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Telling stories: text analysis in a museum

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Abstract
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Telling Stories: Text Analysis in a Museum

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Introduction

Why analyse a museum text?

Museum texts tell interesting stories, and their role in public education makes them quite important. The exhibition discussed in this paper gives a message that interests, but also concerns me, as a teacher of language, communication and cultural studies. It is a case of one culture telling stories about another, and in such a delicate arena there is much potential to cause offence.

The exhibition in question is about peoples of the Pacific, and is in a major European museum of the world's indigenous cultures (Berlin-Dahlem). I had visited it to see how Australian cultures are represented in image and language and subsequently discussed the representations with students of Australian Studies, translation and text grammar at Potsdam University. The museum texts raise central problems of communication. They are highly academic in style and not at all designed for the general visitor with no previous knowledge of the topic. For readers with a great deal of previous knowledge in the area, they raise serious discursive conflicts and involve inter-cultural issues of racism and misrepresentation.

Representations of Australia are of course less likely to become contested ground in Europe than they are in Australia, and a remote place like Europe cannot perhaps be expected to maintain knowledge of cultural debates with the same degree of currency and complexity that is part of life in Australia. Knowledge of indigenous cultures is of a different order, however, where those cultures exist and have at least some chance to represent themselves. Wherever and whenever it occurs, when one culture is telling its members about another group of people, rather than inviting and enabling them to speak for themselves in some way, and carefully listening to them, we need to be wary of what is being said, how the story is being told, and why.
Dialogue between cultures, as between individuals, is possible; yet communication is often monologic and entirely self-interested.

My concern about the Berlin exhibition texts and about the museum’s response to the suggestion that they were problematic, grew when I saw the Australian documentary film, Cracks in the Mask (Calvert, 1997). It shows a leading Torres Strait Islander, Ephraim Bani, exploring the ethnographic museums in Europe which “own” Torres Strait artefacts. The objects on show in the museums, taken out of the contexts they were made to function within, have become signs read by strangers on the basis of entirely different sets of ideas in these new contexts. As well as wanting to be with culturally significant things that are no longer at home, he was curious to know how these items had entered museums and whether they might be repatriated. The curators had various responses to Mr. Bani’s questions, some conservatively “Eurocentric” others quite “post-modern.” The voice of the Berlin museum in this inter-cultural documentary was of particular interest to me, because it echoed some of the attitudes and issues I had encountered in the museum’s texts, and it further illustrated how uneasy the meeting of different intellectual and social histories can be.

Looking at museum texts in detail

The museum of indigenous cultures in Berlin-Dahlem houses a large and impressive exhibition of the South Pacific, covering two floors. The exhibition is dominated by vertical glass case displays of masks and other artefacts from Papua New Guinea, objects from various island cultures, and huge installations of boats and houses. It was set up in 1970 in a new building to display some items from an extensive and valuable collection, which began as long ago as the Cook/Forster voyage. Within the exhibition there is also a small display of indigenous culture from mainland Australia. It is located in a corner which most visitors see last, if at all. (Entering the exhibition, the eye teds to be drawn to the large boats at the end of the passageway to the right, and a guide sheet, available at the entrance, instructs the visitor to turn right and follow an order which visits Australia last.) The only reference to the Australia section in that guide text is a paragraph describing its three display cases as “an overview of Australian material culture, weapons, implements and ornaments”, “rounded off by a little gallery of bark paintings”.

The image of indigenous Australia constructed here, though not unusual and not without a history, is surprising in the context of an institution one would expect to have a contemporary and critical knowledge of its subject. Without the resources to survey a hundred visitors' readings of the exhibition, I asked one acquaintance to visit it and record a spontaneous running description of what she was seeing onto dictaphone. The informant I sought was a local (not another Australian like myself), who knew little or nothing about Australian and Pacific cultures. Her account of message that the visual display gave is presented in the following section.

The exhibition also includes language texts, and their role in reinforcing the message of the visual display is the main object of concern and analysis for this paper. The language is analysed from a 'functional' perspective, using descriptive terms from the Functional Grammar of Halliday (1985) in particular. Apart from the meanings that texts and readers make, and what social and textual histories inform these, what interests text analysts is how those meanings are made. Analysing the grammar of the texts shows how they are organised to make the meanings they make and how they manage to get a particular message across. The final section discusses the language features identified in the analysis, as well as some broader implications of the ways the exhibition works.

**European vision**

*First Impressions of the 'South Seas'*

The following description of the Australia section of the South Pacific exhibition is a summarised version of my volunteer's tape-recorded reading. "Quoted" elements are translations of her wordings, which are linked by explanations of what is being described. The informant is a native of the local culture (Berlin) with no specific knowledge about the Pacific region previous to the museum visit. The floor plan of the museum in Figure 1. shows the location of the Australia section (#38, 39, 41).

The informant first noted and approached a huge black and white photograph of an elderly man painting patterns onto an object. Several bark paintings are displayed nearby, and she soon guessed he was painting such an object, which she described as a "wooden board". She then read the label in front of the bark paintings identifying one decorative image as "mythical snake, symbol of creative powers throughout Australia". The label also specified the material
Figure 1. The floor plan of the museum.
composition of the bark paintings and burial poles, but not who made them or why. Seeking to understand the objects, she collected and skim read the information text available in this section of the exhibition. It neither explained, nor referred explicitly to the objects on show (see Appendix 2 for the complete text, # 71), and the only remark relating to visual arts ended with the text given in (1):

(1) ... making art work was not a means of personal expression for Australians, but the visible expression of their religious worldview. This is especially true of their most remarkable works of art, the rock and bark paintings, which represent mythical motifs in 'x-ray' style... Artistic and religious acts coalesce in these works, when the objects are ritually 'touched' each year, that is, their colours freshened, ensuring the maintenance of the order of things.

On leaving the exhibition she found one further mention of the bark paintings in an information text in the foyer: "they mirror the worldview of these people, their imaginings of creative beings and spirits, mythical animals and events and their dream experiences"—an explanation she considered inadequate and unhelpful.

Moving on to look at objects in a glass case (41 on floorplan), she described them as "like jewellery", saying they were "not particularly attractive", "like rough thick wool". Compared to the objects seen elsewhere in the South Seas exhibition from island cultures, she thought these seemed "solid, lacking finesse, very undeveloped". She then commented on another large black and white photograph, grainy and out of focus, which she described as "poorly developed". It represents a desert landscape with a large rock formation in the background and open plain in the foreground—barren, sparsely covered with dried-out trees. An element she tried to, but could not with certainty, identify is what seems to be a group of Aboriginal people, on the margin of the image, walking in the general direction of the viewer through the long grass.

The next glass case (40) was described as "full of weapons and hunting tools, rough, large, heavy", and gave a general impression of "underdevelopment" in relation to the skilful boat technologies of the island cultures seen at the other end of the exhibition floor. "Underdeveloped" was a key word that kept recurring in the commentary, and the informant was finding most of the display of Australian objects rather dull. What really caught her attention and amused her, was a small diorama, a model to be viewed through a window, set in a wall at eye level. The only other such model in the South Seas exhibition, near the entry, is one of a complex elegant and
elaborate long house in a lush bush setting. The contrast between these two models is stark.

The vignette of Aboriginal Australia represents the model maker's idea of a typical family group in traditional society. The small figures are in an "extremely dusty dry space" framed by "twisted small dried out trees" with several "dead bushes scattered about", a semi-circular painted landscape background creating the illusion of space and perspective. At the centre of the representation is "a lean-to structure of gnarled roots", over which is hung "some sort of skin or cloth" in what looked like "an attempt at a tent" - all of which gave a very "uncultivated" impression. Beside the tent kneels a naked woman with child, "their stomachs protruding to indicate malnutrition". The woman is "grinding something in a bowl". Lying about everywhere are "tiny boomerangs". In the foreground sits "the man, responsible for fire making". A second man, standing by a tree, "shaved head bar pony-tail", stands holding a spear in a posture interpreted as "looking out for some randomly passing animal he might be able to hunt for feed (sic)". He also had a "malnourished appearance". In the background, a group of much smaller figures, (an almost bald woman, an adolescent male, led by a man with long hair), appear to be "heading towards the camp" at speed.

