

Cross-Cultural Bodies through Space: European Travellers, Permanent Body Marking, and Liminality

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Abstract

This chapter explores the new forms of embodiment which can ensue from human movement across geographical and cultural space. Archival evidence from late 18th and early 19th century European voyages to the Pacific Islands reveals how cross-cultural encounters exposed Europeans to novel methods of modifying the body, prompting a variety of responses. The diverse ways in which visitors engaged with the indigenous Islander practice of permanent body marking (tattooing) - which included experimentation, appropriation, and total capitulation to indigenous tattooing tradition - are revelatory of the multiple significances of the body as a site of cross-cultural exchange, as well as one through which power and social influence and agency are affected. Particular attention is paid to liminality as a productive conceptual approach for examining how corporeal movement across cultural boundaries can result in new manifestations of the expressive and social potential of the body.

Key Words: The body, embodiment, Pacific Islands, history, anthropology, tattooing, body modification, cross-cultural exchange, liminality.

1. Introduction

Tattooing in Europe during the early modern period has long been understood as a fragmented practice, although it appears to have had long-standing associations with mobility and cross-cultural exposure. Permanent corporeal inscription is known to have taken place amongst a minority of Europeans prior to the late 18th century as a mark of religious pilgrimage, for example, and in association with the maritime world.¹ During the late 18th and early 19th centuries voyages to the Pacific Islands led to the exposure of hundreds of Europeans (mostly men) to both sophisticated indigenous tattooing imagery, and Islander² body marking technology and techniques. Through these voyages, captains, officers, supernumeraries,³ and crew on the early exploratory voyages, traders who later circulated around the Pacific, and also missionaries, were confronted with new forms of the corporeal.

Physical manifestations of the Other fascinated visitors, yet on first encounter were unavoidably read through observers' existing cultural norms. Certain Europeans initially perceived tattooing as clothing for example,⁴ while Islanders expressed astonishment that foreign visitors were not tattooed and the blue veins visible on white European skin were sometimes understood to be some form of

body modification.⁵ As discussed by Peng Liu in this volume, the sense of one's physical body, one's embodied *being-in-the-world* is inevitably perceived through the mediation of cultural categories, which work as a perceptual and experiential lens.⁶ At the same time, it has been argued that the body can be seen to 'behave' in new ways at specific moments, epitomising historical flux.⁷ New forms of embodiment are unlikely to emerge in a linear fashion, but, as in the cases presented below, they may emerge instead from the agency and interactions of particular individuals and groups in specific places, at certain points in time, and under certain conditions, including new contexts of cross-cultural encounter. The adoption of tattooing amongst some European visitors to the Pacific Islands, discussed in this current chapter, supports Liu's argument that movement across geographical and cultural space can not only lead to novel forms of corporeal engagement and expression, but also, in certain cases, a transformation of cultural categories, a 'newly acquired lens,'⁸ and hence different forms of embodiment.

2. Initial Forms of Adoption

The first account of European visitors becoming tattooed as a result of contact with Islanders is by Sydney Parkinson, a botanical artist on the *Endeavour* during the first exploration of the Pacific captained by James Cook. Following the vessel's landfall at Tahiti in 1769 Parkinson recorded:

The natives are accustomed to mark themselves in a very singular manner, which they call *tataowing*.... Mr Stainsby, myself, and some others...underwent the operation, and had our arms marked: the stain left in the skin, which cannot be effaced without destroying it, is that of a lively bluish purple.⁹

Parkinson's description was circulated in his published memoir, diffusing knowledge of body marking as a foreign, exotic practice throughout Europe. The cosmological significance of Islander tattooing practices were barely understood, however, and the custom was frequently - and erroneously - understood as founded on individual taste. This inaccurate, secular interpretation, perhaps inevitably founded on the Europeans' own cultural *lens* regarding bodily decoration, dress, and the general treatment of the body, possibly facilitated the initial adoption of body modification by some Europeans as an ornate mark of their travels: a personal voyage souvenir.¹⁰

In 1773, during the second voyage captained by Cook, observations of the communal inscription of the body to mark group affiliation led swiftly to imitation, as described by John Elliott, a teenage midshipman:

...all our Mess conceived the idea of having some mark put on ourselves, as connecting us together, as well as to commemorate

our having been at Otaheite [Tahiti] For which purpose we determined on having a compleat Star drawn and then Tattowed with black, the same way as the Natives are tattowed, upon our left Breast, and...we all underwent it and have each a very handsome Star...the size of a Crown Piece.¹¹

In this case the distinctive star tattoo observed amongst the *arioi* - an exuberant, high caste group of men and women native to the Society Islands,¹² who mounted music, dance, and dramatic performances and feasts in the name of their patron deity - inspired the messmates. The appropriated motif served both as a souvenir and a symbol of the enduring bond amongst the group of men who became marked together. Yet while Elliott and his companions embraced the novel marking of their bodies, George Forster, a Prussian naturalist on the same voyage, detailed in his account the ‘disfiguring’ nature of the practice, reflecting on ‘how little the ideas of ornament of different nations agree,’¹³ a statement which not only implies a static cultural notion about ornamentation, but belies the reality of some of his fellow voyagers’ enthusiastic adoption of body marking. The concurrent diversity of responses amongst Europeans to the tattooing they encountered is striking, and underlines how the capacity for - and interest in - corporeal engagement in cross-cultural settings differs amongst individuals.

