

Series Editors' Preface

Art: Performance, Identity, and Ownership

Andrew Strathern and Pamela J. Stewart

Katherine Giuffre's detailed ethnographic study of a surge in artistic productions in Rarotonga provides an unusual and arresting picture of change in a Pacific Islands social milieu, tied in to globalization and history but exemplifying the perennially powerful capacities of the human imagination. Utilizing pointers from numbers of disciplines, including psychology and anthropology, Giuffre succeeds in analyzing and bringing to light the reasons for the remarkable efflorescence that she documents. On the anthropological side, we ourselves pointed her in the direction of John Liep's edited collection on creativity (Liep 2001) and Alfred Gell's *Art and Agency* (Gell 1998). To these could be added Hallam and Ingold's collection (2007), in which the editors point out that creativity should not be considered as an exceptional feature of social life, because it is at the heart of social life as such. "There is no script for social and cultural life. People have to work it out as they go along. In a word, they have to *improvise*" (Ingold and Hallam 2007, 1). By this yardstick, Lévi-Strauss's bricoleur would not be an exception but be the exemplar of *homo sapiens socialis*.

Ingold and Hallam foreground "improvisation" as basic, stressing its generative capacities. Expanding the concept, they refer to "the improvisational creativity of skilled practice" (2007, 14). Creativity for them is thus already present in improvisation. The cover of their book has an imprint of a pen drawing signed with "T.I. 2003." A series of continuous loops, links, lines, eyes, and faces appears to enclose reindeer and birds and other creatures, inchoate, humorous, insistent. Presumably, it is intended to illustrate artistically this basic idea of creative improvisation. Playfulness enters into this idea and gives it a performance dimension, displayed for us on the cover along with a reference to identity and then an iconic claim to ownership of the product. The drawing also resonates with the theme of "novelty as recombination ... found in the hybrid animal-human figures with which many medieval and early modern writings were illustrated" (p. 17). Hallam and Ingold's text comes close to Lévi-Strauss's famous representation of such hybrid figures in his *Pensée Sauvage* (Lévi-Strauss 1962), although they do not explicitly make this connection. Unexpected combinations, juxtapositions, transformations that tell us about fundamental possibilities: these are indeed among the bases of creative action in the world.

Yet there is a sense in which artistic creation, rooted as it may be in the negotiated and partial practices of “flow” in everyday life, also achieves itself by standing out from that background of fluid improvisation of forms and becoming a foreground that crystallizes into a new shape. It is in this context of “standing out” also that competition takes place and drives that differentiation of art forms which Dr. Giuffre has amply highlighted in her study. It is in competition that we find the individual and the collective elements of art brought together: drawing on shared collective resources artists vie with one another to produce works that will sell to tourists and collectors. This is the context that is delineated in the present book.

Such a context must also belong to a wider situation of cultural revival. Or it may itself constitute such a revival. In Taiwan, where we have conducted research for many years now,¹ indigenous Austronesian groups, long acculturated and brought under Han state control and cultural influences from both Chinese and Japanese sources, have, since 1986 and with official support, sought to reassert their original and historical identities, appealing to cultural motifs in order to do so. They have revived cultural practices, changing them very often to adapt them to the interests of tourists, especially Han tourists. They put on dances in cultural centers that re-enact or rely on cultural practices such as initiation, war, or harvest dances (see, e.g., Stewart and Strathern 2005, Strathern and Stewart 2005, 2007). In Papua New Guinea, another of our research areas, art was made central to the national project from the time of political independence from Australia in 1975 onwards. This was done through legislation that set up a series of cultural institutions, including a national Museum, the Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies, a national theater, and the national Arts School, all supported by an appropriation of government money, assisted by the Australian government of the day. The Arts School became the natural center from which new artists could emerge, and it was later incorporated into the University of Papua New Guinea, whose campus was nearby in Waigani, Port Moresby. Another factor, however, came into play: the presence of two expatriates, a non-New Guinean artist, Georgina Beier, and her husband, Prof. Ulli Beier, who was the founding Director of the Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies and an entrepreneur who helped to sponsor both new writers of literature and producers of the visual arts. Georgina Beier taught various artistic techniques to a number of young aspiring artists, who later became among those who were very well known and well patronized. Such artists included, notably, Kauage, Jakupa, Akis, and Ruki Fane. These young male artists were not ones who had come up through the formal education system within New Guinea. Kauage, for example, spoke his indigenous Chimbu (Simbu) language and the lingua franca, Tok Pisin. He was not educated in