Overall the image the informant gained of indigenous Australia "before the Europeans came" was of a "miserable, dehydrated, inhuman life; primitive random wanderers, on the verge of starvation, in an impossibly harsh environment, and inevitably dying out".

Knowing subjects and others

This reading of the exhibition's message may seem extreme, but was predictable. Visitors can of course make various interpretations and evaluations, change their understanding and disagree with a text's message, but resistance is a response to meanings that the text has already established. This informant was not evaluating what the exhibition seemed to her to be saying, but giving a deliberately simple recount of its message. It is perhaps the message most visitors are likely to take away as a lasting memory, and to accept as the facts about who Aboriginal Australians "are" (or rather "were" – the museum insists that the exhibition is "documenting" a culture that colonisation has completely extinguished).

The "facts" presented are that indigenous people on the mainland lived in the desert, had a materially crude and regionally undifferenti-
ated culture, and a mysterious and perhaps inexplicable intellectual life. Several giant black and white photographs dominate the section with desert images, implying that everything on show comes from such an (apparently) inhospitable region. Indigenous cultures across the continent are "located" by a single red dot in the centre of a basic map on label panels at the front of each display case, as though, irrespective of whether an item comes from the south, east, north, west or centre, the "same" culture made it. (In contrast to the Papua New Guinea section, where an impressive range of artefacts on display, rather than landscape photographs, is accompanied by detailed maps to identify where objects come from and to differentiate cultural groups.) In the light of the wealth of information available to researchers about indigenous cultures in Australia, their histories, technologies, practices, adaptations, environmental and cultural diversity, this exhibition is more than embarrassing. One must wonder why such a museum continues to tell a "Daisy Bates" style story about Australia, rather than giving some access to stories indigenous cultures themselves tell about who they are, what they do, and why.

The "subject" of a text is, on the one hand, what the visitor comes to see and understand – the object in view, the facts the museum claims to know and show through its representation of the other. The "subject" of a text can however also refer to the voice speaking it – the "subjectivity". Any text, in both factual and fictional genres, tells as much about its maker as about that which has been made the object of its view, its story, its interpretation of the world. Texts document the priorities and choices someone has made in order to frame events and people in particular ways. Although "text" is very often read as a mirror of things as they are in the "world out there", it can also be recognised as a projection of a particular speaking voice into the social space it has to function within. The representation of indigenous Australia here is partly about "them", but also about the cultured "me" speaking, what this particular "I" knows, does not know, and avoids knowing about "them" to preserve its own identity. It is a theoretical convenience to describe a text's meaning in terms of content, separate from the "subjectivity" and "pragmatics" of the communication. However, every text is designed to operate as a representation and as a social interaction, so that its speaker, audience, purpose and context are in fact as much part of the picture presented as the topic.

The museum’s presentation of Aboriginal Australia is, like any text, a record of selections made from all the possible meanings and
encodings that constitute the culture – not the culture of Aborigines, but the culture the text is made within and for. The exhibition of Oceania and Australia is made within and for a European, German, academic, museum culture, and is based on a rich network of other texts in circulation. The following section examines how language used in the exhibition supports the view of the subject given by the visual representation.

**Language Analysis**

*Choice of text*

There are two types of language text accompanying the displays of artefacts: labels and take away information sheets. There are neither panels nor wall texts of basic information to guide the visitor.

The labels are not the focus of my attention as they give only very minimal information, though they are worthy of some comments. They are positioned at the front of each of the three cases of Australian artefacts, and classified by basic function, material and origin. The understanding they enable is compromised somewhat by an inconsistency of classification (the function of objects is not always indicated, and some labels give more specific information than others). Materials are also not always identified in the labels. More problematic, however, is the identification of origins. Some labels name the community which made the object, others name the geographic area. This distinction is not indicated, so that the visitor who does not already know what names such as "Aranda" or "Garadjeri" refer to, might assume they are geographic (as "Kimberley" and "Queensland" are). One label breaks with the pattern of the others entirely. It puts the function of the item in scare quotes ("coat"), suggesting perhaps that the word represents a borrowed concept not applicable to the object. It does not identify the community the object comes from, or any more specific function, but indicates why the museum values it ("only 10 of these objects remain in museums today in the whole world").

The lengthier information texts are of greater significance in terms of their power to influence the visitor’s view of indigenous cultures in the Pacific. Their relationship to the exhibition seems more that of general background reading than explanation of specific objects, to which they make little or no reference. These texts are around a thousand words each and are lexically formal and "dense", that is, the number of "content" words per clause is high (nouns, adjectives,
verbs, adverbials). As is also typical of academic writing, their clauses tend to be simply inter-related (infrequent subordination and projection), but full of very complex nominal structures. This density, together with the (minimal) charge, may discourage their being read by visitors, who might prefer to rely on their own "general knowledge" to make sense of the exhibition. Nevertheless, two such texts are analysed in detail below, as they provide at least some form of "explanation" of the exhibition's general message. One, entitled "Australia" is to be found within the Australia section of the South Seas exhibition, the other, entitled "The South Seas Exhibition: a Documentation of the Past", in the foyer at the entrance to the exhibition.

The texts are numbered 71 and 100, and so are clearly part of a much larger system of information. Numbered texts such as these are available throughout the public museums network in Berlin (Staatsliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz Berlin), and they are designed for visitors to collect and store in ring binders, which are for sale at the museum stores. Throughout the South Seas exhibition, on the ground floor alone, there are over thirty such information sheets, and a further half dozen in the foyer before the exhibition. There are nine about Papua New Guinea, ten about other specific islands, six about Oceania in general, seven about boats and fishing in the Pacific and one about Australia in particular. The texts are written in German; English translations are attached in Appendix 2. Text 71 is the only text specifically about Australia, rather than Oceanic cultures in general or an anthropological subject (such as "totemism", the title of the other text found in the Australia section). Before discussing the language analysis, the method and terminology used may need some explanation.

Procedure and terminology

The area of grammar focused on for this description is "Transitivity". The patterns of transitivity choices made throughout the texts are significant in terms of frequency and the attitude towards their object that they establish. The analysis is based on descriptive categories used in systemic-functional theory, capitalised terms being those used in Functional Grammar (Halliday 1985; Eggins 1994; Martin et al. 1997; Bloor & Bloor 1995; Thompson 1996).

Transitivity refers to the language choices made to represent "who is doing what to whom" in the image of the world a given text creates.
and the expressions of time and place represented as Circumstances. These are the three elements potentially involved in any clause's representation of experience. Choices in Process and Participant type are largely motivated by the topic, but also by the type of text. Texts about indigenous cultures in the Pacific will obviously involve representations of them as Participants, and locate events on the islands, and the academic type of text used in this case means that many Participants are abstract, and events are often represented as things rather than Processes. Grammatical choices are however also motivated by the ideology being voiced through the text, which is intimately connected to contextual and inter-cultural features of the communication.

The Processes identified in the description are of three main types: "Material" Processes involve an active (Actor) Participant, may also represent some other Participant affected by the event (Goal), and perhaps a Location (I threw the book out the window). "Relational" Processes attribute someone or something with a quality (I am tough) or identify the Participant with a role or Value (I am the great pretender). "Mental" Processes are those of perception, involving a Sensor and a Phenomenon (I saw the show).

The less frequent Processes in these texts are "Verbal" (I said "read this"), Behavioural (I laugh and cry every day), and Existential (There is a virus in my computer). The categorisation of Processes becomes interesting when a text is examined to see, for example, who tends to be represented as an active doer, who is attributed with certain qualities, who is represented as feeling rather than doing, whose actions are represented as affecting others and whose are not.