That certain travellers, such as sailors, may have had a predisposition - a latent *potentiality*¹⁴ for self-expression through body marking - is apparent from the dramatic speed at which many mariners embraced Islander tattooing methods and made them their own. The account (cited above) of Elliott and his messmates adopting star motifs on their chests, for example, ended by describing how as a result of the group later being observed bathing, the star tattoo trend ‘tho we intended to keep this Badge to ourselves, we no sooner began to Bathe, than it spread halfway through the ship;’¹⁵ the ready availability of professional tattooists enabled the swift diffusion of the Pacific motif into a wider social milieu. The star on the left breast resurfaces within archival records of the *Bounty* mutiny of April 1789. In the missive which William Bligh dispatched to the Admiralty, describing the ‘Pirates’ who requisitioned his ship he noted all of their identifying marks.¹⁶ Twenty-two of the twenty-five mutineers were tattooed, and in the case of Fletcher Christian, mutiny leader, Isaac Martin, James Morrison and others, their motifs included a star marked on the left breast. Other mutineers were marked with both Tahitian and personal symbolic imagery, mottos, and significant dates.¹⁷

Later in the period (in 1804) a German lieutenant, on the Russian voyage to the Pacific as part of the first Russian circumnavigation of the globe by the sloops *Nadezhda* and *Neva*, wrote in his journal, a mere six days after his ships landfall at the Marquesas: ‘Tattooing becomes more and more popular on our ship. The native works from morning till night.’¹⁸ Hence the technical expertise associated with a localised corporeal tradition was swiftly appropriated for new ends. By the turn of

the 19th century, British Admiralty records reveal a rich lexicon of body marking amongst seafarers, including a range of personal, maritime, and folkloric references, as well as the starred breast,¹⁹ and there is evidence that an early American seafaring tattooing tradition similarly emerged at the same time.²⁰ Evidently exposure to novel treatments of the body in the Pacific Islands contributed to the adoption of, as well as technical and aesthetic innovation in, permanent body marking amongst sailors. The rapid emergence and diffusion of an identifiable tattooing tradition through the maritime diaspora has been attributed to the cosmopolitan ‘habitus’²¹ of sailors, which was characterised by inter-cultural exchange, as well as the peculiar centrality of the corporeal in both mariners’ daily working lives and their choice of social self-demarcation through distinctive dress and accessories.²²

3. Beachcomber Transculturites

A further trajectory which ensued from European exposure to Islander body marking practices was the active adoption not only of local motifs, but indigenous cultural and ritual *modes* of tattooing. The adoption of local body marking as a means of expediting residence amongst Islander societies appears to have been grasped almost immediately by early travellers as a result of their contact with local communities, and was first documented during the final Pacific voyage led by Cook in 1777. John Ledyard, a Euro-American petty officer on the ship *Discovery* (who was himself tattooed on his hands while visiting Tahiti with the expedition)²³ described in his journal a mariner’s attempt to desert at Aotearoa (New Zealand) to reside with his Maori lover, in which the seaman strategically embraced the local body marking tradition:

...though our sailor appeared amiable in her eyes in the habit of a stranger he was conscious that to ornament his person in the fashion of New Zealand would still recommend him more to his mistress and the country he was in; he therefore submitted himself to be tatowed from head to foot.²⁴

Ledyard’s account, though possibly exaggerated,²⁵ evidences how some individuals wholeheartedly embraced indigenous body marking practices on Islanders’ own terms in an attempt to integrate. This phenomenon evolved over the coming decades with the emergence of *beachcombers*, men who spent extended periods living within - or occasionally alongside - Islander communities, either out of choice or necessity. These individuals included deserters, discharged crew and castaways and their accounts of their Pacific residence provide rich insight into the early contact period, when power dynamics were relatively fluid.²⁶ Many of these documents provide important detail on how beachcombers navigated their interactions with Islanders and cultivated social relationships.²⁷

Greg Dening, the Pacific historian and anthropologist, argued that beachcombers existed on the boundaries of two worlds, transgressing codes in both and belonging to neither.²⁸ Dening has these individuals stuck in a kind of social and cultural *no-man's land* or limbo. There is, in fact, evidence that some beachcombers exploited their ambiguous, inter-cultural status, living alongside rather than within communities and gaining material benefits from their interactions with Islanders on the one side, and visiting Europeans on the other. However Dening's rather generalising interpretation detracts from the fascinating detail provided in individual beachcomber's accounts which elucidate the important processes of dialogue and negotiation, which led to successful prolonged Island residence. Indeed, little attention has been paid in all existing analyses of beachcomber accounts to the important role which the treatment of the body played in the process of crossing cultural spaces.

