpapered walls is countered by a rapid familiarization of the usual highly repetitive patterned imagery. This ensures wallpaper is readily relegated as a background stimulus. This comfortable familiarity is implicit in the concept *heimlich*. The perception of the homely may be easily disrupted if the 'reality' of nature or identity presented by the wallpaper is challenged by the viewer comparing the construction of the domestic interior version of home with the actuality of situation within the Australian natural environment.

Conclusion: ambivalently Australian

In continuum

Answers, concrete and speculative, to the individual questions posed in the introduction that structured this research are interdependent and difficult to provide separately. The contribution that natural history illustration and ornamentation made to perceptions of the natural environment of Australia was strongly reliant on the historical period in which colonisation and subsequent settlement occurred. In this period these visual languages were a significant part of the cultural and intellectual framework of the Western world and acted to express and define identity while articulating concurrent perceptions and philosophies. The influence of these languages on the specific construction of the Australian exotic 'other' is significant and of relevance today.

The assumptions and beliefs established by modernity of the primacy of the present and the cultural authority of Europe underpinned colonial discourse. Such beliefs were informed and sustained by an 'intense deployment' of representations particularly within the visual culture of the period.[277] The reception, and often construction, of these representations was a product of conceptions concerning the 'other.' The aesthetic responses generated by such imagery operated subliminally to develop and reinforce dualistic notions surrounding the difference of the distant 'other' in comparison to the European self. As Stephen Greenblatt points out the manner of circulation of such representations is highly significant:

> And it is the character of this circulation – secret or open, rapid or sluggish, violently imposed or freely embraced, constrained by guilt and anxiety or experienced as pleasure – that regulates the accommodation, assimilation, and representation of the culture of the other.[278]

The potency of colonial discourse was derived in large part by the rapid and zealous commodification of the exoticised 'other.' The non-specific difference of the exoticised 'other' was offered openly to a public to consume with guilt-free pleasure. The desirability of the distant exotic 'other' ensured its absorption by popular taste into the unquestioned status of commonplace imagery and the domestic interior. The highly

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[277] Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions*, 119.
[278] Ibid., 121.

significant contribution that natural history illustration and ornamentation made to the establishment and reinforcement of exotic constructions is related to the widespread circulation and open embrace given to these ubiquitous and transformable forms of imagery.

The voracious public appetite of the Empire in the nineteenth century for the exotic 'other' was fed by the importation of a diverse array of unsystematised 'innocent signifiers'.[279] Wonder was central to this whole complex system of representations through which people 'apprehended, and hence possessed or discarded, the unfamiliar, the alien, the terrible, the desirable, and the hateful'.[280] The response of wonder to the exotic 'other' deflected attention from the underlying political processes that were implicit with colonial domination.[281] The evolution of aesthetic perceptions of the exotic 'other' was driven by the manner in which these signifiers of the distant 'other' was both presented and represented to European society. Ornamental motifs and natural history illustrations were a significant part of the mélange of decontextualised fragments that acted as metonymic links to distant 'other' places and cultures. The formal qualities of both forms of imagery enabled them to act as inadvertent carriers of the exotic. In the case of natural history illustration this was the typical empirical depiction of a subject devoid of its original context; while in the case of ornamental imagery its inherent plasticity allowed the appropriation and absorption of isolated ornamental motifs into established European ornamental imagery. In Chapter One I discussed how the manner of presentation of such imported signifiers developed into a specific manner of aesthetic representation.

The mode of display within imperial natural history museums, world fairs and the transformation of natural history imagery into fantastic visual conglomerations conveyed a consistent form of aesthetic representation. These representations were often constructed as overwhelming, immersive spectacles which informed the perception of the distant 'other' as exciting, sensual, ripe and ready for acquisition. The perception of desirability within the exotic however is fraught and paradoxical as it is always considered by definition as contrary to normative (European) ideals of self. The delightful chaos was antithetical to Western ideals of order and rationality. This characteristic representation of the objectified 'other' as an overwhelming 'jumble of

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[279] Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, 94.
[280] Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions*, 22.
[281] Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*, 14.

foreignness' inhibited true empathetic understanding of the individual signifiers presented. The concept of an 'innocent signifier' as described by Ashcroft *et al* emphasises the unsystematised nature of such signifiers.[282] This enabled an aesthetic of exotic representations which has been described as self-empowering or self-referential by Graham Huggan[283] or alternatively as empty, blank or opaque by Peter Mason.[284] These terms reflect the manner in which exoticisation succeeds in emptying the content of individual signifiers.[285] This results in the exotic person, artefact, or plant being incomprehensible beyond its outward appearance to the appropriating society. Wonder, precious as a commodity, was preserved within these 'opaque' modes of representation. It is not surprising that Western cultural receptivity to the process of exoticisation was galvanised by the rise of philosophical and scientific interest in natural history. The privileging of the visible, readily communicated in natural history illustration was associated with a concurrent devaluing of information concerning the cultural context and interrelationships of plants, animals and people. The focused pursuit of knowledge by ordering living beings according to their visible physical structure and the aligned processes of naming and classifying greatly enabled acts of appropriation and possession.