Looking at what is happening and who is involved in a clause in terms of Transitivity asks who is doing what, and to whom. An event involving more than one Participant is described as "transitive", though the Actor might be left out of the representation (I dropped the book in the lake/the book was dropped into the lake). An action involving only one Participant is described as "intransitive" (Drop dead!/He jumped in the lake). Another perspective on the clause is to describe its Ergativity, asking which entity (Medium) is necessary for the event to take place. The throwing of a book cannot be represented without the book, whereas who is responsible for the action (the Agent), may or may not be represented in the clause. This is an interesting perspective when a text is examined to see whether it tends to represent events as done by someone or as occurring autonomously. Whether describing Process and Participant choices or the representation of Agency, the point is that an event such as colonisation (or any social change, or any event) can be represented
or the representation of Agency, the point is that an event such as colonisation (or any social change, or any event) can be represented in many different ways: we changed them; things changed on the islands; changes were made; the way things were required changing; change was waiting around the corner; things were begging to be changed; the situation forced them to make some necessary changes; they were confronted with change; they decided to change the way they did some things; they changed their lives; their culture was transformed; elements of culture have melted into a new form.

A feature of the texts is the high frequency of "grammatical metaphor" in the representation of events. In the version elements of culture have melted into a new form, for example, specific social practices are "metaphorically" represented as though fixed-form solids based on natural elements, such as ice or metal. One reason for describing the configuration of meaning in a clause as "metaphorical" is to draw attention to the notion of choice and the potential significance of the lexical and grammatical selections made. It is precisely because it is possible to represent the same event in many different ways that the choices that are actually made in any particular representation signify at all. This at least is the premise of the systemic-functional theory of language. It is only in relation to what could have been put into the representation but was not, that what has been used can mean anything at all. Points of choice are lexical and grammatical, and Transitivity is just one area of text grammar. Wherever choices have been made, there are motivations and consequences, and the nature of the contextual motivation (e.g., the constraints of register, genre and ideology that have shaped a representation) is all part of what a functional grammar seeks to describe. The Process choices represented in the texts are summarised in Tables 1 and 2. Transitivity features, as well as Agency, abstraction and metaphor in the texts, are then commented on in the final section.

Table 1. The 'South Seas Exhibition' text (guide sheet Text 100)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>92 clauses (excluding projections and quotations)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>41 Material Processes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29 Relational Processes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 Mental Processes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Existential Processes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Verbal Process</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2. The 'Australia' text (guide sheet Text 71)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>51 Relational Processes</td>
<td>(c. 57 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 Material Processes</td>
<td>(c. 35 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4  Existential Processes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2  Mental Processes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1  Behavioural Process</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Process types identified in Tables 1 and 2 are categorisations of the original German. (See Appendix 1 for each clause and Appendix 2 for the complete texts in English.)

Commentary on the grammar of the texts

In the South Seas text, almost half the Processes are Material, thirty percent Relational, and twenty percent Mental. Looking firstly at the Material clauses, Participants in the action are variously distributed. In the clauses representing events as transitive (half the total), the Actor roles are represented in only a third of the clauses (e.g., Whites discovered the country, missionaries tried to change traditional life), being either implicit or obscured in the other two-thirds, e.g., traditional cultures were destroyed (by Europeans), basalt technology was abandoned (by islanders), churches were erected (Actor is unspecified or implicit), objects were collected (by whom unspecified). The Actors in the transitive clauses through the text, that is, Participants whose actions affect other Participants in the events, are almost exclusively Europeans. Whites discover the islands, bring plants and animals, and aim to get power, European ships leave tools, missionaries change traditional life. Islanders are represented as acting upon themselves, not upon others. Though indigenous people were presumably doing most of the building of schools and churches, most of the activity involved in adapting to new ideas, materials or practices, and forming nations, their agency is obscured, backgrounded, denied, left out or left ambiguous. Islanders are implicitly involved in abandoning their own technology, adopting European clothes, using traditional objects and making them badly with European technologies. Agency is implicit, though not represented, when Europeans are actively involved in changing, destroying, wiping out, decimating and "collecting" island cultures, in offering their culture and introducing their diseases.

In the Material clauses representing events as intransitive, that is, involving only one Participant, the clauses representing Europeans as active in some event show them doing very specific activities.
Whites begin to transform, their ships head for the Pacific, missionaries settle and gain power, sailors and traders live and settle, whalers trade, ships visit. Islanders in this role do rather less clear-cut activities. They do plant, fish, build and imitate, but they are also involved in existing, meeting problems, emerging, collapsing and vanishing, and the activities they are centrally involved in are more often represented as abstractions – cults, nations, cultural elements, culture, stone age, traditional life. Their use of new technologies is represented without their involvement (metal came into use) or with their failure (despite improved tools, objects were made badly).

Relational clauses are used to locate, define, classify and evaluate the Pacific cultures being described. A high number of these clauses involve grammatical metaphor, whereby Agency is attributed to a Participant as though an event were being described rather than a state or logical relation (the exhibition "gives" an overview, the westernisation of Oceania "began" in the 16th century, missionaries "came to" power, colonial division "came to" an end, WWII "led to" a levelling of cultures, the Christian religion "replaced" traditional beliefs, metal "came into" use, tin cans "replaced" wooden vessels, the task of collecting "fell to" museums). When people in the Pacific islands began to use metal instead of stone, wood, bone and shell for a variety of purposes, the text encodes these events not in terms of people doing something, but as metal doing something. (*Metal tools came into use.*) It gives an image of indigenous people not explicitly participating in the use of the new materials, not actively engaging in intellectual and material processes. The interesting question is whether the text occasionally varies lexical and grammatical choices to avoid monotony or whether attributing Agency to the Islanders is being deliberately avoided for ideological reasons.

The third significant type of Process in the image of the world the text sets up is Mental. Half of the perceiving is done by islanders (experiencing, learning, feeling, seeing and believing). The other statistically significant Participant in this kind of Process is "we", the museum visitors, who are positioned as experiencers, evaluators and observers of the islanders.

While the South Seas text narrates a "history", in which the active protagonists are Europeans, the Australia text uses a different genre of representation. The dominant Process type is Relational (well over half) and Material accounts for around thirty percent. So the dominant design of the text is to define and classify the people and situation described. Aborigines are identified as Tasmanoids, as hunter-
gatherers and as exogamous, they are attributed with a homogenous culture and with tasks, and aspects of their culture are classified, located or identified as wanting, or are attributed with interest value, totems and tradition. Aborigines are not made subjects of a historical story, but objects of an anthropological examination. The frequent material clauses often represent Aborigines as Actors in various activities, though inanimate and abstract entities are slightly more often in the Actor role than are Aborigines. Agency is represented when Aborigines are hunting, gathering, cooking, going naked, protecting, sometimes when they are making decisions and living but not always, when they are seeking partners and gaining energy at ceremonies. Agency is not represented when Aborigines are settling, killing, roaming, regulating social behaviour, or making tools, huts, baskets or art.

The significance of grammatical choices observed in these texts depends on the nature of the patterns established throughout. One example of a metaphor such as metal came into use may not indicate very much. It may function within the thematic development of the text (the pattern of clause beginnings that indicate the departure point of each "message" the clause represents). There may be a preference to begin the clause with "tools" rather than "people", for example, if the previous clause ended with tools, and it would create cohesion to pick up on that informational element again and move on from there. Or had the clause occurred in a chunk of text, a paragraph, which is about metals, with most clauses beginning with a reference to metals as their point of departure. In the case of these texts, such factors do not seem to be the motivating principle of the choices made. The very high degree of metaphoric expression in the two texts analysed is arguably quite inappropriate in a public information text in a contemporary museum (see Ferguson et al. 1996: 6, 11-12, 32; Ravelli 1996: 369, 382). Apart from objections that could be raised with regard to the reading difficulty such complexity (Halliday 1985: 329-230) confronts visitors with, the "tensions" in the grammar of these texts need some explaining (Halliday 1985: 230). There is a clearly "ideological" motivation for the predominantly incongruous transitivity choices running through the texts. It is striking how often events are represented so that indigenous people are passive and Europeans active, and how often events occur by themselves without the apparent involvement of people (e.g., the colonial division of the islands came to an end, the Christian religion replaced traditional beliefs, the task fell upon museums to collect and protect these cultures, grasses provided materials for wickerwork, power lay with
the elders). In the Australia text there is a striking tendency to represent states and events in the negative. Indigenous people are represented as not knowing and doing, as lacking knowledge and unable to act. Occasional examples do not have a great influence on the view we form, but frequent repetition makes patterns which do.

