

**cultural difference and the density of objects**

**ANNETTE B. WEINER**—*New York University*

**a personal quest**

In 1971 I first went to the Trobriands as a graduate student to study material culture—specifically, the aesthetics and economics of Trobriand woodcarving. Before I left for the field, several of my professors gave me advice about other kinds of material culture. Bob Netting told me to weigh the yams at harvest. Freddie de Laguna hoped I would pay attention to the house decorations that Malinowski said had no symbolic value. And, of course, everyone was curious about those kula shells. Was Malinowski right about this unusual system of long-distance reciprocity?

Like most of us at that time, I went to the Trobriands unconcerned with reciprocity as a problematic. The exchange of things was important to me only in relation to how the cash from tourist art interfered with the traditional exchanges described by Malinowski. I also gave little thought to a question that underlies the theme of these meetings: “Arts and Goods: Possession, Commoditization, Representation.” Given that material culture is such an intimate part of our ethnographic inquiry, why has it taken so long to move beyond traditional, normative economic theories when as anthropologists we all acknowledge the complex and ambiguous nature of objects at the microethnographic level?

It was at this microlevel that my initial interest in anthropology was engaged. In the first years of my graduate student career, I participated in several archaeological expeditions to Guatemala (see Reina 1970). After tediously cataloguing hundreds of bags of potsherds and trying to imagine the social dynamics they represented, I often escaped to the neighboring villages. There I visited with Indian women and sometimes accompanied them to local markets where I watched them make knowledgeable selections in their choices of particular cooking pots—pots that appeared similar to the shattered ones we were excavating (see Figure 1). For me, ethnography was the only meaningful way to make sense of the clay fragments in the lab. Convinced that I needed to do research with people and not material culture alone, I switched to cultural anthropology, only to find myself faced with an even more mysterious puzzle about material culture.

In the beginning of my Trobriand fieldwork, the banana leaf bundles I watched women exchange were indeed strange in terms of the variables that anthropologists usually ascribe to objects (see Figure 2). These Trobriand bundles had no apparent aesthetic value nor use value.

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Figure 1. Assessing the quality of cooking pots at the market in Antigua, Guatemala.

Their distribution following each death seemed to defy reciprocal models. Even more bewildering, given the neglect of women in discussions of material culture, the bundles were produced and controlled by women.

I was similarly puzzled by the magnitude of Trobriand intrigue and involvement with yams. Soon after *Women of Value* was published, I wrote an article focused entirely on the complex representations embodied in yams, to emphasize the extent of political action regarding yams before they may be eaten (see Weiner 1976, 1978). In the Trobriands, raw yams are used to challenge adversaries or authenticate status, are buried with important chiefs, are left to rot to show a chief's power, and are given to women by their brothers (thereby creating a debt that links yams directly to women's economies), all before yams are finally eaten.

Yet, in thinking back to the intellectual course I followed while trying to understand the cultural experiences symbolically compressed in Trobriand objects, one issue remained unre-



Figure 2. Part of the process of making bundles in Kiriwina, Trobriand Islands.

solved even after I had written two books about the Trobriands. Why were banana-leaf bundles used in exchange and as currency in the Trobriands and not elsewhere? I was similarly perplexed in the case of *kula*. Was *kula* more than ceremonial exchange, and why is it still such an emotion-laden activity for the participants?<sup>1</sup>

My most challenging insights into these questions began while doing fieldwork in Samoa, where I found both remarkable similarities and extraordinary differences between the use and meaning of Samoan fine mats and Trobriand banana-leaf bundles. From then on I was committed to positioning material culture in an arena not easily reducible to a reciprocity model. Further, these comparisons between Samoan mats and Trobriand bundles made me especially cognizant of how exchange theory, as we know it, developed out of particular historical circumstances that gave decidedly Western economic and political readings to gifts, reciprocity, authority, ownership, and gender.