Despite the underlying intention of natural history illustration being the provision of an unbiased empirical record of the observable, other aspects of its production ensured it acted as a representation. The usual public presentation of the open diagrammatic imagery created during field trips or voyages of exploration was as engravings. The process of selection, editing and translating of the original illustrations into products for consumption was influenced by political imperatives and a public captivated by strange tales and sights. This circulation and transformation of natural history illustration in journals, books, decorative imagery and other forms of visual culture catered to and perpetuated popular taste for the exotic. The fact that the original natural history illustrations were created characteristically from direct observation ensured that this imagery implied the authority of the eye-witness. The aura of veracity was often reinforced in accompanying texts. Assumptions of truthfulness ensured a high level of popular appeal (and hence commercial success) of the imagery but also allowed images to absorb an element of the unknown fantastic and yet appear credible. Claims of

[282] Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, 95.
[283] Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*, 14.
[284] Mason, *Infelicities: Representations of the Exotic*, 148-64.
[285] Ibid.

primary witnessing were of great historical significance in the context of European perceptions of distant lands such as Australia whose indigenous population did not utilise a recognised written or visual form of text. The creation of natural history images by European artists was considered a primary act of recognition and discovery which substantiated assumptions of European rights to possession and ownership. Natural history illustrations were visual texts, intimately involved in establishing conceptions of rights to possession and consequently settler's notions of 'home.'

The contribution that natural history illustration made to conceptions of the exotic extended beyond its documentary description of the form of unusual beings isolated from their original context. As the function of this imagery is to record the characteristic physical structures of the unusual, it also provided a form of visual testament to the difference of the 'type specimen' of the objectified 'other'. As mentioned in Chapter One, processes of self-definition based on the identification of defining differences in comparison to the 'other' were seminal in colonial discourse.[286] This imagery acted as a primary catalyst in the construction and circulation of a European public's imaging of the different and distant 'other' located in recently 'discovered' lands. Exotic constructions of the distant, exciting Australian 'other' were most lucrative and politically powerful in the heart of the colonial Empire — Britain. These constructions served to justify and perpetuate the exploitative process of colonialism.

A lust for wonder

A lust for wonder also drove the desire for ornamental imagery of distant cultures. Similar to natural history illustrations, ornamentation operated as a conduit for imaginings and visual constructions of the 'other'. This conduit operated by the direct importation of ornamental artefacts as commodities and by their provision of a resource for the creation of European ornamental imagery. Ornament exists as a visual language, universally created by cultures throughout history and provides insights into cultural priorities, conceptions and perceptions as form is reflected in contemporaneous taste. In Australia the overwhelming perception of an exotic land and peoples established prior

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[286] Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, 169.

to and at initial settlement rapidly subsided into familiarity aided by the calmness of satisfaction of 'ownership' within Australia. The unknown, highly exoticised Aboriginal Australia of 1788 had by 1830 been transformed into a new Britannia within settler's perceptions.[287] Ornament's rapid response to shifts in taste, modifying form to include the exoticised 'other' with its implied associations ensured that it was a sensitive indicator of what and where the desirable 'other' was perceived to be in Australia. In Chapter Three, I provided examples of the infrequent appearance of the exoticised Australian 'other' within ornamental imagery. The variable inclusion of imagery derived from the Australian natural environment and/or indigenous people mirrored the recognition, perception and valuation of the Australian 'other'.