The Bounty mutineers were arguably the first well-documented beachcombers. In a detailed description of his experiences in Tahiti, James Morrison described an early meeting between himself and his fellow mutineers - who had requested to remain at the island - and a young chief:

Having made known our business to Areepaeaa (the mutineers' mediator) - who told us that we must not approach the Young king as he was yet Sacred, unless we Strip'd the Clothing off from our Head & Shoulders, which we refused telling him that it was not Customary to remove any part of our Dress except our hat and if we were under arms it was not our Country Manner to remove our hat even to the King. However that we might not seem to be deficient in point of Good Manners each was provided with a piece of Taheite Cloth to put over our Shoulders and take off in the Young Kings Presence.²⁹

Here individuals, with different customs related to the body embedded in their own cultures, attempted to find common understanding and negotiated mutually acceptable, recognisable status. The mutineers' assertion of their 'Country Manner'³⁰ highlights how at this stage in their residence they placed tenacious importance on retaining their own customary practices related to dress. Moreover, the men's reference to their own king, as part of their attempt to establish their independence of Tahitian bodily conventions, is significant. It has been argued that European resistance to conforming to local practices in appearance in Pacific contexts during this historical period was most prevalent when the nexus between dress and power became most apparent.³¹ As will be discussed below, however, resistance and engagement varied in every case. Indeed, this particular encounter between the mutineers and an Islander of some authority probably constituted an important power struggle, with the men not wishing to appear pliable and willing

to assimilate, as they were now seeking to establish an independent community on the island. This is not to suggest that these men's tattooed bodies, described earlier, did not also symbolise some form of close engagement in Tahitian society. However, it could be argued that the mutineers' tattoos, with their often striking combination of both European and Tahitian motifs - which a number of the men chose to have inscribed upon their bodies - can be understood as a physical registration of their hybrid associations as they attempted to forge a parallel society in Tahiti, following their mutiny. Their historical specificity in fact renders the mutineers a special and fascinating case in inter-cultural contact during this period.

All beachcombers were admitted into communities conditionally by Islanders convinced of the correctness of their own social codes, including those which governed corporeal practice. Similar to Morrison's narrative, numerous beachcomber accounts describe the pressure exerted on them to conform to local norms. Body marking was a fundamental, cosmological component of Islander society which expressed gender, status, and personal life events - a reality which was swiftly made obvious to the new arrivals. For example, Joseph Kabris, a Frenchman who resided in Nuka Hiva, in the Marquesas Islands from 1796 to 1804 as a result of being shipwrecked, described the survivors' early experiences as follows:

For about four months we were treated with great deference and care by the islanders. At this time the *quaitenouiy*³² urged us to be tattooed all over, which these people regard as a mark of manhood... After the ceremony, which made us belong to the tribe, we each chose a wife and were married according to the islanders' custom.³³

Tattooing here was a vital rite of passage, and their acceptance of it consolidated the men's social position. Indeed, the corporeal motifs visible in an extant portrait of the beachcomber both attest to and symbolise this identity: the partial facial mask indicating his title as a son-in-law;³⁴ a motif on the right breast signified his standing as a warrior;³⁵ and the tattooed eye marked his membership of a specific feasting society.³⁶

A particular combination of individual potentiality and agency, and Islander social forces is likely to have come into play in the case of each beachcomber, with varying corporeal outcomes. There is no doubt that some pressure (implicit or explicit) was exerted on certain beachcombers to conform to local practice and transform their bodies. Nonetheless extant accounts suggest that the marking of the body was never physically enforced, however, but constituted a combined outcome of Islander pressure and visitors' acceptance of - and engagement with - local norms of behaviour, which differed in each case.³⁷ This is evidenced in the case of Edward Robarts, an Englishman, who deserted from the whaler *The New*

Euphrates at Nuku Hiva in late 1798, and lived on the island until early 1806. Joseph Kabris, as detailed earlier, was resident on the same island from 1796 to 1804. The two men resided on opposite sides of Taiohae Bay, under the patronage of different chiefs, and had a strained relationship which frequently descended into bitter rivalry. Robarts exhibited considerably more selective engagement in local practices than his French counterpart. Indeed, visitors from the Russian expedition mentioned earlier, which moored off the island for twelve days in May 1804, were struck by Robarts' limited acquaintance with local language and customs compared with the Frenchman's.³⁸ Although the description of Robarts' Marquesan body motifs varied,³⁹ the Englishman's engagement with tattooing appears to have been consistent with his more distanced and selective participation in other indigenous practices. Unlike Kabris, who submitted to the elaborate body tattooing characteristic of Marquesan men, most accounts indicated that Robarts was merely marked on the chest with a motif which indicated his membership of a feasting society.⁴⁰

In another example from the same period, George Vason, an Englishman, arrived at the island of Tonga in April 1797 as part of the first missionary enterprise in the archipelago led by the London Missionary Society (LMS). Vason rapidly integrated amongst his Tongan hosts and adopted local dress - behaviour which estranged him from his Christian brethren.⁴¹ The Englishman's account is sympathetic to Islander culture and details his marriage into a chiefly family, leading him to participate in several battles of the early period of civil war in Tonga at the turn of the 19th century. The beachcomber described how, during this time of warfare and the 'triumphant excursions' following combat success, he was often ridiculed during communal bathing as his body lacked the 'cuticle vesture' of tattoo.⁴² The essentiality of body marking to the Tongan male body is forcefully articulated to Vason, who subsequently became tattooed himself. The process took place over several sessions (Tongan men were typically marked with extensive patterns and blocks of black between the thighs and the belly).⁴³ It was notably within a context when the symbolic significance of male body marking was at its most explicit, that the renegade missionary finally became tattooed, describing the final phase as follows:

I summoned up resolution to have the tattooing finished by a professional operator in the neighbourhood. It was performed only after every third day, the pain being so exhausting... When it was completed I was very much admired by the natives, as the European skin displays the blue colour, and the ornaments of the tattooing to very great advantage. I looked indeed very gay in this new fancy covering.⁴⁴

In the cases described, tattooing can be understood not only as an outcome of social pressure from Islanders but as an important ritual process which consolidated their transculturation - in other words their integration within their host society. Becoming tattooed can therefore partially be understood as a strategic method for (literal) *incorporation* which often brought beachcombers important benefits in status. Beachcombers initially found themselves as outsiders in Islander communities, stranded in a fluid inter-structural space, separated from their home setting and cultural norms. Some individuals actively participated in body marking rites, which enabled their socially *incoherent* bodies to become integrated. Such processes are clearly not limited to the particular historical and cross-cultural context of the Pacific. In her chapter in this volume, Viola Thimm explores how, in contemporary Singapore, female Malaysian migrants navigate the varying social norms pertaining to clothing of their home and host society and exert agency in the gradual transformation of their dress to effect integration within the new setting.⁴⁵

4. The Body, Movement across Space, and Liminality

What were the processes, meanings, and outcomes of beachcombers becoming tattooed during their Island residence? The concept of liminality can be seen to provide a useful theoretical entry point for exploring corporeal and associated identity transformation amongst beachcombers whose bodies became permanently transformed. This concept was brought to the forefront of anthropology in the early 20th century through the work of Arnold van Gennep, who examined the structure and dynamics of the rituals surrounding social transition,⁴⁶ and later through Victor Turner, who investigated ritual in his pioneering ethnographic study amongst a small-scale Ndembu society in Zambia.⁴⁷ Turner elaborated on van Gennep's three stages of transformation - separation, marginality (liminality), and aggregation - and defined marginality, or the ambiguous *limen* phase, as an inter-structural state. In this state 'neophytes,' the subjects of the ritual process, are gradually divested of previous values, norms, and social techniques associated with their prior position and are exposed to other alternatives, enabling them to 'juggle with the factors of existence.'⁴⁸ As such, this phase can be seen to offer great potential for reflection and creativity as the neophytes actively progress into a new state. In Turner's seminal work, the liminal phase was managed by the guardians of ritual within Ndembu society, who led neophytes through the ritual processes required for their aggregation.

Image 1 is a representation of what can occur when the body moves across social and cultural boundaries into the liminal phase and beyond. This schema includes some agency and autonomy on the part of the individual, who retains certain elements of their previous or *native* cultural and social norms, together with their own preferences, of *living* their body, and their own potential for change and innovation. As s/he moves into new social and cultural spaces, the individual enters a phase of potential transformation, becoming exposed to - and influenced by -

alternative uses of the corporeal and social norms. The liminal phase therefore represents a significant inter-structural (and in the case of beachcombers inter-cultural) situation. During this phase a complex interchange of existing beliefs, new influences, potentiality, agency, social pressure, and experimentation can occur. In some cases the mobile body may even literally be managed by others (the guardians of ritual) on its transformative journey. Indeed many beachcomber accounts describe in detail not only the traditional body markings present in their host community and the articulated pressure to be tattooed but also the local Islander tattooing specialists who marked their bodies, though this may be a process of dialogue and negotiation. In the final phase, following some form of corporeal reconfiguration or reconstitution, the individual is transformed into a new state. An essential dynamic is the influence of the surrounding environment on the individual's apprehension of themselves, including their body, and their own impulse to be transformed in a manner which renders them more *intelligible* within the new environment.

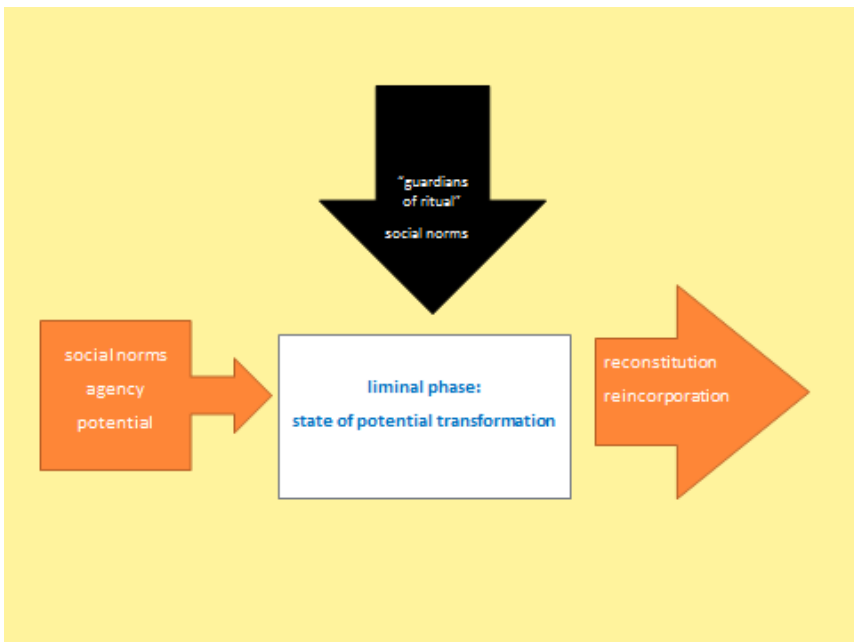


Image 1: Movement of the Body into and beyond Liminality and Influencing Processes.