1 A. Strathern and P.J. Stewart (Strathern) are a husband and wife research team who have spent many years as long-term researchers working on a variety of topics in a number of different geographical locales, including Papua New Guinea and Taiwan. They have published extensively and widely. For a list of relevant examples of their work visit their website (www.pitt.edu/~strather/sandspublicat.htm).

other languages, e.g., English. Georgina Beier introduced to him various painting techniques and encouraged him to develop these in his own way. Kauage's works eventually became quite famous and have been exhibited internationally. Artists also took advantage of schemes that encouraged artists and sculptors, painters, music-players, song makers, weavers, or bead and jewellery crafters, to re-develop images and themes from the past. In one of the cases that we know well from work in Taiwan among the Paiwan people in the southern part of the Island, the framework that surrounds such initiatives consists of (a) government support, (b) community approval and organization, and (c) individual and familial creativity. Artistic production is set into a narrative of historical change, from government disapproval and suppression of indigenous customs at large to government support and community enthusiasm. Art is also expressed in church decorations that depict Christian figures and symbols with images in Paiwan style (Stewart and Strathern 2007a, 2007b, 282; Strathern and Stewart 2009; Tan 2001). Most of the art objects produced are either not for commercial purposes, as with church sculptures, or are for consumption in the tourist network within Taiwan itself. There seems to be a contrast here with Giuffre's study of Rarotonga, where the colonial and post-colonial connections with New Zealand have provided chances of art education, for example at the University of Auckland, and opportunities to sell to a market. Taiwan, by comparison, has been enclaved by its separation from, and contested relationship with, Mainland China, and within Taiwan itself, the fourteen currently recognized "tribes" (including the Paiwan) are further enclaved as a tiny minority within a largely Han majority population of Taiwanese and Mainlander immigrants. Nevertheless, the comparison, and contrast, with Rarotonga is quite instructive. The Rarotongans are a small population, but they are not a minority within their own land; and their external ties with New Zealand are founded not only on a colonial relationship of the past but on their older ethnic homogeneity with the Maori of New Zealand. So much easier for them, then, to make use of these connections to open up pathways for their artistic work.

Dr. Giuffre notes that in Rarotonga cultural revival began, in some ways, with the return home of youths who came back from New Zealand, bringing with them notions about indigeneity and its putative rights deriving from the New Zealand Maori context. As has happened also with the indigenous groups in Taiwan, people began to adopt or re-insert indigenous elements into their names. In New Zealand itself, Giuffre notes, programs have been instituted to teach the Cook Islands Maori language. Similarly in Taiwan, cultural revival has gone hand in hand with efforts to recover and re-institute the teaching of indigenous languages to the younger generations (Strathern and Stewart 2005). In passing, Dr. Giuffre also notes that there has been a renewal of interest in tattoos (and tattooing is a highly salient historical practice among Polynesian groups).

There is another parallel from our Taiwanese research, this time with the group called the Atayal, among whom tattooing was said to be originally important as a marker of warriorhood and the taking of heads of enemies. Indeed, it seems that without tattoos a person could not properly enter the afterworld on their death.

Japanese colonial authorities after 1895 forbade this practice of tattooing and forced those who wanted to be educated in school to have their tattoos removed; actions now remembered with indignation. More recently Atayal warriorhood has been transformed into dance displays, and versions of tattooing have been taken up again by some younger people who participate in these dances, often competing for prizes in festivals that may pit dancers of different “tribes” against one another.