The Australian 'other' provoked a range of responses in settlers but in colonial and Victorian times these were uniformly made within the framework of British preconceptions and valuations. Certainly, the desire for wonder was captivated by aspects of the utter uniqueness of the Australian natural environment. However the difficulties of physical existence, the heat, dryness and an indigenous population that increasingly resisted settlement caused the majority of settlers to attempt to imagine and reconstruct Australia in terms of British ideals. The subliminal mode of operation of the ornamented domestic environment on notions of 'home' and the self (and by exclusion the 'other') ensures that the contribution of this form of imagery is usually under-recognised as a formative cultural text. Ornamental imagery functioned as a primary tool in the process of self definition founded on British tastes and values. The profuse and widespread usage of ornamental imagery in the domestic environment has been fundamental in informing conceptions of both self and national identity. Of all forms of domestic imagery, that of wallpaper is considered the most banal. Its ubiquity and use as background imagery comprised of repeated motifs contribute to this valuation however it is these same visual qualities that bestow its power of psychological operation. The desirable British standard of European fecund floral imagery provided by wallpapers filled the visual fields of the domestic environment in virtually every home during Victorian times. The strong linkage between the construction of the individual self, social identity, material objects and notions of the safe familiarity of home ensured that such imagery subliminally informed the *heimlich* in Australia. Acknowledgment of the 'other' was disavowed, repressed under a mantle of British taste. The uncanny lay nestled within the folds of this mantle. For the majority of

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[287] Neville, *A Rage for Curiosity*, 84.

settlers even while resident in Australia the 'other' remained disagreeable and distant. This distance was both physical as settlement became progressively more urbanised and psychologically as symbols of social identity were sought for from abroad.

The unique features of the construction and experience of the exotic 'other' in Australia were informed by natural history illustration and ornamental imagery as discussed above. Their influence occurred in a specific historical, political and cultural context that operated in conjunction to confer the distinct nature of the Australian 'other'. The specificity of the process of exoticism in Australia was due to three main factors. Firstly, the absolute uniqueness of the Australian continent, its landscape, flora, fauna and indigenous people, allowed a profound plasticity to develop around the 'otherness' of the land, animals and people. The utter strangeness, disappointments and difficulties of existence profoundly influenced perceptions and constructions of the 'other'.

The seemingly unsystematised and bizarre nature of Australia also informed the second factor, namely the nature of the colonial relationship between the British centre and Australian periphery. Australian settlers occupied the uncomfortable territory of both invader and exile. The drive of settlers to renounce their subaltern status of 'other' in relation to the imperial centre drove their cultural productions and constructions.[288] The pervasive consequences of the British imperialistic relationship on the Australian habitus were referred to in Chapter Two. The exoticisation of the Australian 'other' as a desirable commodity was predominately a process that occurred at the imperial centre. A lucrative export trade of signifiers from Australia to Britain occurred subsequent to settlement. This trade of exotica was initially comprised of authentic objects of Indigenous material culture as well as living and dead 'specimens' of Aboriginal people, flora and fauna. Such artefacts which reinforced constructions of the bizarre yet desirable 'other' were dependent on distance and served to reinforce the conception of the exciting but deviant antipodes. The experiences, resultant constructions and their representations in the colony were very different.[289]

The third factor that determined the specificity of the construction of the Australian 'other' was the manner in which British settlement was imposed and layered against the pre-existing indigenous cultures. The establishment and maintenance of the power

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[288] Peter Beilharz, *Imaging the Antipodes: Culture, Theory and the Visual in the Work of Bernard Smith* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 99.

[289] A market for Australian exotica exists in the present however it is predominately trade in mass-produced kitsch souvenirs. This is part of a global interest in affordable artefacts consistent with stereotypic notions of the 'other'.

relationships between imperial centres and their peripheries is discussed by Abdul R. JanMohamed. JanMohamed states that an initial 'dominant' phase based on physical force evolves into a 'hegemonic' phase which operates by establishing various material and discursive cultural practices that utilise representations to reinforce imperial control. The efficient domination of the 'hegemonic' phase is a function of the fact that the imposed political and cultural forms that construct the colonial subject become 'internalised as a condition of psychic reality, and then reproduced as the basis for normative social experience.'[290] Such forms include objectifying textual and visual representations that are comprehended within the mechanism of the Manichean allegory which functions as 'the medium of exchange' within colonial discourse.[291] As discussed in Chapter One, such an exchange system permits the rapid incorporation or substitution of dualistic or binary images that are used to maintain the sense of moral difference.[292] Within Australia I would argue that there was a specific dualistic pairing in the Manichean allegory that operated in the settler's psyche; namely that of the historical settler who was present in the land as opposed to the Aboriginal who was perceived to of become absent.