Image Courtesy of Joanna White.

Through becoming tattooed, the beachcomber ritual protagonists underwent a transformation which rendered them more recognisable and more culturally acceptable members of the Islander communities among which they found themselves. As already described, ultimately what took place was most likely an outcome of a particular combination of local pressure and individual agency.⁴⁹ The transformation leading to reconstitution and reincorporation was a powerful personal journey, however. Judith Butler proposed that, ““existing” one’s body becomes a personal way of taking up and reinterpreting received... norms... through the proliferation and variation of corporeal styles.”⁵⁰ Through movement across cultural boundaries the norms received by beachcombers changed, as did their treatment of their own bodies. In the same structural processes detailed by Peng Liu in his chapter in this volume,⁵¹ these individuals’ cultural embodiment was transformed through movement across geographical and cultural space and interactions in new settings. The permanent markings on these men’s bodies did not therefore merely constitute, as has been erroneously described, *badges of residence* (the term *badge*, implying a temporary, removable symbol, which tattoos were not) but had deeper significances, contributing to altered personhood.

The potential for such transformation is likely to have been rooted within each individual and not merely explicable through cultural or social background, a complex latency which Terence S. Turner drew on when he referred to the various levels of the ‘social skin’ - the skin as social boundary but also modelling the ‘psychic diaphragm’ between the internalised energies and impulses of the individual, as well as the social meanings and values which each individual bears and articulates through their treatment of the body (‘internalised others’).⁵² The liminal phase can be seen as a nexus of interaction between these elements, a particularly rich and fertile phase where the *others* internalised experiences - an important shift.

Both Kabris’ and Vason’s accounts testify to the personally transformative nature of their residence.⁵³ Alfred Gell produced the sole ethnographic examination of the historical meanings of Pacific Islander tattooing during the period of early European-Islander encounters.⁵⁴ He has argued that local tattooing institutions, the ritual process of tattooing, and the experiences engendered by becoming tattooed and interacting with differentially marked others, produce a certain notion of person, selfhood, and empowerment amongst Islander individuals and groups.⁵⁵ On becoming tattooed within Pacific communities, beachcombers did not merely transform their bodies but also reconfigured their embodied existence, or being-in-the-world, as well as the public indexing of their status to others. Kabris’ narrative attests to his immersion within the Marquesan world; he lived as a warrior and son-in-law to a chief and his body bore the permanent markings associated with this status.⁵⁶ Indeed, the full extent of Kabris’ cultural *crossing* is manifest in his encounter with voyagers on Russian vessels in 1804; observers commented that the Frenchman had lost command of his native language and had adopted Marquesan

‘modes of thinking.’⁵⁷ Similarly Vason’s commitment to the physically arduous process of tattooing and his enthusiasm regarding his subsequent appearance underline how the Englishman’s movement into an Island setting appear to have transformed his embodied ‘being-in-the-world,’ introducing an alternative system of corporeal agency and empowerment.⁵⁸

5. Liminality Revisited: Return and Reconfiguration

In some cases a new liminality and consequent corporeal reconfiguration took place yet again when beachcombers found themselves within settings bound by the social mores of their native societies. The arrival of ships bearing fellow-Europeans (or later in the period, Americans) during beachcombers’ island residence was often emphatically referred to in their narratives as an event which caused some disquiet, even to those individuals who desired to return to their home country. Significantly, in many narratives the distribution of clothing to beachcombers was detailed as one of the earliest exchanges to take place between these individuals and visiting crew. As is the account by Samuel Patterson, resident in the Fiji Islands, who on coming alongside a European vessel in 1808, was immediately greeted with the words, ‘Shipmate, why don’t you come on board, haven’t you been there long enough, without a shirt?’⁵⁹ One beachcomber who had been resident at the Marquesas supplied his own apprehensive account of such an incident:

The first kind offer of the captain as I came on board was to give me clothes to cover my nakedness. Awkward, indeed, I felt as well as acted when clothed again, having been naked eighteen months.⁶⁰

This description underscores the transformation which had taken place in the beachcomber’s embodied existence during his eighteen months of Island residence and his new discomfort on entering a social space operating according to different corporeal norms. Indeed, the process of imposed re-clothing is so commonly detailed in contemporaneous accounts that it can be understood as a ritualistic reincorporation of beachcombers into their own culture, the arriving ship constituting a floating society founded on European or American cultural practices and values. The beachcomber’s body is again incoherent in a new liminal space. The enforced reconfiguration through the adoption of clothing is suggestive of the parading of ragged British captives returned from North Africa in the 18th century, whose literal and symbolic re-clothing marked their re-entry into society and the Christian church.⁶¹

While clothing could be replaced, tattoos were permanent markers of difference rendering the men’s bodies culturally incoherent and potentially transgressive amongst their compatriots⁶² and reflecting the continuing instability of the tattoo on

the European body as it moved through space.⁶³ In the case of the beachcomber Vason, referred to earlier, his account detailed his new experience of cultural dislocation when on board the ship which was returning him to England:

...my mind was not at ease... and ashamed of my own exposed appearance among those who were more decently clothed (for I was still in want of many articles of dress), I began to reflect on my past strange life and conduct, and look forward with shame and anxiety to a return to my native country.⁶⁴

The intense mode of reflection described is a classic trope of the ritual neophyte, as Vason is forced into contemplating a new reconfiguration of his embodied existence as he finds himself again in a liminal phase. In stark contrast with his unrestrained *in situ* enthusiasm for his tattooed body, which was a central site for incorporation within the Tongan male world, his body, lacking clothing, is now again a critical marker of difference in a new setting.