Although cultural anthropologists' interest in material culture was important from the beginning of American anthropology, over the years it received little sustained theoretical attention except for materialist and evolutionary theories. By contrast, exchange theory has had a vital trajectory throughout this century, building on the legacies of Durkheim, Mauss, and Malinowski. Yet while objects are central to exchange theory, they were most often described as reciprocal "gifts" (or, in Lévi-Strauss's [1969(1949)] structural analysis of marriage exchange, the reciprocal "gift" that became a woman, the "gift" *par excellence*). The label "gift" further reinforced the old, inaccurate assumption that material culture in "primitive" societies is devoid of particular ownership, thereby making other people's cultural property more easily transferable into the hands of Western collectors or national trusts. Even the ideology of reciprocity as an inherent part of Western economics—for example, Adam Smith's notion that an "invisible hand" keeps the market equitable without laws or governmental controls—was simply projected onto "primitive" economies in the 19th century, where reciprocity was perceived as a regulatory mechanism because "primitive" society lacked legal codes or political hierarchy.

In effect, our own familiarity with the history of our discipline has made it easy to forget how deeply specific Enlightenment ideologies shaped and reshaped the theoretical premises on which the categories "primitive" exchange and "gifts" are historically based. Adherence to the belief in the primacy of reciprocity as the motivation behind "primitive" exchange remained unexamined, in large part, because anthropologists were able to determine ethnographically the exchange value for a "gift" and its "counter-gift." However, a traditional reciprocity model ignores factors that are significant in understanding the dynamics of those objects that, in their ability to resist reciprocity, seemingly stand outside the reciprocity model.

## **the comparability of dense objects**

Therefore, I want to discuss how values resistant to reciprocity can be created in objects. What are the strategies that people use to keep things out of exchange as a means of enhancing their value? To begin with, objects obviously do not stand alone outside the processes that make them into commodities or treasures. As cultural constructions, some objects become symbolically dense—so dense with cultural meaning and value that others have difficulty prying these treasures away from their owners. Such density accrues through an object's association with its owner's fame, ancestral histories, secrecy, sacredness, and aesthetic and economic values. Thus objects that are especially dense circulate exceedingly slowly in comparison to less dense ones, which can be exchanged, sold, or traded with impunity.

Simmel (1978[1907]) pointed out that, "A high degree of sensitivity distinguishes very precisely between the amount of satisfaction that a certain possession provides, through which it becomes comparable and exchangeable with other possessions, and those specific qualities beyond its eudaemonistic effects which may make it just as valuable to us and in that respect completely irreplaceable" (p. 123).<sup>2</sup> This suggests a continuum along which objects may be ranked according to their symbolic densities. At one end of the continuum are inalienable possessions—objects that should be kept within the closed context of family, clan, dynasty, or corporation, for example. Other, less prized possessions vary in their symbolic densities and, therefore, in their degree of interchangeability. Like commodities, things at the other end of the continuum without much symbolic density are exchangeable merely in terms of the value of their replaceability.

I use the device of imagining objects strung out along such a hierarchical continuum only to emphasize that symbolic densities differ radically even with objects that are physically alike. One monarch's crown is not the same as another; their histories differ just as one kula shell is not replaceable with another. Each shell represents a history of different former owners—the reason kula players told Malinowski that a player wants to possess every high-ranking shell.

The danger, of course, in trying to keep a possession inalienable is the inevitable presence of other factors, such as theft, physical decay, and opportunistic exchange strategies that may separate such a valued possession from its owner. Yet what makes these famed possessions remarkable is how similarly they are used in a multiplicity of places, times, and situations as a means to negotiate and legitimate intertwined and often disputed past histories.<sup>3</sup> In discussing the historical peregrinations of Cardinal Wolsey's hat now enclosed in a glass case in the library of Christ Church, Oxford, Stephen Greenblatt notes that "cultural artifacts do not stay still, . . . they exist in time, . . . [and are] bound up with personal and institutional conflict, negotiations, and appropriations" (1990:161). A "bit of red cloth stitched together" becomes "a complex symbolic construction" marking Wolsey's rise from a butcher's son to a prince of the church and "in its glass case it still radiates a tiny quantum of cultural energy" (1990:161–162).<sup>4</sup>

Certain objects acquire a charisma that lasts beyond one person's ownership. Through time, these objects become monuments of past fame, or they may become curiosities; they may become tarnished, or their charisma may become heightened or contested. But the most

important goal is to keep them out of circulation in the face of their potential or actual movements from one social or economic encounter to another. Thus the presence of these objects constrains social and economic action as much as it enhances the possibilities for such action. The symbolic densities that surround these objects attempt to contain subversity and political change while their ownership calls attention to the possibilities of their displacement.