A series of sequential systems of denial have operated in Australia in an attempt to remove the 'other' from the consciousness the coloniser/settler. Claims of possession based on *Terra Nullius*, the progressive genocide of Aboriginal people, the widespread clearing of land and species extermination by early pastoralists and the progressive forced resettlement of indigenous people on distant missions and reserves was the foundation of the initial expansion of British settlement. The monster of social Darwinism ran rampant in Australia in the 1870s and dominated cultural attitudes until the 1920s. This was essentially an 'ethic of conquest, providing the moral justification for dispossession'.[293] What is significant in the context of how the 'other' was perceived in Australia is that although there were some individuals who publicly voiced their concerns over the ethics of colonisation, the objections were not significant in number until the late twentieth century.[294] As Bernard Smith points out, the horrors of environmental destruction, genocide and dispossession are events that have largely been

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[290] Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*, 171.
[291] JanMohamed, 'The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonist Literature,' 83.
[292] Ibid., 87.
[293] Bernard Smith, *The Spectre of Truganini*, *The 1980 Boyer Lectures* (Sydney: The Australian Broadcasting Commission, 1980), 15.
[294] Mark McKenna, *Looking for Blackfellas' Point: An Australian History of Place* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2002), 28.

repressed in the purposeful construction of myths of Australian nationality. Smith states:

> But for most white Australians it is a nightmare to be thrust out of mind. Yet like the traumatic experiences of childhood it continues to haunt our dreams. And as with childhood so with the childhood of a nation.[295]

As with other incidences of imperial domination the asymmetrical power structure was maintained 'through the psyche as well as through the hand or gun'.[296] Possibly in no other colony was the mechanism of psychic repression of the 'other's' existence and resistance so predominant.

Within *Strangers to Ourselves*, Julia Kristeva explores the aetiology of historical constructions of the stranger or 'other' that developed in the West. Kristeva states that the rejection of 'otherness' became marked with the rise of nationalism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. She considers whatever the geographic origin of the stranger/other is their actual location is within an individual's own psyche. Kristeva writes:

> Strangely, the foreigner lives within us: he is the hidden face of our identity, the space that wrecks our abode, the time in which understanding and affinity founder.[297]

The widespread expression of self-identity within the domestic interior using European constructions of nature was one of the most effective visual mechanisms of evicting the 'otherness' of Australia. The process of repression escalated in the purposeful constructions of national identity that focused on international standards of taste. The teetering relationship within the psyche between the constructs of self and 'other' and the experience of the uncanny was made at the end of Chapter Three. The perception of uncanny strangeness signifies 'our psychotic latencies and the fragility of our repression.'[298] The experience of this perception has the effect of rendering uncertain the placement or identification of oneself with respect to the 'other'. Uncanniness is essentially a de-structuring of the self and while it is an outcome of the return of the familiar repressed, it needs an initiating unexpected trigger.[299] The settler's urge to construct self and national identity based on the absence of the 'other' has had

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[295] Smith, *The Spectre of Truganini*, 17.
[296] Beilharz, *Imaging the Antipodes: Culture, Theory and the Visual in the Work of Bernard Smith*, 94.
[297] Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, 1-2.
[298] Ibid., 187.
[299] Ibid., 188.

reverberating implications on subsequent perceptions of place and identity. Since the early nineteenth century the Australian natural landscape was persistently described as mournful or melancholic. This well-known phenomenon is attributed by Smith as the outcome of repressed fear and guilt rather than nostalgia; a manifestation of the conflation of the bush with aboriginal society.[300] The contemporary experience of the uncanny triggered by the contestation to concepts of self, home and nation was alluded to in Chapter Three. Ken Gelder considers that the uncanny is experienced with increasing frequency and magnitude in post-colonial Australia. He claims that complicated and contradictory political forces have been activated subsequent to the Mabo Decision in 1992 which has initiated increasing unease within settler's concepts of 'home.' Gelder points out:

> The conventional colonial distinctions between self and other, here and there, mine and yours are now by no means totally determinable…boundaries designed to distinguish the one from the other are so hard to draw in modern Australia and, if they are drawn, they are immediately absorbed in a process of use (a politics) which can utterly transform the distinctions they had sought to make.[301]

The perception of the uncanny is more complicated than conflicting land ownership claims. It is fundamentally a questioning of whom and where the 'other' is in Australia; questions asked with trepidation due to growing awareness of how notions of self were constructed by ablating the 'other'.