Textual and cultural politics

The grammatical patterns discussed above are given attention because, as Bain Attwood (1992: xiii) puts it, "the problematic of our representations lies not in the fact that we speak, but in the particular nature of how and what we speak. This is what determines whether the effects of European representations are reprehensible or not." Ideology is encoded in the lexicogrammar of texts and is the area of text production least likely to be changed by the museum on its own initiative. Many museum representations of Aboriginal cultures have shifted away from the display of "them" towards an emphasis on the subjects of collecting practices (the European), and make the historical processes of colonisation behind their collections clearer. Yet many others have not even begun to consider the issues raised in postcolonial or post-Aboriginalist discourses (Attwood 1992: xv).

Museums do not just house objects; they communicate ideas. A major idea implicit in this exhibition's visual display and in various of its texts is a "social Darwinist" view of cultural evolution. This is a view also, and most famously, evident in the Pitt Rivers museum (Oxford), where artefacts from various regions are displayed in such a way as to "evidence" cultural evolution from the most "primitive" to the more modern. It classifies and hierarchically arranges artefacts from various cultures to give a picture of the "evolutionary progress" of human history. Such "scientific" displays give an authoritative message that cultures can be represented by a few of their objects, and that these are incontrovertible evidence of the natural and obvious rank of cultural "development". Another information sheet in the Berlin exhibition, number 51, makes the comparative imperative explicit - the visitor is instructed to observe how building and weaving technologies in some islands are particularly developed in relation to other cultures in the exhibition.

The visual and written texts in the Berlin-Dahlem ethnographic museum are reminiscent of many others in the history of representations of indigenous peoples - from the beginnings of colonisation to the present. Passages from a 1908 paper in the Royal School series of
high school readers, *Aborigines of Australia*, from the 1937 Queensland government documentary film *The Native Problem* and from Daisy Bates’ *The Passing of the Aborigines* are very similar. The writers of the texts have simply continued a form of representation on the basis of precedent and of ignorance of alternatives from different textual and life experience. This traditional view of the colonising culture is of course not neutral, nor do curators simply or neutrally "describe" what is; they interpret.

There is nothing that can be done, in a museum context (in any context) that does not carry meaning at some level. There is no placement of an item, no writing of a label, no control of space, no use of an illustration, that does not carry meaning. Given this perspective, there is not even such a simple thing as a fact, for a fact is simply a meaning constructed within a particular system (Ravelli 1997: 4).

Curators make a small and careful selection of objects from their museum’s vast collections, themselves small selections from the vast potential of materials the cultures from which they are taken have, or had. Each selection and arrangement is made for a specific audience and is significant, purposeful (multi-purposed), designed and motivated. Why the Berlin museum avoids representing the various, dynamic, diverse and transforming cultures of Australia’s indigenous peoples is an interesting question. Ignorance and inadequate research, but also perhaps a refusal to enter into self-reflective theory and dialogue with indigenous people, or an assumption that this is the story the public wants to hear. The lack of wall text in this exhibition is based on the view, dominant in many art museums since the 1970s, that objects can speak for themselves. But signs cannot speak for themselves, it is the readers and the text makers who make the meanings we attribute to the objects in an exhibition.

**Conclusion**

The various representations of Australia one sees overseas, from slide show posters of "the outback" to shows in art galleries and museums, make useful objects for critical discussion of culture, representation and subjectivity. This ethnographic museum is a particularly interesting object for a case study as it says a great deal about both the culture spoken about and the culture speaking, and the intellectual history of the representation is easy to trace. For students unused to doing it, it is quite challenging to shift conscious attention away from
the "content" of a representation to its mode and manner of constructing identities and relationships between people, and to recognise that all these types of meaning are co-occurring all the time. Without the challenge of alternative, we adopt a default reading strategy, governed by a "conduit metaphor" (Reddy 1979). We tend to read language and visual texts as though they were windows through to a reality which exists in the same form outside of the particular framing a representation is making. Rather than questioning the story being told, and the hierarchy of cultures being set up in the whole Pacific exhibition, most visitors to the exhibition will imagine that they are seeing it the way it is, that the frame is a value free view through to another culture. The representation seems natural, obvious and true.

While "most ethnographic museums have had to address problems of representation – how the West classifies, categorises and represents other cultures" (Lidchi 1997: 153), this one seems to have avoided the debate and successfully maintained a very conservative view of "the Other". This poses a problem both for any "Others" who might happen to pass through and be offended, as well as for visitors educated after the exhibition was conceived and the texts written (1970's), within a very changed discursive environment of writings across the disciplines of anthropology, cultural studies, semiotics, linguistics and the visual arts. The challenge in the context of a cultural studies seminar is to get students to look less at what the "other people" (in this case indigenous Australians) "are like", and more at how the European representation of 'them' expresses a European desire to see and believe certain things about them.

Representing and making sense of another culture is never neutral – there is unavoidable bias and inequality of position. For however "well-meaning" or written with a conviction of scientific objectivity and neutrality, the texts represent one group of people is classifying, describing and telling stories about another, on their own terms; stories that their audiences believe, in storytelling modes which do not invite backchat. It is not easy to see or explain how texts gain their authority to tell what passes for the truth in our own culture. The contexts of situation and culture expressed through the texts we make are instantiations of ourselves, even as we speak "about" someone else, we are representing ourselves, our values, our desires, the ways we want to tell our story.

How do texts, visual and linguistic, get authority, and how is it that their power is so rarely challenged? For one thing, our culture has, like any other, habitual ways of storytelling and making sense of phenomena that we slip comfortably into. For another, texts use specific
grammatical strategies to gain credibility. And added to this, we tend to hold objects responsible for not changing our views of them; as though the material stability of the artefacts, tools and traditional art works on display are evidence of the "fact" that the people who made them do not change. It might rather be the storytellers who are unenlightened and incapable of change. Though all representations encourage particular readings, readers are not enslaved to comply. The museum visitor can look critically at the "poetics of representation", at how exhibitions lead us into accepting a particular view of the world. We can focus less on "correcting our vision" of other cultures, less on "scientifically true" stories about them, and more on the way we tell scientific stories about them, and why we do. We can direct our attention onto the techniques of story telling that define our culture, on our styles of writing and reading, and how they serve our interests as story tellers and audiences.

Notes

1 Special thanks to Regina Walter-Lehmann, my native Berlin informant.
2 Daisy Bates’ (1938) The Passing of the Aborigines is a much read and reprinted narrative, telling the story of a British woman's 35 years living with the indigenous people of Australia. The view of them presented is classic and conservatively embedded within European intellectual history – they are barbaric, cannibalistic, wandering primitive but fascinating people, on the verge of extinction. As one of the prefaces to the 1966 edition put it, "their race is bound to disappear... They should be left as free as possible, to pass from existence as happily as may be".

References


Appendix I: Transitivity Analysis

The following is an attempt to classify the clauses of the original German texts. As these classifications are based on the system of English, very little work having been done as yet on theorising and describing the Transitivity system of German within a Hallidayan framework, they may need to be criticised and modified. They are offered as a step towards the development of a German-specific description of this area of the grammar.