So politically significant are these dense possessions that, for example, the rulers of the T'ang dynasty incorporated royal objects from earlier unrelated rulers into their courts as a way of tracing descent fictively (Wechsler 1985). Similarly, Japanese emperors wore sacred clothing made from bark fibers at their installations, instead of newly crafted magnificent silks, to proclaim their neolithic ancestry (Cort 1989). Even with intense colonial exploitation, kula exchange continues, as does the veneration of sacred Indonesian textiles (e.g., Gittinger 1979; Kotilainen 1992), and the contemporary exchanges of Tahitian or Hawaiian quilts, that in the colonial period, replaced similar exchanges of barkcloth (Hammond 1986).<sup>5</sup> Overall, we seem to be missing something basic here.

By turning our attention to the ambiguous role of objects and the dilemmas that their particular ownership generates, we see that value is created by trying to keep certain possessions out of exchange in the face of obligations to engage in exchange. I call this the paradox of keeping-while-giving (Weiner 1992). It is through this paradox of keeping-while-giving that we follow the human strategies working to create densities in objects as these objects resist exchange and as their value is enhanced by the exchange of other things.

This view frees exchange theory from its traditional rationalistic, often mechanistic, positioning. Of even greater importance, it enables us to compare cross-culturally the processes of keeping-while-giving. The Maussian perspective, that the principles of thought and action take their specificity from particular cultural contexts, is useful in this regard if we expand this view comparatively in two exploratory areas. First, we must examine the range of actions involved in the dynamics surrounding keeping-while-giving. Second, we must discover how these actions vary in a range of historical and cultural contexts that may themselves change through time and operate under different economic systems.

By a comparative perspective I do not mean the traditional nomothetic approach where ethnographic examples are marshalled in support of a specific theory. Rather, what I envision is a comparative exploration of how objects limit or expand the possibilities for gender-based power, status, and hierarchy. This leads to a critical interplay between local ethnographic sites and what else we can learn about those particular sites from other ethnographic vantage points.

Symbolically dense possessions are politically salient because keeping a highly prized object against all the demands for its exchange defines and even entrenches the owner's difference. Even if the possession is not displayed by its owner, the fact of its presence confirms the establishment of hierarchical difference in social and political identities. Participants are as aware of what is *not* being exchanged, as much as they attend to what is being exchanged. The seemingly linear aspects of reciprocal give-and-take are thus merely overt attempts to participate in, and even to snare, what is not part of the exchange. In this way, the ranking of objects legitimates the ranking of persons.

### **the density in kula shells**

In kula, for example, the most symbolically dense shells are known as "chiefly shells." These shells are large, aesthetically desirable, and have long prestigious genealogies of their previous owners.<sup>6</sup> Some of the highest-ranking shells are kept by one player for 10, 20, or even 30 years. Given the relatively few valuables in any of these Massim societies and the unending exchange obligations, several decades is a very long time to keep a possession out of exchange. Within kula, these most prized possessions remain inalienable because their ownership is reserved for



Figure 3. A Kula valuable of great renown.

a kula elite. The presence of chiefly shells with the highest levels of symbolic density—although highly restricted in their availability and their movements—builds a bridge between all other players, making the possibility of getting a ranking shell an anticipated rather than an actual event because the reality of owning such a shell is rare (see Figure 3).

What holds the kula exchange in place, however, are the very shells that have little symbolically dense value. Such shells are actually expendable. They can be taken out of kula, sold to others, lost from a partnership through the manipulations of better players. Sometimes they are merely copies of well-known shells or are small shells given with the promise of larger ones to come or, perhaps, new shells recently purchased with money.<sup>7</sup> These exchanges of commodity-like shells permit the manipulation and the individual long-term retention of the higher-ranking shells. Commodity-shell circulation enables a partner to hold a symbolically dense shell for a long time while carefully deciding who should be the next recipient. In other

words, the commoditylike shells empower the strongest players to keep-while-giving while they attract others to take part in kula despite the high odds against ever gaining a chiefly shell.