Stephen Greenblatt states that the operation of wonder offers a portal to the reappraisal of perceptions and constructions of the 'other'. Wonder, as the recognition of unsystematised difference, initially acts as a hiatus while the nature of the difference is assessed. Greenblatt argues that two distinct pathways exist from the experience of wonder to the processes of describing differences, forming judgements and provoking actions:

> 'One path leads to …articulations of the hidden links between the radically opposed ways of being and hence to some form of acceptance of the other in the self and the self in the other. The movement is from radical alterity — you have nothing in common with the other — to self-recognition that is also a mode of self-estrangement: you are the other and the other is you. The alternative path leads …to articulations of the radical differences that make renaming, transformation and appropriation possible. The movement here must pass through identification to complete

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[300] Smith, *The Spectre of Truganini*, 21.
[301] Gelder and Jacobs, *Uncanny Australia: Sacredness and Identity in a Postcolonial Nation* 138.

estrangement: for a moment you see yourself confounded with the other, but then you make the other become an alien object, a thing, that you can destroy or incorporate it at will.[302]

The implication of recognising that the 'other' is located and constructed within the psyche allows the unravelling of the operation of colonial mechanisms of domination while providing psychoanalytical pathways for reconciliation. Psychoanalysis can be considered as a journey into the strangeness or otherness of oneself which allows for understanding of the foreign component of the psyche and an 'ethics of respect for the irreconcilable.'[303] Within the context of this Dissertation the salient point is that awareness of the persuasive operation of visual representations in reinforcing constructions of self and 'other' is necessary in order to question the mechanisms of power relationships. Representing the 'other' so that it is perceived as a desirable and distant commodity ensures that exoticism is a widespread and effective mode of 'othering.' Likewise the ability of commonplace imagery to influence the popular imagination either aesthetically or by sheer ubiquity can not be underestimated in the context of defining the self.

The contribution of either natural history illustration or ornament as visual languages on Australian exotic constructions of the 'other' is highly dependent on the historical period examined. The influence of natural history illustration waned sharply with the advent of photography. The somewhat misguided perception that photographic documentation would provide an unbiased, more scientific record ensured its rapid adoption as the visual documentary tool of choice in the mid nineteenth century.[304] Despite the influence of modernity's emphasis on functional form and materials, ornamental imagery continues to be created and subtly inform cultural perceptions. Today the decorative use of natural colours and textures that evoke of the Australian natural environment is very prevalent and considered both beautiful and formative on Australian notions of place. The contrast between this minimalist imagery with the florid opulence of the Victorian interior exemplifies the influence of the aesthetics of modernism on the current *Kunstwollen* as taste continues to direct the production and consumption of ornamental imagery.

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[302] Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions*, 135.

[303] Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, 182.

[304] Elizabeth Edwards, 'Representation and Reality: Science and the Visual Image,' in *Australia in Oxford*, ed. Howard Morphy and Elizabeth Edwards (Oxford: Pitt Rivers Museum University of Oxford, 1988), 27.

In this research project, delving into commonplace imagery of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries has illuminated how these cultural texts have contributed to the foundations of current cultural concepts. Perusal of natural history illustrations made of the Australian colony and its inhabitants, understanding the cultural significance of this visual language and seeing examples of how this imagery was transformed and circulated both in Australian and British society enables us to perceive the Australian natural environment through colonial and Victorian eyes and minds. Likewise, awareness of the cultural significance that ornamentation had in this period, the profusion and ubiquity of its use and the factors that informed Australian taste for consumption and creation of this imagery provides insight into the role of ornamentation in developing notions of Australian self identity; a self intimately but uneasily related to perceptions of the natural environment. The metaphoric concept of the palimpsest is based on the notion that cultural experiences have a translucent sedimentary structure. Although each historical layer of experiences, texts and constructions are erased and over-written to some degree, ineradicable traces of the past remain as part of the structure of the present. This concept is particularly valuable in post-colonial nations such as Australia as 'it illustrates the ways in which pre-colonial culture as well as the experience of colonisation persists in informing aspects of post-colonial society's developing cultural identity'.[305] Identifying vestigial features of the past is crucial in the search for greater understanding of the present.[306]

In Australia the 'other' is alive and well; reflecting persistently labile notions of the self. Not surprisingly contemporary constructions of the 'other' are also informed by visual representations. Ken Gelder points to the frequency that 'contemporary New Age environmentalism and Jungian spiritualism looks to Aboriginal religion as a means of making modernity reconcilable with itself.'[307] Within Australia, as in other Western countries indigenous spirituality has become a lucrative commodity. Presented as a manifestation of authentic human spirituality this mode of exoticism is offered as the dualistic redemptive partner to secular Western culture criticised as inauthentic by its attachment of material excess.[308] Within a marketplace of cultural difference, it is this constructed authenticity that is valued and sold.[309]

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[305] Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, 174.
[306] Ibid.
[307] Gelder and Jacobs, *Uncanny Australia: Sacredness and Identity in a Postcolonial Nation* 1.
[308] Ibid.
[309] Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*, 158.