THE SOUTH SEAS EXHIBITION (guide sheet Text 100)

"A Documentation of the past"

1. die traditionellen Kulturen... sind... verändert oder vernichtet worden  
   traditional cultures have been changed or destroyed  
   Material (2)

2. Nur im Hochland... existieren noch kaum gestörte Gemeinschaften  
   undisturbed communities exist only in the highlands  
   Existential

3. diese Ausstellung soll einen Uebersicht... jener Völker geben  
   this exhibition aims to give an overview of... these peoples  
   Relational

4. wie sie entwickelt waren  
   as they were developed  
   Relational

5. als die Weißen das Land entdeckt hatten  
   when Whites discovered the country  
   Material

6. und mit der Umwandlung... begannen  
   and began with the transformation of...  
   Material

7. damit ist diese Schau... eine Dokumentation der Leistungen jener Völker  
   this display... is thus a documentation of these peoples' achievements  
   Relational
9. die unter den Voraussetzungen ihrer eigenen Welt zu worten sind, Mental
10. which are to be judged in terms of the conditions of their own world, Mental
11. wir erleben hier die Ausprägungen anderer Lebensordnungen, Mental
12. we experience here the forms of other ways of life, Mental
13. die uns nur so lange fremd sind, Relational
14. which are only foreign to us as long, Relational
15. wie wir uns nicht bemühen, mehr von... zu erfahren, Mental
16. aus we do not try to learn more of...
17. die Kulturen der Suedsee hatten... schon... Wandel... erfahren, Mental
18. Pacific cultures had already experienced... changes...
19. so ist die "Europäisierung" Ozeaniens keine... neuartige Entwicklung, Relational
20. the Europeanisation of Oceania is therefore not a... new type of development
21. doch sie übertreffen... alle bisherigen... Bewegungen, Relational
22. however it did surpass all previous... movements...
23. die Kulturen... früher... Werkzeug... European ships left behind tools...
24. die europäischen Schiffe... hinterliessen Werkzeug... Material
25. which... headed for the South Seas Material
26. lernten die Insulaner das Eisen kennen Material
27. Islanders learned of iron
28. so dass auf... die Technik der Herstellung von Basaltklingen, Material
29. such that on... basalt axe-head technology was abandoned Material
30. aus... brachten die Weissen seit dem 18. Jahrhundert Haustiere und Nutzpflanzen Material
31. whites had been bringing domesticated animals and plants since the 18th century for...
32. auf... gelangten sie zu Macht, Relational
33. they came into power
34. seit... liebten auch desertierte Matrosen und entflohenen Straftägige auf... Material
35. deserted sailors and convicts had also been living on,... since...
36. bauten sich Haendler auf... nieder, Material
37. traders settled on...
38. gegen Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts war der "Suedseehandel"... in voller Blüte Material
39. South Sea trade was in bloom by the end of the 19th century
40. die Walfänger tuschusten... Proviant ein Material
41. whalemen were bartering goods
42. die Schiffe... hatten schon... in einheimisch... "slave catchers" had already visited upon... island Material
43. unter der Macht... war die kolonialen Aufteilung... zu Abschluss gekommen Material
44. the colonial division... had come to an end
45. die Administration der Weissen... wirke als... Einfluss... Material
46. White administration operated as an... influence
35. der zweite Weltkrieg... führte zu einer Nivellierung der Kulturen...
36. the second world war... led to a levelling of the cultures...
37. die These, dass... ist zweifellos richtig
38. the thesis that... is undoubtedly correct
39. zwar empfanden auch Missionare, dass...
40. missionaries certainly thought that...
41. in allen Gemeinschaften besteht seit... ein lebhaftes Interesse an den Guerillen...
42. there has been a lively interest in every communities for...
43. die Insellbewohner fanden selbst ihren "Kulturwandel"
44. islanders themselves encouraged the transformation of their culture
45. die Einheimischen waren... zunehmend freundlich
46. natives were... friendly at first
47. oder hielten sie fuer Gooter
48. or regarded them (the invaders) as gods
49. auch heute werden die Weissen... noch sehr ueberschattet
50. Whites are still greatly overvalued
51. auch heute werden die Weissen... noch sehr ueberschattet
52. these Islanders know hardly anything about...
53. jeder von ihnen kann pflanzen und fischen... bauen
54. they can all plant, fish and build...
55. so glauben sie, dass...
56. hence they believe that (every European can make ships...)
57. die christliche Religion die traditionellen
58. the Christian religion replaced traditional beliefs
59. Glauensvorstellungen
60. the Christian religion replaced traditional beliefs
61. damit wurden die alten Kulte ausgelöscht
62. ancient rituals were thus wiped out
63. die Ursache fuer die Schoepfungen der "Kunst" waren
64. which were the cause for art works
65. das praktisch-aufsichtliche Leben wurde verändert
66. everyday life was changed
67. die Nachkommen gerieten in einen Gegensatz zu ihrer... Kultur
68. the next generation ran into opposition with their tribal culture
69. schaumten sich ihrer ursprünglichen Daseinsformen
70. (they) were ashamed of their original forms of existence
71. und versuchten, Lebensstil... der Weissen nachzuehmen
72. and tried to imitate Whites' lifestyle...
73. welches umso schwieriger war
74. which was all the more difficult
75. als sie die "europäische Kultur" nur in Teilspektren angeboten
76. when they were only offered European culture piecemeal
77. erhielten
78. they never experienced a European lifestyle
79. man erhielt nie einen Europäer bei der Produktion von Waren
80. one never experienced a European making goods
81. alle ankommenden Weißen hatten genug Geld
82. all the Whites arriving had enough money
83. und waren mit begüterten Guerillen versehen
84. and were seen with desirable goods
85. manchenorts entstanden "cargo-Kults"
86. cargo cults emerged in many places
87. in denen Propheten den Glauben verbreiteten, dass...
88. whereby prophets spread the belief that...
89. das allseitige Leben wandelte sich
90. everyday life changed
91. Metalwerkzeuge kamen allenthalben in Gebrauch
92. metal tools came into use everywhere
93. Kattunkleidung wurde übemommen
94. calico clothing was adopted
65. importierte Nahrungsmittel waren begehenswert
imported foods were desirable

66. Blechkanister ersetzten Holzbehälter
67. zum Hausbau besorgte man sich. Importholz...
tin cans replaced wooden vessels
one obtained imported wood... for housebuilding

68. Kirchen wurden allenthalben errichtet
churches were erected everywhere

69. Schulen gebaut
schools were built

70. die Krankenhäuser wurden verbessert
health care was improved

71. nachdem... Infektionskrankheiten eingeleitet (waren)
72. und ganze Inselbevölkerungen dezimiert waren
73. heute sind schon selbständige Staatswesen entstanden
once diseases (had been) introduced
and entire island populations had been decimated
independent nations have now emerged

74. allgemein ist die Entwicklung dazu... in die Wege geleitet
the development in this direction... is generally on the way

75. ist es menschlich, von einer eindeutigen Schuld der Weissen zu sprechen
it is necessary to speak of a definite guilt on the part of Whites

76. wollten sie diese Menschen... mit einer... "Zivilisation" beschließen
they wanted to delight these people with... a civilisation

77. die von ihnen als das Mass aller Welten erschienen
which seemed to them a universal standard

78. zudem standen viele... Profit und Macht
many were also seeking profit and power

79. europäische Einflüsse führten nicht... unweigerlich zum
european influences do not inevitably lead... to cultural decline
kulturellen Niedergang

80. In Tonga... sind europäische und altpolynesisiche Kulturzüge
european and Polynesian cultural traits have melted into a new form
zu einer neuartigen Daseinsform verschmolzen
in Tonga

81. dort erleben wir die Fähigkeit zur Kulturgleichrichtung
we experience there a capacity to acculturate

82. allerdings ist hier... kaum eine eigenschoepferische Weiterentwicklung
barely a single original further development is however to be
zu beobachten
observed here

83. allenthalben in Ozeanien und Australien ist... das Verlorenen der trad.
the extinguishment of traditional cultures everywhere in Oceania and
Kultureinheiten... zu konstatieren
Australia has to be acknowledged

84. geschah dies in einem grosseren Zeitraum
this occurred over a longer period

85. bald nach der Entdeckung von Tahiti verfiel die polynesisiche Kultur
good, traditional objects had to be collected there before 1800
Polynesian culture collapsed soon after the discovery of Tahiti