In this way, kula creates and authenticates hierarchical differences among players. While at one end of the continuum kula is an open exchange system in which most players participate, at the other end it is tightly controlled as each shell becomes an objectification of hierarchical difference. This authentication of difference, however, stays within kula alone, and therein lies the political limit to these exchanges.

This brings us back to the question I asked earlier about the presence of such a complex exchange system in the Massim. When I first analyzed kula only from the perspective of the Trobriands, I considered kula exchanges from the perspective of Trobriand chiefs. It was only when I studied kula activities comparatively and understood how objects are used to legitimate and bolster more established chiefly hierarchies elsewhere in Oceania that I saw the limitations of kula as a political system.

Analytically, kula is a system of power and political strategy that must be juxtaposed against the limitations of power and politics at the local levels. These limitations are revealed in the cultural constructions—the symbolic density—perceived to be in the shells themselves. The symbolism associated with these high-ranking kula shells is not about lineage succession, or the claims of marriages, deaths, and reproduction. The elementary relation between kinship and the political order is missing from the values accorded these shells—they encompass the names of prestigious kula players but not the ancestors of lineages and clans. This is the illusion in kula; it constitutes a pan-island hierarchy in which the image of Trobriand chieftaincy is recapitulated without reproducing its institutionalization in other island groups.

Here then is a model for comparison: a system with differentially dense objects, some of which are inalienable among a group of elites. Yet despite symbolic density, the system is politically limited because these shells do not authenticate political succession. In this inter-island exchange system, the reproduction of kula politics takes place so that hierarchy is sustained only within that political sphere, without its reproduction within a lineage or clan. Therefore, kula activity provides a context for chiefly authority in other Massim societies where formal political ranking and chiefs do not occur. So while ranking in kula is continually legitimated and sustained by the presence of a kula elite and chiefly shells, kula action itself never succeeds in creating rank in these other societies.

Comparatively speaking, kula objects are missing historical associations with families, lineages, or clans. The densities associated with individual kula players' fame does not alter the ranking of kin groups. These former associations give rise to the symbolic densities that create long-lasting inalienable possessions, and these are the occasions when possessions associated with women and reproduction usually come into play.

### **cloth and its density**

When I first analyzed Trobriand bundles and skirts, I could only see their relation to political hierarchy through the fact that increased inflation in their exchanges was a continual drain on men's wealth. As I mentioned earlier, it was only when I did fieldwork in Samoa and analyzed other Polynesian polities, that I saw Trobriand bundles, Samoan fine mats, and Maori and Hawaiian cloaks as "cloth"—part of a major category of material culture—that was largely ignored in discussions of exchange, politics, and cultural evolution. Yet as Jane Schneider and I have shown, on a global scale the predominance of women in cloth production and distribution is linked to the widespread symbolism in which cloth evokes female power (Weiner and Schneider 1989:20–26).<sup>8</sup> From one society to another, this power may be skewed in particular ways, in some cases bringing women into political prominence, in other situations supporting male hegemony. But the extent of the symbolic density in cloth and women's



involvement in its production and control are a measure of how this gender-based power is organized.<sup>9</sup>

In Samoa, women's production of fine mats and their partial participation in the exchanges of these mats enable some women as sisters to hold high-ranking titles and to maintain a significant political presence.<sup>10</sup> Like kula shells, these fine mats have varying degrees of symbolic density—those that are old, beautifully made, and associated with important titles are the most inalienable. Thousands of additional less-inalienable fine mats are exchanged along with enormous quantities of food, such as cases of tinned fish and meat, biscuits, and bread at the taking of a new title, at births, marriages, and deaths (see Figure 4). Like the lower-ranking kula shells, the intensity of these exchanges fulfills individual obligations. Most importantly, the exchanges serve to keep the highly valued fine mats out of exchange or, at the very least, limit the number that must be given away.