Graham Huggan alludes to the fact that authenticity is part of an exotic representational mechanism of the dominate culture that aims to create and transmit a 'familiar domesticated difference'. Rather than being evidence of a contemporary openness, 'it registers the desires of the hegemonic culture to hear 'authentic' tales of the 'other', preferably in accordance of those tales and images already possessed.'[310] Modernity's enthrallment with the sacred and notions of primitive purity direct the readings of art works produced by indigenous communities. The production, circulation and marketing of much indigenous visual art and literature are strongly influenced by Western commercial imperatives that aim to deliver a Western preconception of Aboriginal sacredness. This associated exoticism and consumption of the Aboriginal 'other' by the Western art market has the result of narrowing the possibilities of self-identification open to Aboriginal people rendering the process of reconciliation more rather than less difficult.

The issue of reconciliation between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians is beyond the scope of this Dissertation. However there is merit in examining a range of visual texts created pre- and post-settlement to gain insight into the pervasive manner in which such representations have reinforced notions of self and 'other.' Knowledge of how representations have been used to identify and define ourselves allows greater self awareness. Consideration of the unique environmental, historical and cultural conditions that fostered exotic constructions of the Australian 'other' illuminate why I, like so many other contemporary Australians, experience paradoxical perceptions of place. Such perceptions are likely to persist while political and economic directives continue to inform constructions of the 'other.' The wide acknowledgement of the actuality and repression of the historical horrors associated with colonialism has enabled Australia to move from its infancy as a nation. Within the uncertainty of adolescence the 'other' and self continue to be constructed and reinforced by representations, a process always open to manipulation.

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[310] Ibid., 159.

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Appendix A: Curriculum Vitae

Born 1959, Southport, Queensland

Education

2006-2010, Candidate for Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Studies in Visual Arts, School of Art, Australian National University,

2000-2003, Bachelor of Visual Art, Honours, National Institute of the Arts, ANU

1977-1982, Bachelor of Veterinary Science, Honours, Sydney University

1981, Bachelor of Science (Veterinary), Honours, Sydney University

Solo Exhibitions

2009, *An 'other' visions*, Canberra Contemporary Art Space, Gorman House

2008, *Other Visions*, Foyer Gallery ANU School of Art, Canberra

2006, *Exotica*, Beatty Gallery, Sydney

2005, *Mementos*, Impressions on Paper Gallery, Canberra

2005, *Garden Games*, Canberra Grammar School

2004, *By any Other Name*, Canberra Contemporary Art Space, Manuka

Group Exhibitions

2009, *The Flower Show*, Brenda May Gallery, Waterloo

2009, *M16 Drawing Prize*, M16, Canberra

2009, *Prometheus Visual Art Award*, All Saints Anglican School, Merrimac

2008; *The Gathering* M16 Gallery, Canberra

2007, *Great Southern Land*, Beatty Gallery, Sydney

2007, *Hazelhurst Art Award*, Hazelhurst Regional Gallery

2007, Waterhouse Natural History Prize, South Australian Museum

2007, *Caring for Land*, Curated by Christine Watson, Australian Botanical Gardens

2007, *Prometheus Visual Arts Award*, All Saints Anglican School, Merrimac

2006, *Picture this: painting alumni 2000-6*, ANU School of Art Gallery, Canberra, VCA Gallery, Melbourne

2005, Canberra Contemporary Art Space Award, CCAS, Canberra

2005, *Flock, group show about birds*, Helen Maxwell Gallery, Canberra

2005, Willoughby Art Prize, Chatswood

2005, *Artists' Book Exhibition*, Piece Gallery, Mullumbimby

2005, *Vision Exchange 2005*, Ewha Woman's University, Seoul

2005, *Prometheus Visual Arts Award*, All Saints Anglican School, Merrimac

2005-2007, *How I entered there I cannot truly say*, Collaborative works from the ANU Edition + Artist's Books Studio Artspace Mackay, Bathurst Regional Gallery, State Library of Victoria

2003, *130 degrees*, ANU School of Art Graduating Students, Australian National University

2003, *Land$cape Gold and Water*, Cowra Regional Gallery, CSA foyer Gallery, Orange Regional Gallery

2003, *The Lachlan: Blue-Gold*, Grenfell NSW 2005

Collections

Australian National University

Publications

2007, Trevethick, J., & Dickson, N. 'Rewriting the Exotic': In discussion with Artist Nicola Dickson. Graduate Journal of Asia and Pacific Studies, 5(1), 6-14.