86. gute, traditionsgebundene Objekte dort vor 1800 gesammelt sein
the objects in display case 12, on the other hand, were still being
sollten
used in 1967 in the highlands

87. andere sind die in Vitrine 12 gezeigten Hausgemdressen... noch
88. das erst seit zwei Jahrzehnten "erschlossen" ist
im Jahre 1967 im Hochland... getragen worden
which have only been opened up for two decades

89. die nun als machtvolle Exponate... im Jahre 1967 im Hochland... getragen worden
the objects in display case 12, on the other hand, were still being
89. die nun als machtvolle Exponate... im Jahre 1967 im Hochland... getragen worden
used in 1967 in the highlands

91. das erst seit zwei Jahrzehnten "erschlossen" ist
which have only been opened up for two decades

92. die nun als machtvolle Exponate... im Jahre 1967 im Hochland... getragen worden
the objects in display case 12, on the other hand, were still being
used in 1967 in the highlands
trotz des verbesserten Werkzeugs... wurden die Objekte allenorts fortan flüchtig und mangelhaft gearbeitet

90. Carting die "Herrlichkeit des Steinzeitalters"
the glory of the stone age vanished

91. so erwuchs den Museen in diesen Zeiten... die Aufgaben... (die "Ethnographie", als Dokumente zu sammeln und zu bewahren)
the task of collecting and preserving ethnographic artefacts as documentation thus grew to museums

92. zumal die betroffenen Volkst... nicht ihre eigenen Traditionen... warnen
at least as long as the peoples concerned do not value their own traditions

AUSTRALIA (guide sheet Text 71)

1. wurde Australian... besiedelt
Australia was settled

2. die Erstbesiedler waren Tasmaniden
the first settlers were Tasmanoids

3. die bald... absorbierb bzw. auf... Tasmanien abgedrangt wurden
who were soon absorbed... or pushed onto Tasmania

5. wo sie... ausgerottet worden sind
where... they were exterminated

6. die neuen australischen Siedler... besassen... homogene Kultur
the new australoid settlers had a homogenous culture

7. die... mit den Europäen verwandt sind
who... are related to Europeans

8. die entwicklungs geschichtlich von Interesse ist
which (the culture) is of interest in terms of evolutionary history

9. der fehlende Kulturaustrausch... und die... Lebensbedingungen... hatten
here auf die zivilisatorische Entwicklung hemmend gewirkt
the lack of cultural exchange and the... living conditions...had been

restrictive here (operated restrictively)

10. und die Erhaltung altertümlicher Kulturverhältnisse begonnen
and favoured the maintenance of antiquated cultural relationships

11. dies gilt nur für den materiellen Bereich... der Kultur
this only applies to the material aspect of the culture

12. dessen Schlichtheit in einem... Gegensatz zu der... geistigen
whose simplicity stands in contrast to their spiritual order

Kulturverhältnisse steht

13. diese Schlichtheit gaukerte... in der primitiven Wirtschaftsform
this simplicity was based in their primitive economy

14. die sich niemals zu einem produktiven Pflanzerum entwickeln konnte
which could never develop into productive agriculture

15. sondern auf der... Wirtschaftsweise des Wildhändlers verharrten
but which remained static at the game hunting level

16. die Australier waren Sammler und Jäger
Australians were hunters and gatherers

17. die Männer jagten
the men hunted

18. Fischfang gehörte zu ihren Aufgaben
fishing was among their tasks

19. ihre Jagdwaffen waren der... Bumerang... und die Keule
their weapons were the spear... and the club

20. die Frauen sammelten... Wurzeln, Knollen, Früchte...
the women gathered roots, tubers, fruits...
21. these Lebensweise erlaubte den Australiern nicht, in großerer Material
Sozialverbanden zusammenzuleben
22. this way of life did not allow them to live in larger groups Material
23. sondern zwang sie, in... "Herden"... Jagdgebiet zu durchstreifen... but forced them to traverse... hunting ground... in mobs
24. der Wildwechsel und die Reifzeit... bestimmten die Wanderungen Material
das man gegen das Eindringen fremder Gruppen zu schützen suchte seasonal changes... determined their wanderings
which (the hunting ground) one sought to protect against foreign intrusion
25. konnten die Australier keine dauerhaften Siedlungen anlegen Material
they could not set up permanent dwellings
26. weil... Platz für die Nahrungsbeschaffung war... war ausschließlich die Wahl des Lagerplatzes... the food acquisition site was suggestive of the campsite
27. wo... einfache Hütten errichtet wurden Material
where... simple huts were erected
28. diese dienten als Schlafstätte... these served as sleeping places
29. und hier verwahrten man die wenigen Habesellen... one stored the few meagre possessions here
30. ... und... Wechsel des Lagerplatzes erklären die Schlichtheit... and seasonal change of camp explain the simplicity
31. die nur auf... die Notwendigkeit beschränkt war... which (material culture) was restricted to bare essentials
32. Kenntnis der Metallverarbeitung fehlte... knowledge of metalwork was wanting... there was no...
33. die Waffen... wurden aus Holz... gefertigt... weapons... were made of wood...
34. Graeser lieferten das Material fuer Flechtwerk... grasses provided material for wickerwork
35. Weberei war unbekannt... weaving was unknown
36. die Australiern gingen gewöhnlich nackt... Australians usually went naked
37. gegen Witterung schützten sie sich durch... Fellen... they protected themselves from cool weather with... furs
38. die Toepferei war ihnen unbekannt... pottery was unknown
39. Speisen bereiteten sie im Erdenofen... they prepared food in earth ovens
40. so primitiv der materielle Kulturbezüge... anmutet... so simplistic does the material culture appear...
41. primitive as the material culture appears
42. die Australiern lebten in latenten Sozialverbanden... Material
43. Australians lived in loose tribal groups
44. denen nur geringe politische Bedeutung zukam... which had (to which came) only limited political significance
45. die wichtigste politische Einheit war die Lokalgruppe... the most important political unit was the local group... which comprised of extended families
46. das erbrachte Hauptlingstum fehlte... there was no hereditary leadership
47. die Macht lag in den Händen der Gruppenältesten... power lay in the hands of the elders
48. deren Autoritat durch ihre Weisheit... begründet wurde... whose authority was based on their experience
49. sie führten die Entscheidungen
you made the decisions
they made the decisions
Material

50. und genossen... Privilegien
and enjoyed privileges
Material

51. die oberste Gewalt lag... bei dem... Rat
the highest power lay with the council of tribal elders
Relational

52. der... über Leben und Tod gebieten konnte
which could preside over... life and death
Relational

53. die Gruppenchefs waren... an die Beschlüsse... gebunden
group leaders were bound to the council's decisions
Relational

54. der die Interessen der Gemeinschaft zu vertreten (hatte)
which had to represent (community interests)
Relational

55. und sie gegen die Willkür... zu schützen hatte
and (had to) protect them against arbitrary individual desires
Relational

56. neben der Lokalgruppe gab es überregionale Sozialverbände
there were supra-regional groups as well as the local groups
Relational

57. deren Grundlage der Totemismus bildete
whose basis was totemism
Relational

58. darunter ist... zu verstehen, dass...
by this is to be understood that...
Relational

59. diese Beziehung... wird begründet durch den Glauben, dass...
this relationship is founded on the belief that...
Relational

60. die sich... als schicksalsmässige Bindung darstellt
which represents a tie of destiny
Relational

61. und regelt... die Verhaltensweise...
and regulates behavior
Relational

62. die Auswirkung dieser... Vorstellung war... der Zusammenschluss... the effect of this... notion was the locking of members into clans
Relational

63. die totemistischen Klone waren exogam
totemic clans were exogamous
Relational

64. die Klaunangehörigen mussten ihre Heiratspartner in anderen Klaunen suchen
clan members had to seek partners in other clans
Relational