A number of former beachcombers - including Joseph Kabris - displayed their bodies as circus showmen on their return to Europe. Through such performances their Islander tattoos were deliberately transformed into spectacular symbols of exotic ornamentation. Moreover in some cases these men exhibited themselves as individuals who had been captured by natives and forcibly tattooed, downplaying their own agency and creating a coherent narrative which allowed them to reincorporate themselves within their native societies more easily. By intentionally placing themselves within a context of staged exhibition such individuals deliberately and creatively rendered their bodies - and the tattoos inscribed upon them - acceptable objects of scrutiny in a controlled setting,⁶⁵ allowing them to move beyond liminality into (albeit carefully constructed, artificial) aggregation. For some, however, their liminal status was insurmountable. After his return to England, for example, George Bruce, a former convict who had been a long-term resident within a Maori community, petitioned the Royal Navy in 1817 to let him return to the Pacific, claiming:

Life is a burden to him in this Kingdom. some calls him a Man Eater, another says his is the Devil & others calls him a Traitor To his Country. & this is because he don't sattsifie Them all, with the marks in his face.⁶⁶

Bruce's description underlines the cultural incoherence of his body outside of the Islander setting. The disruption of local concepts of corporeal normality, caused by his physical appearance, was evidenced by his *marks* even being associated with traitorhood. This response may reflect a hardening of social attitudes towards tattooing in England at this historical juncture. Tattooing was

increasingly being considered an immoral practice of deliberate disfigurement - a perspective linked to missionary responses in the Pacific. Further, this perspective is likely to have contributed to the later associations between tattooing, vulgarity, and criminality which emerged in the 19th century, another element of the complex history of tattooing in western settings.

6. Conclusions

The body can be understood not only as the frontier or boundary of society but also in terms of the social self - the skin being the final barrier. Movement into new geographical and cultural spaces - and associated exposure to alternative treatment and expressive uses of the body - can be a catalyst, stimulating new forms of being-in-the-world, resulting in new configurations of the body and cultural embodiment. The historical evidence presented underlines how corporeal movement across space may facilitate experimentation, hybridisation, and transformation, underlining the importance of theoretical paradigms which allow for potentiality, change, and innovation beyond Foucauldian notions of the body as merely being practiced upon, or responding to, social power.

Liminality provides a useful theoretical framework for exploring the body and transformative cultural and social processes when individuals, such as the beachcombers presented in this chapter, move more permanently between established cultural structures and norms and find themselves in spaces which offer the potential for alternative ways of being-in-the-world. In some cases beachcomber residents in Island settings found their embodied existence transformed, which was inextricably linked to the tattooing process. Through a combination of their own agency and local influences, beachcombers' bodies were ritually reconstituted in ways which were more coherent within their new environment, resulting not merely in productive social outcomes and the creation of more culturally *explicable* bodies in new settings but also their own transformed embodiment. The liminal phase can be seen as a fertile period of interaction between an individual's internalised energies and impulses, and their social values and preferences that become transformed as the individual body moves into - and interacts in - new social and cultural settings.

Notes

¹ Jane Caplan, 'Introduction,' in *Written on the Body: The Tattoo in European and American History*, ed. Jane Caplan (London: Reaktion Books, 2000), xvii-xix.; Joanna White, 'Embodied Encounters: Pacific Voyages and Tattooed Europeans, 1767-1850' (PhD dissertation, University of London, 2007), 42.; Anna Felicity Friedman Herlihy, 'Tattooed Transculturites: Western Expatriates among