Citations

2003, Martin, Mandy ed., <u>Land$cape, Gold and Water,</u> Environment Studio, School of Art, Australian National University, Canberra

2003, Martin Mandy and Sarah Ryan, eds., <u>The Lachlan: Blue-Gold</u>, Environment Studio, National Institute of the Arts, Australian National University, Canberra

Reviews

2004, Warden, Ian, *Exhibition shows the beast behind the Beauty,* Canberra Times, p7, 23/11/2004

Awards

2009, ANU School of Art Graduate Materials Award in Visual Arts

2009, Highly Commended M16 Drawing Prize

2008, Istituto Italiano di Cultura Premio Italia Award

2008, Cliftons Art Prize,

2006, Australian Post-Graduate Award

2003, EASS ANU Art Collection Acquisitive Award

2003, ANU H C Coombs Scholarship

Residencies

2005-2004, Alumni in Residence, Edition and Artists Book Studio, ANU

Grants

2007-2008; ACT Environment Grant supported by the ACT Government for *Learning the Land*; a project conducted with the ACT scouting association and exhibited at the Belconnen Gallery and Tuggeranong Arts Centre in 2008

Presentations

19/09/2009: *Ornamentation and Western Painting*, Art Worlds Symposium, Art History Department, ANU

5/06/2009: *The Art of Creative Research*, The Research School of Humanities, ANU

Post graduate Poster Presentation at the 32nd Congress of the International Committee of Art Historians (CIHA), Melbourne, 2008

Appendix B: Approved research proposal

General Aim

This PhD project will investigate and compare various forms of cultural interaction with the natural world and how such interaction informs current Australian perceptions of the concepts of 'Nature' and the 'Environment'.

Studio Practice Proposal

Aim

The aim of the studio practice component is to develop a visual language that will encourage the viewer to reassess cultural perceptions regarding the character of the natural world. The project would investigate these perceptions and their visual expression comparing them to factual evidence of how the natural world actually exists. The context of the studio practice is similar to artists such as Fiona Hall who explores 'humanity's relationship with nature'[311], Simryn Gill[312] and Janet Laurence,[313] who both investigate the way in which the concepts of nature and culture interact.

The proposed studio practice component is an extension of my work undertaken in my Honours Year, 2003, which explored how painting may be used to represent the concept of the weed and how this concept relates to cultural perceptions of Nature. Subsequent to graduation I have continued working on this subject and also have explored how plants have been used symbolically to convey a sense of national identity. In addition I have investigated how imagery whose source was either botanical or the human body may be used to construct a sense of memory or longing. Coupled with my more recent experience as a visual artist is my prior academic and work experience within the disciplines of Microbiology and Veterinary Science. These disciplines are based on a

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[311]Julie Ewington, *Fiona Hall,*(Piper Press, Annandale), 23.

[312]Wayne Tunnicliffe, 'Self Selection,' in *Simryn Gill Selected Work,* (Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2002), 9.

[313] Rachel Kent, 'Changing topographies: the environmental art of Janet Laurence,' in *Janet Laurence A Survey Exhibition,* ed. Nancy Severs (Drill Hall Gallery, ANU, 19 August – 25 September 2005), 14.

wide variety of subjects within the Natural Sciences such as botany, agronomy, biology, herd health and veterinary medicine. The study and practice within these fields has allowed me to develop a broad understanding and ability to investigate many aspects of the natural world in a scientific manner.

Methods

In order to fulfil the aim of the proposal, investigation of the following areas would be undertaken:

An initial broad survey of various means of representing the natural world historically and contemporarily in areas as diverse as natural history, narrative, language, decorative and fine arts. Emphasis would be given to how this occurs within the Australian domestic environment.

Establishment of the various aesthetic categories in which such imagery resides.

Ask what conclusions may be drawn from the survey regarding the cultural desire to understand, appreciate and relate to the natural environment.

Compare and contrast these conclusions with research and prior knowledge within the disciplines of ecology, biology and botany.

The development of a visual language that seeks to compare and question the conventions used to represent the natural world, the assumptions derived from such conventions and how the natural world factually operates.