65. da sie als verwandt galten
as they were (considered) related
Relational

66. Verbindungen zwischen Angehörigen... wurden bestraft
intra-totem attachments were punished
Relational

67. daneben bestand "Lokalexogamie"
there was also local exogamy
Relational

68. die eine Heirat... Gleiches Horde... ausschloss
which precluded intra-mob marriage
Relational

69. zusätzliche Ehen... folgten aus... Dualorganisation further marriage restrictions followed from... moieties
Relational

70. die in... "Sektionen" untergliedert sein konnten
which might be subdivided into sections
Relational

71. Schwierigkeiten... führten zu... "Raubehe"-difficulties (finding a partner) led to theft marriage
Relational

72. wobei... Ehen... nachträglich legalisiert werden konnten
whence... marriages... could be retrospectively legalised
Relational

73. ... und das Verwandtschaftssystem... bestimmen... das... Verhalten... the system of relationships determined social behaviour
Relational

74. der Komplexität... entsprach... Reichthum an... Traditionen
the complexity... bespoke a wealth of traditions
Relational

75. in deren Mittelpunkt die... "Grosen Traumwesen" stehen
central in which stand the great dream beings
Relational

76. sie erfüllten die Welt mit... Lebenskraft
yet filled the world with... life force
Relational

77. die... an... heiligen Orten... wirksam blieb
which remained effective in sacred sites
Relational
Appendix 2

Texts 100 and 71 in English

These translations follow the grammatical patterns of the original language closely, to give the English language reader a sense of the lexical density in the original texts, choice of Process and Participant types, degree of nominalisation and the connotations of certain lexical choices. Footnoted words/phrases have been discussed with native speakers of German. Clauses are numbered to correspond with the transitivity analysis in Appendix 1. The original texts give no proper references to the sources of their information.

The South Seas Exhibition (guide sheet Text 100)

"A Documentation of the past"

(1) The traditional cultures of the peoples of Oceania and Australia have been greatly changed (2) or entirely destroyed under the influence of European-American civilisation. (3) Only in the western Highlands of New Guinea do barely disturbed communities still exist.

(4) This exhibition aims to give an overview of the individual cultures of these peoples, (5) as they were developed (8) when Whites discovered the country (7) and began with the transformation of the former way of life.

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"Lebensordnung", unlike 'way of life', is not in common use. In anthropological discourse it is never applied to 'western' cultures, or to pre-industrial European cultures (where "Gesellschaftsordnung" is used), but is exclusively used for the classification of 'primitive' or 'natural' societies.
Thus this display of objects from the various areas of culture is a documentation of the achievements of those peoples, which are to be judged in terms of the conditions of their own world. We experience here the forms of other ways of life, which are only foreign to us as long as we do not make an effort to learn more of their content and meaning. They are different ways of organising human life. Our European- American, high-technology, standardised development of civilization need not be the only valid yardstick.

The cultures of the South Seas had already experienced several changes over the millennia as a result of mutual contact, sometimes over very great distances. Hence the "Europeanisation" of Oceania was no fundamentally new type of development. However it did surpass all previous inter-cultural movements in its geographical expanse, and most particularly in its manner, intensity and speed. It began in the 16th century with the discovery of the Pacific by the Spanish and with the first circumnavigations of the globe. The European ships (20) which headed for the South Pacific in the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries left behind many tools and implements, items of clothing and things in exchange. Islanders in many regions learned of iron, so that, for example, on Tahiti the technique of making basket axe heads had already been abandoned between the years 1769 and 1777. Whales had also, for philanthropic reasons, been bringing domesticated plants and animals to many islands since the second half of the 18th century, especially to Polynesia.

The Christian mission in the Pacific began in the 17th century (on the Mariana). In accordance with their beliefs, missionaries of various confessions had been attempting, especially since the end of the 18th century, to radically change the traditional way of life wherever they were able to settle. On many islands they came into considerable power. Since the early 19th century, deserted sailors and escaped convicts had also been living on several islands, and soon traders settled on very many of the islands of Oceania. By the end of the 19th century "South Pacific trade" was in full bloom (with coconut oil, copra, pearls, trepang, sandalwood etc.). Whalers were bartering supplies in many places, and the ships of brutal labour recruitment ("slave catchers") had already visited upon a number of islands.

The colonial division of the island world amongst the major political powers, had also come to an end by the end of the 19th century. While administration soon operated as an additional influence on the traditional way of life of individual communities, the second World War in particular, and then the following periods of opening up the insular world through air and land transportation technologies, as well as the rising tide of tourists, have led to a further levelling of the cultures of these peoples in the sense of material "civilisation".

The thesis that Oceania is no zoological garden and that one cannot, in our times of globalising technology, preserve the old world is undoubtedly correct. Missionaries themselves certainly thought that this old world, measured by its own standards, had a right to exist: \\

"materielle Prägungen" - material characteristics, impressions.
"Ausrüstung" - structure, shape.
"gestalten" - set up, arrange.

The phrase "Einheitszivilisation" was considered odd by the native speakers. Various translations of the sentence are possible, e.g. "our development into a unitary, Euro-American hi-tech civilisation is not necessarily the only valid standard."

"Tand" is very old-fashioned and slightly devaluing - junk, stuff, bits and pieces, trinkets.
the course of the great cultural transformation in Oceania, the Christian religion replaced traditional beliefs. (49) The ancient cult rituals (50) that were the main inspiration for "art" works, were thus wiped out. (51) Not only traditional ritual life was changed, but also practical everyday life. (52) The next generation encountered opposition with their tribal culture, (53) were even ashamed of their original ways, (54) and tried to imitate the lifestyle and attitudes of Whites, (55) which was all the more difficult (56) when they were only offered "European culture" pincers.

(57) One never saw a European making goods, (58) and all the Whites arriving had enough money. (59) and were seen to have abundant desireable goods. (60) "Cargo cults" emerged in many places, various movements (61) whereby prophets, for example, spread the belief that the natives' ancestors sent the cargo from beyond and that Whites used it to empower themselves.

(62) Everyday life increasingly changed: (63) metal tools came into use everywhere, (64) the calico clothing "prescribed" by the missionaries was willingly adopted, (65) imported foods (rice, sugar, preserves) were much sought after, (66) tin cans replaced wooden vessels and ceramic, (67) imported wood, corrugated iron and cement were used for house building whenever possible, (68) churches were erected everywhere, (69) schools built, (70) and health care was also improved, (71) once innumerable infectious diseases had been introduced (72) and entire island populations decimated. (73) Independent nations have now emerged in Oceania (e.g. Tonga, West Samoa, Fiji, Nauru), (74) and development in that direction, from colonial, protectorate and trustee governments, is the general trend.

(75) Notwithstanding the eradication of the Tasmanians, the persecution of the Australian natives in the 19th century, or the demise of the original inhabitants of the Maranias and the original population of Easter Island, for example, it is necessary to speak of a definite White guilt. (76) Caught in the convolutions of the time, they wanted to delight these people in Oceania with a single true belief and with a "civilisation" (77) which seemed to them the universal standard — (78) and many of them were also seeking profit and power on the distant islands.

(79) Strong European influences do not necessarily nor inevitably lead to cultural decline (or to the "progress to nowhere", as A. Lommer described developments amongst the Australian natives). (80) In the Kingdom of Tonga, for example, one of the oldest monarchies on earth, elements of European and ancient Polynesian culture have melted into a new form of existence. (81) There we experience the capacity to acculturize through a constant self-assessiveness. (82) Still, here too hardly a single original further development of that which has been adopted can be observed. (83) All over Oceania and Australia, the extinguishment or wiping out of traditional cultures, as they are still documented in this exhibition, has to be acknowledged. (84) This occurred over a long period of time, in relation to the history of westernisation. (85) Soon after the discovery of Tahiti, for example, Polynesian culture on the island collapsed, (86) so that good, traditional objects were collected there before 1800 (see vitrine 74). (87) On the other hand, the ornamental house posts of the Telefomin and Elphtam shown in vitrine 12, for example, were still being used in 1907 in the highlands of central New Guinea, (88) which have only been "open" for the last two decades. (89) Despite improved tools (steel iron instead of stone, shell, bone and tooth) objects were thereafter made in haste and inadequately everywhere, (90) the "glory of the stone age" vanished (cf. the ancient ceremonial padle from Tuvalu in vitrine 73). (91) The task thus fell to museums, in this time of radical change, to collect and preserve the artefacts of these disappearing cultures, the "ethnographica", as documentation, (92) as long as the peoples concerned, in the aftermath of this "clash of cultures", do not yet value their own traditions, in the sense of cultural heritage.