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- Amerindian and Pacific Islander Societies, 1500-1900' (PhD dissertation, University of Chicago, 2012), 3.
- ² The term Islander/s is used here to describe the indigenous populations native to islands in the Pacific Ocean.
- ³ Non-regular crew members, such as scientists and gentlemen travellers, who were common on exploratory voyages.
- ⁴ M. De La Peyrouse, *A Voyage Round the World which was Performed in the Years 1785, 1786, 1787 and 1788* (Edinburgh: T. Brown, 1798), 233.; G. H. von Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels in Various Parts of the World During the Years 1803, 1804, 1805, 1806 & 1807* (London: H. Colburn, 1813), 116.
- ⁵ George Forster, *A Voyage Round the World: Volume 1*, eds. Nicholas Thomas and Oliver Berghof (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 2000), 161.; George Keate, *An Account of the Pelew Islands, Situated in the Western Part of the Pacific Ocean; Composed from the Journals and Communications of Captain Henry Wilson and some of his Officers, who, in August 1783, were there Shipwrecked, in the Antelope, a Packet Belonging to the Honourable East India Company* (London: Printed for Captain Wilson, 1788), 29.
- ⁶ Peng Liu, this volume.
- ⁷ T. J. Csordas, 'Introduction,' in *Embodiment and Experience: The Existential Ground of Culture and Self*, ed. T. J. Csordas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 1-2.
- ⁸ Liu, this volume.
- ⁹ Sydney Parkinson, *A Journal of a Voyage to the South Seas in His Majesty's Ship, The Endeavour* (London: Stanfield Parkinson, 1773), 25.
- ¹⁰ See Alfred Gell, *Wrapping in Images: Tattooing in Polynesia* (Oxford: Clarendon Paperbacks, 1993) for a thorough analysis of the historical cosmological significance of tattooing in the Pacific Islands.
- ¹¹ Christine Holmes, ed. *Captain Cook's Second Voyage: The Journals of Lieutenants Elliott and Pickersgill* (London: Caliban Books, 1984), 20.
- ¹² Archipelago of islands within which Tahiti is situated.
- ¹³ Forster, *Voyage Round the World*, 145.
- ¹⁴ Bryan S. Turner, *The Body and Society* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984), 248.
- ¹⁵ Holmes, *Captain Cook's Second Voyage*, 20. That men also became tattooed during Island landfalls during the third Pacific voyage captained by Cook is confirmed in the account of James Trevenen, who noted in his journal when the ship was at Hawaii: '...tattooing is not so common a custom here as at the Society or Friendly Islands. I do not...believe that any of our people got a single additional mark here.' - Gell, *Wrapping in Images*, 278-279.
- ¹⁶ See: William Bligh, *Description List of the Bounty Mutineers* in the Admiralty Archives ADM I 5328.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ermolai E. Levenshtern cited in Elena Govor, “‘Speckled Bodies’: Russian Voyagers and Nuku Hivans, 1804,” in *Tattoo: Bodies, Art and Exchange in the Pacific and the West*, eds. Nicholas Thomas, Anna Cole, and Bronwen Douglas (London: Reaktion Books, 2005), 69.

¹⁹ For example, Admiralty archives ADM 38/104; ADM38/7618; ADM38/8391; White, ‘Embodied Encounters,’ 198-199.

²⁰ Ira Dye, ‘The Tattoos of Early American Seafarers, 1796-1818,’ *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 133, no. 4 (1989): 520-554.

²¹ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (London: Routledge, 1984), 170.

²² White, ‘Embodied Encounters,’ 190-201.

²³ In his post-voyage correspondence Ledyard referred to the ‘Otaheite marks on my hands.’ John Ledyard, *John Ledyard’s Journey through Russia and Siberia 1787-1788* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1966), 105-106.

²⁴ John Ledyard, *John Ledyard’s Journal of Captain Cook’s Last Voyage* (Oregon: Oregon State University Press, 1963), 16. See also John Rickman, *Journal of Captain Cook’s Last Voyage to the Pacific Ocean, on Discovery; Performed in the Years 1776, 1777, 1778, 1779: Second Edition* (London: E. Newbery, 1781), 57-59, 67, on which Ledyard’s account was based.

²⁵ Maori corporeal inscriptions, though often involving intricate markings on the face and other parts of the body, never extended *from head to foot*, and it is unlikely that the extensive tattooing Ledyard reported to have been marked on the body of the would-be deserter could have been completed during the brief landfall of the *Discovery* at Aotearoa.

²⁶ Vanessa Smith, *Literary Culture and the Pacific* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 23. See H. E. Maude, *Of Islands and Men* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1968), Appendix, for an almost comprehensive bibliography of extant beachcomber narratives, excluding those of individuals who resided at Aotearoa. While beachcomber narratives flourished in the 19th century, the phenomenon was, as Maude noted, as ‘old as European contact itself’ - Ibid., 135, footnote 132.

²⁷ Greg Dening, *Islands and Beaches: Discourse on a Silent Land, Marquesas 1774-1880* (Honolulu, HI: University Press of Hawaii, 1980), 139.; Ian Campbell, “‘Gone Native’ in Polynesia: Captivity Narratives and Experiences from the South Pacific” (London: Greenwood Press, 1998), 100.

²⁸ Dening, *Islands and Beaches*, 155.

²⁹ James Morrison, *The Journal of James Morrison, Boatswain’s Mate of the “Bounty,” Describing the Mutiny and Subsequent Misfortunes of the Mutineers,*

Together with an Account of the Island of Tahiti (London: The Golden Cockerel Press, 1935), 77-78.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Michael Sturma, 'Mimicry, Mockery and Make-Overs: Western Visitors in South Pacific Dress,' *Fashion Theory* 4, no. 2 (2000): 154.

³² Keatonui (c. 1750-1818) was an important chief on Nuku Hiva island during the historical period.

³³ Jennifer Terrell, 'Joseph Kabris and his Notes on the Marquesas,' *The Journal of Pacific History* 17, no. 2 (1982): 108-109. It is unlikely that Kabris became tattooed *all over* in one sole occasion as claimed in his account; the Marquesan marks he is known to have borne were probably garnered through the course of his lengthy residence.