It is probable that in many parts of the Pacific, art, song, dance, and drama have flourished as a result of festivals in which national and regional identities are show-cased and brought into the ambit of the independent nation as such. In these contexts individuals may exert great influence and help to bring artistic works into being. Interestingly enough, Kauage and others of the artists from Papua New Guinea that the Beiers worked with, came from Highlands areas of Papua New Guinea which did not have elaborate traditions of visual art and sculpture such as are found in many coastal parts of the country, notably the Sepik region. Their productions, however, drew notably on images found in songs and folktales in their local areas. The images they drew on and created were examples of what Kirsten Hastrup, in a discussion of “Agency, Anticipation, and Creativity,” refers to as “experience which is not captured by current categories and which potentially points to alternative ways of seeing things and acting on them.” (Hastrup 2007, 204)

Another important aspect of art production in Rarotonga and elsewhere is its connection with intellectual property rights. In contexts where art objects are produced not for internal ritual purposes or for recreation but for external sale, such issues of rights are likely to arise. Giuffre points out that the individualistic element in the intellectual property rights context conflicts with Rarotongan concepts of generosity and sharing. Identity questions, however, run across this conflict. “Who owns native culture?,” is the question posed in the title of a book on this matter by Michael Brown (Brown 2004). “Who can say?” is the question that might be offered in response to this question. In Rarotonga the issue has turned on who has the right to use cultural materials and images from Rarotonga itself. But disputes arise primarily, if not exclusively, in contexts of monetary profit. Giuffre cites the case of a painting of a senior local woman standing near a clothesline. The painting was done from a photograph of the woman taken by the artist, who was an expatriate and also ran a gallery. The Cook Islands National Visual Arts Society instigated a copyright lawsuit against the artist on grounds that art galleries should be reserved for Cook Islanders and that foreigners should not be allowed to use Rarotongan cultural symbols. The lawsuit was clearly a part of indigenous rights political movements in New Zealand and elsewhere. The artist eventually closed her gallery and went back to New Zealand.

Elizabeth Burns Coleman has made an in-depth examination of comparable issues in the indigenous Australian context (Coleman 2005). She notes (p. 31) that according to some viewpoints, claims to the exclusive ownership of culture may be devalued if they are linked to “ethnic nationalism.” She notes further that cultural

elements, especially as they enter art or a political movement, are examples of the “creation of tradition” (p. 35). She concludes that “a group making a claim over a cultural form on the basis that it is a part of their identity needs to be able to explain the relationship between that form and their identity” (p. 42). She goes on in her book to suggest that in the case of the indigenous Australian art forms she discusses their motifs can be seen as “insignia” of the artists’ groups, and therefore there is a legitimate basis for making a claim of ownership. In the Rarotongan case, comparable motifs certainly exist, but their exclusive relationship to specific groups may not be clear. Less clear again is the status of an image derived from a photograph that happens to include cultural elements, such as a kind of cloth. But aside from the question of group claims there is the sense of personal creativity and its claims to recognition. In a case we ourselves have studied and written about from Papua New Guinea a young woman contested the appropriation, without suitable reward or acknowledgement, of her design, done as a schoolgirl, for what became the country’s national flag (Strathern and Stewart 2000). She said that the flag, i.e., its design, was hers, and she did not want it used as it had been (“mi les long yupela usim flag bilong mi” in the Tok Pisin lingua franca she used to express this point). Here she was speaking as an artist. Creativity may in the long run be its own reward (like virtue is said to be). But artists, like everyone else, wish to be individually recognized for what they have achieved.

In this book Dr. Giuffrè has given us a unique and vivid picture of creativity in transition in a Pacific Island context that must resonate with other such cases around the world. We recognize here her achievement in doing so.

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Cromie Burn Research Unit
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