Australia (guide sheet Text 71)

(1) Australia — then still linked to Asia by a more or less closed land bridge — was settled from there around 40,000 to 15,000 years ago. (2) The first settlers were Tasmanoids, a round-headed, curvy-hair, dark-skinned race, (3) which was soon absorbed by new migrants, the Australoids, (4) or were pushed onto the island of Tasmania, in the South-East of Australia, (5) where they were sys-

7 "eigenschaplootacht" — "independently creative" (formal).
8 the verb is modalised and the meaning is unclear; 'were apparently collected' or 'had to be collected'.
tematically exterminated by Whites last century (bounties having been set). (6) The new Australoid settlers, also dark-skinned, but long-headed people with strait or wavy hair (7) who are not, as local opinion has it, related to Negroids but to Europeans, had at the time Whites arrived an amazingly homogeneous culture, despite many peculiarly local developments. (8) which is of particular historical interest in terms of human development. (9) For the lack of cultural exchange — determined by the isolated position of Australia — and the relatively unfavourable living conditions in this part of the earth, largely covered by steppes, bushland and desert, restricted the evolution of civilisation here, (10) and favoured the maintenance of very antiquated cultural practices.

(11) This applies of course only to the material aspect of the culture, (12) whose simplicity stands in remarkable contrast to the variety and complexity of the Australians' spiritual order. (13) This simplicity was not boast of all based in their primitive form of economy, (14) which, never able to develop into a productive agriculture, remained at the acquisitive, game hunting, stage. (15) The Australians were hunters and gatherers with a gendered division of food-getting labour. (17) The men mainly hunted large animals (kangaroos, opossums, dingos etc.) with great persistence and skill. (18) Fishing, done with great ingenuity, was also one of their duties. (19) Their hunting weapons were the spear (extending the leverage of the arm), mainly thrown with the aid of a "spear thrower", the boomerang (but not the returning variety) and the club. (20) The woman, equipped with digging sticks and carry bags, gathered edible roots, tubers, fruits and seeds, but also small animals such as larvae, insects etc. (21) This hunter-gatherer way of life did not allow the Australians to live together in larger social groups, (22) but forced them to traverse often quite vast traditional hunting areas in small “mobs” (of 20 to 200 people), constantly on the search for sufficient food. (23) The movement of game and the seasonal ripening of plant foods determined the wanderings of these mobs within their hunting grounds, (24) which one carefully sought to protect against the encroachments of foreign groups.

(25) Because of their nomadic way of life the Australians could not set up permanent dwellings. (26) The best place to get food (and to find scarce water in the dry zones) suggested the choice of campsite, (27) where break-winds made of twigs and grasses, or - for longer stays - simple huts of the same material, were erected for temporary protection from rain and wind. (28) These served as places to sleep, and to store the few possessions, weapons, bags and body ornaments. (30) The constant concern about getting food, and the permanent, seasonally determined change of camp, explain the simplicity of the material culture of the Australians, (31) which was limited to the satisfaction of their immediate needs and the very barest essentials. (32) There was no knowledge of metal work, (33) weapons and simple implements were made of wood, stone, bones and shells. (34) Reeds and grasses provided material for wickerwork, (35) weaving was unknown. (36) The Australians usually went naked, (37) protecting themselves from cooler weather by draping themselves with furs or bark. (38) Pot-making was also unknown to them, (39) they cooked their food in earth ovens.

(40) Pristine as the material cultural possessions of the Australians appear, (41) their social order represents a complex and highly developed code. (42) The Australians lived in loose tribal groups, (43) which had only minimal political significance. (44) The most important political unit was rather the local group, (45) which comprised of several extended families. (46) There was no hereditary leadership. (47) Power lay in the hands of the family and group elders. (48) whose authority was based on their wisdom and life experience. (49) They made the decisions about earthly and religious matters (50) and they enjoyed many privileges, thanks to their position of high esteem. (51) The highest power (52) lay however not with these group leaders but with the council of tribal elders, (53) which could unrestrictively preside over matters of war and peace, and life and death. (54) The group leaders were hierarchically bound to agreement and to the decisions of the council of elders, (55) who were to represent (56) and protect the interests of the community against arbitrary individual desires.

(56) As well as the political unit of the local group, there were supra-regional social groups, based on so-called totemism (cf. guide sheet 96). (57) By this, in relation to Australia, is to be understood that an individual or group of individuals believed themselves to be in a mystical relationship to a particular type of animal or plant. (59) This special relationship, representing, on the one hand, a
family tie, and on the other a bond of common destiny, is based on the belief that the individual or group of individuals has a shared mythical ancestry with the particular "tobem" (61) and it also regulates behaviour towards the "tobem" (ritual taboos etc.). (62) The most important effect of this notion, rooted essentially in a particular religious worldview, was in the social sphere of locking members of the same "tobem" into clans, i.e. into social groups of supra-regional significance with a common tradition of myths and cults.

(63) The totemic clans were exogamous i.e. (64) clan members had to seek marriage partners in another clan, (65) as they were considered related. (66) Attachments between members of the same "tobem" were punished by death. (67) As well as this, there was "local exogamy". (68) which precluded marriage between members of the same mob (regardless of their different totemic membership). (69) Additional marriage restrictions resulted from the divisions of many tribes into exogamous halves (moieties), (70) which might be further subdivided into two or four "sections". (71) The difficulties in finding a legal partner that resulted from the complicated marriage restrictions led to the institution of "thief marriage", (72) whereby marriages entered into against the rules of exogamy could, under certain conditions, be retrospectively legalised.

(73) The social order embedded in totemic notions and the classification system of relationships (classification of all individuals according to degrees of relatedness irrespective of blood relationship) determined the entire social behaviour of the Australians, the choice of marriage partner as well as the ceremonial exchange of gifts or the seating order at ceremonies.

(74) The complexity of the social code expressed an amazing wealth of mythical traditions, (75) at the centre of which are the "great dream beings" who lived on earth in distant time past. (76) They filled the world with creative life force, (77) which also remained effective afterwards in special sacred places (e.g. in trees or rock formations). (78) These were the ritual sites of the Australians, (79) to which, in ceremonial realisations of the events of the creation time, they bore responsibility for the continuing efficacy of that all-animating life force. (80) The mythological ancestors, (81) who brought the culture long ago, (82) and to whom the entire social order of the Australians ultimately traces back, make themselves manifest, according to the natives' beliefs, not only in natural forms at sacred sites, but also in special ritual objects, such as the tjurunga (flat, long, oval little boards made of wood or slate, which are covered with geometric symbols) and the bullroarer (83) which when spun on a cord make a loud humming sound). (84) During the grand ceremonies, participants gained new strength from contact with these sacred objects.

(85) The making of visual art was not a means of expressing individual personality for the Australians, but the visible expression of their religious worldview. (86) This is especially true of their most remarkable works of art, the rock and bark paintings, (87) which represent mythical motifs in "x-ray style" (showing also non-visible things such as, for example, bones or internal organs), (88) in these works, artistic and religious acts partly coalesce, (89) when through annual ritual "touching" of the objects i.e. the freshening of their colours, the continuation of the social order of things is meant to be ensured.

11 "in die Urzeit" – "ur" has meanings of origins, very distant or original.
12 "Vergangenwerteurg des Urzeitgeschichts" – vividly recall, re-enact or imagine the events of the creation time.
13 "Sorge tragen" – cares for, take care of, concern oneself with.
14 "Gestaufunk" – arrangement, organisation.