³⁴ Patrick O'Reilly cited in Terrell, 'Joseph Kabris,' 109.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Gell, *Wrapping in Images*, 208.

³⁷ See, for example, James F. O'Connell, *A Residence of Eleven Years in New Holland and the Caroline Islands*, 1836. Reprint, ed. Saul H. Riesenberg (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1972), 115.

³⁸ Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels*, 98. See also: Adam J. von Krusenstern, *Voyage Around the World in the Years 1803, 1804, 1805 & 1806, on Board the Ships Nadeshda and Neva* (London: C. Roworth, 1813), 172. See Govor, 'Speckled Bodies,' 53-71, for a detailed analysis of the textual and pictorial outcomes of the landfall of the Russian expedition at Nuku Hiva.

³⁹ Wilhelm Tilezius cited in Elena Govor, "'Speckled Bodies': Russian Voyagers and Nuku Hivans, 1804,' in *Tattoo: Bodies, Art and Exchange in the Pacific and the West*, eds. Nicholas Thomas, Anna Cole, and Bronwen Douglas (London: Reaktion Books, 2005), 67-68.

⁴⁰ Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels*, 122.

⁴¹ His LMS colleagues could only hope for his 'recovery,' according to the diary of William Suddy, January 6th 1798. See: LMS Archives: South Sea Journals Box 1.

⁴² George Vason. *An Authentic Narrative of Four Years' Residence at Tongataboo, one of the Friendly Islands, in the South Sea* (London: Longman, 1810) 178. Vason consistently analogised Tongan tattooing with clothing. See: Gell, *Wrapping in Images*, 104, 107.; John Martin, *An Account of the Natives of the Tonga Islands in the South Pacific Ocean: With an Original Grammar and Vocabulary of their Language. Compiled and Arranged from the Extensive Communications of Mr William Mariner, Several Years Resident in those Islands. Volume 2* (London: John Murray, 1818), 253-254 for more on male Tongan tattooing. A strong ethos of male exhibitionism prevailed within Tongan body culture during this historical period. See: William Diapea, *Cannibal Jack:*

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- the True Autobiography of a White Man in the South Seas* (London: Faber and Gwyer Limited, 1928), 219, for a singular description from later in the period of Tongan men proudly *airing* their new tattoos.
- ⁴³ Martin, *An Account*, 254.; Gell, *Wrapping in Images*, 101-104.
- ⁴⁴ Vason, *An Authentic Narrative*, 179.
- ⁴⁵ Viola Thimm, this volume.
- ⁴⁶ Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (London: Routledge, 2004).
- ⁴⁷ Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (New York, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967).
- ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 98-106.
- ⁴⁹ See: White, 'Embodied Encounters,' for an elaboration of this combination of influences.
- ⁵⁰ Sarah Salih and Judith Butler, eds., *The Judith Butler Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 28-29.
- ⁵¹ Liu, this volume.
- ⁵² Terence Turner, 'The Social Skin,' *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 2, no. 2 (2012): 503.
- ⁵³ Terrell, 'Joseph Kabris,' 108-109.; Vason, *An Authentic Narrative*, 179.
- ⁵⁴ Gell, *Wrapping in Images*.
- ⁵⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁵⁶ Terrell, 'Joseph Kabris,' 108-109.
- ⁵⁷ Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels*, 98.
- ⁵⁸ Jean Comaroff, *Body of Power, Spirit of Resistance* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 7. Yet, notably, it is his Otherness, how his whiter skin displayed the marks, which elicited particular admiration; beachcombers were, after all, constantly operating at the threshold between cultures.
- ⁵⁹ Samuel Patterson, *Narrative of the Adventures and Suffering of Samuel Patterson, Experienced in the Pacific Ocean, and many other Parts of the World, with an Account of the Feegee, and Sandwich Islands* (Providence: Palmer, 1817), 106. See also: J. Coulter, *Adventures in the Pacific; with Observations of the Natural Productions, Manners and Customs of the Natives of the Various Islands* (Dublin: William Curry, Jun. and Company, 1845), 39.; Martin, *An Account*, 20.
- ⁶⁰ William Torrey, *Torrey's Narrative: or The Life and Adventures of William Torrey. Written by Himself* (Boston, MA: A. J. Wright, 1848), 161.
- ⁶¹ See Linda Colley, *Captives: Britain, Empire and the World, 1600-1850* (London: Jonathon Cape, 2002), 78-79.
- ⁶² White, 'Embodied Encounters,' 150.
- ⁶³ Hamish Maxwell-Stewart and James Bradley, "'Behold the Man": Power, Observation and the Tattooed Convict,' *Australian Studies* 12, no. 1 (1997): 71-

97.

⁶⁴ Vason, *An Authentic Narrative*, 204.

⁶⁵ Joanna White, 'Marks of Transgression: The Tattooing of Europeans in the Pacific Islands,' in *Tattoo: Bodies, Art and Exchange in the Pacific and the West*, eds. Nicholas Thomas, Anna Cole, and Bronwen Douglas (London: Reaktion Books, 2005) 66-68.

⁶⁶ George Bruce, *Life of a Greenwich Pensioner, 1776-1817*. Unpublished manuscript (Sydney: Mitchell Library, A1618), 102. Bruce's petition failed and he died in Greenwich hospital on February 9, 1819.

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