This project would explore the ability of a combination of both paint and printing techniques to act as a medium of such a language. The anticipated outcome would be the production of a body of paintings that juxtapose imagery derived from the natural world, both historical and contemporary in origin, with factual visual evidence of how the natural world functions. Manipulation and experimentation within the relationship between the figure and ground of the painting, constructed with the use of stencilling and screenprinting techniques, would be the means of achieving this juxtaposition. A further challenge to cultural perceptions would be achieved by shifting the subjects of these paintings from within the aesthetic categories they are usually found. An example of this would be the representation of a flowering plant using visual devices that ensure that the viewer experiences a sense of the sublime or grotesque rather than the beautiful.

The resultant body of work from the studio practice would allow reconsideration of presuppositions regarding the natural world.

Dissertation Proposal

Aim and Context

As a society our willingness to engage with issues related to environmental degradation is partly determined by how humanity defines its relationship with the natural world. The intricacies and character of the natural world are often broadly understood within the concept 'Nature'. This concept has a long history of being defined as a site separate from humanity, benign and emotional restorative.[314] This Dissertation would seek to argue that forms of visual culture commonly found in the Australian domestic environment foster an idealistic rather than realistic notion of the natural world. Such imagery acting to perpetuate the myth of a dichotomous relationship between Nature and Culture interfering with society's ability to acknowledge issues of environmental decline.

The Dissertation would involve both an exploration and evaluation of forms of imagery representing aspects of the natural world found historically and contemporarily within the Australian domestic environment. Such imagery is found in various mediums, however the Dissertation would concentrate on the ability of imagery found in the decorative arts, such as the patterning found in wallpaper, plasterwork, textiles, wood and metal work, to reflect and influence our relationship with the natural world.

An underlying premise of the Dissertation is that the trends that occur regarding choice of imagery to be included within our homes are a reflection of culturally informed taste. John Carey quotes a survey performed by Pierre Bourdieu in France in the 1960's that concluded that taste is 'a marker of class, reflecting educational level, social origin and economic power'.[315] Based on this premise, examination of various forms of imagery found in the domestic environment both in the past and currently, gives an indication of various influential perceptions of the natural world. Likewise Paula Wynell Bradley concludes that the individual units ordered within patterns provide historical and

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[314] Peter Timms, *Making Nature Six Walks in the Bush*, (Allen and Unwin, Crows Nest, 2001), 44.
[315] John Carey, *What good are the arts?*, (Fabar and Faber Ltd, London, 2005), 118.

cultural insights into the society that created such patterns.[316] By examination and reflection on the changes within decorative imagery based on the natural world found within the Australian home, assumptions regarding perceptions of the natural world may be made.

Method

The argument within the Dissertation would be developed by:

Initial research and survey work in order to record various forms of imagery used both in the past and present throughout a range of Australian domestic environments.

Examination of which aspects of the natural world are represented within forms of decorative imagery.

Develop conclusions regarding the forms and prevalence of patterning as evidence of past and present Australian attitudes to the natural world.

Compare these conclusions to contemporary notions regarding Nature and the Environment

The desired outcome from such a project would be an analysis and understanding of the role of this aspect of Australian visual culture in shaping society's relationship with the natural world.

The knowledge gained from the Dissertation will allow engagement with a breadth of visual conventions that influence cultural perceptions of the natural world, many of which would be of relevance to my studio practice.

Summary

The use of art allows the exploration of the relationship between humanity and the ineffable that exists in the natural world. The combination of the knowledge gained from the Dissertation and the visual research involved in the studio practice I believe would allow the development of a unique visual language. The creation of such a visual language that aims to elicit an aesthetic response on the part of the viewer may initiate a

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[316] Paula Wynell Bradley, *Miriam Schapiro: The feminist Transformation of an Avant-Garde,* (PhD thesis, North Carolina, 1983), 116.

reappraisal of assumptions regarding the concept of Nature and more practically actual environmental issues in a manner different to the consideration of text-based information alone.

In order to undertake this PhD project studio accommodation, access to library, computer and print- making facilities would be necessary.

Bibliography

Carey John, *What good are the arts?* Faber and Faber Ltd, London, 2005, 118

Ewington Julie, *Fiona Hall,* Piper Press, Annandale, 2005, 23

Kent Rachel, 'Changing topographies: the environmental art of Janet Laurence,' in *Janet Laurence A Survey Exhibition*, edited by Nancy Severs, 14. Drill Hall Gallery, ANU, 19th August – 25thSeptember, 2005.

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Tunnicliffe Wayne, 'Self Selection,' in *Simryn Gill Selected Work, 9.* Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2002.

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