Unlike kula shells, however, these fine mats are exchanged at the inauguration of new titleholders. By their ranking, the exchanges establish the support that the new titleholder will have. Unlike kula practice, the politics of Samoan chieftaincy is expressed in the symbolic density associated with a range of extremely valuable fine mats. These are the fine mats that are kept out of exchange for generations—only being inherited among the members of the same descent group. So important are these fine mats that at times a person may decide to hold her or his own funeral distributions while still alive in order to insure the correct transmission.

In this way, ancestral histories are written into the object, increasing its symbolic density to the degree that the fine mat becomes far too valuable to be given in exchange outside the group, although it will be inherited within the group. Today, with the increased global circulation of fine mats as they move throughout Samoan communities in Los Angeles, Seattle, Honolulu, and Auckland, written notes are attached with the names of previous owners to overcome the potential loss of this knowledge and, therefore, the loss of the object.



Figure 4. A Samoan marriage ceremony where the altar of the Catholic Church is adorned with highly valued fine mats.



In some African societies, such as the Ashante and the Buganda, the most important moment in the installation of a divine ruler was the barkcloth ritual in which the heir was draped in voluminous barkcloth coverings (Rattray 1927; Ray 1991). In a similar way, in the South Pacific the tradition in the last century was to bedeck a Fijian chief in vast quantities of barkcloth at his inauguration (see Figure 5). In all these cases, the barkcloth was imbued with cosmological significance that pertained to ancestral authority, conveying an image of power at the precise moment when power is least secure.<sup>11</sup> By creating such physical densities that objectify authority and power, a social person is transformed into a body politic.

In the same way, the symbolic densities in ancient, inalienable possessions bring the often-contested experiences of the past into the present as an act of legitimation and as a political foil. A famous Samoan story recounts that at a marriage, the bridegroom's relatives brought hundreds of fine mats while the bride's relatives brought only one. But this one fine mat was ancient, and when it was presented, lightning blazed across the sky signifying a sacred moment.

Looking back to the enigma of Trobriand bundles, we can see similarities and differences that give comparative scope to Trobriand bundle meanings. The most valued Trobriand bundles and skirts are those newly made for each mortuary distribution, not ancient ones that are



Figure 5. About 180 meters of tapa cloth draped around a Fijian chief in 1877 (from Kooijman 1972:413). Reprinted, by permission, from *Baessler-Archiv Beiträge zur Völkerkunde, neue Folge Band XIII* (1965), XXXVIII Band, Verlag von Dietrich Reimer, Berlin, 1966.

treasured as inalienable possessions. Neither are these objects associated with specific ancestral cosmological powers, like mana is, or chiefly genealogies, such as occurs with sacred barkcloth used as a wrapping for investiture of chiefly office or the wrapping of bodies and bones at death. The symbolic density of Trobriand cloth concerns the primacy of matrilineal identity in a generalized sense, rather than the support and power of chiefly succession and ranking descent groups.

In these few examples concerned with the political significance of keeping-while-giving, we see how sustaining cultural difference activates and differentiates nodes of power and domains of authority. It is through the opposing forces involved in the paradox of keeping-while-giving that hierarchical differences emerge or are undercut, and it is the most symbolically dense objects that are the expression and legitimation of this difference. These are the objects, then, that provide us with the ambivalent texts about gender, power, and authority.

Yet these texts can be read most fully by juxtaposing one society's valuable objects against another's. While the cultural context of each individual ethnographic site is vital, each site still needs to be reread from the perspective of other ethnographic readings. To analyze exchange practices without a comparative focus reduces our understanding of the complex ways exchange value both supports and limits the creation of symbolic density in objects, while a comparative approach enables us to learn about the intricate ways in which individuals and groups become empowered.

### **the density in objects in global perspective**

Throughout the world, inalienable possessions—a tribute to human imagination and ingenuity—take many forms, from the sacred bones of Indonesian rulers to the relics of Christ's disciples; from Maori cloaks to Inca feathered garments; from the British monarchy's crown jewels to the recent global controversies over cultural property, such as the Elgin marbles, Mayan sculptures, or sacred Zuni war god statues. These are the objects around which wars are fought, leaders installed, women's political domains are affirmed or contested, and local groups or dynasties assert their authority.

Therefore, who owns an inalienable possession is a matter of vital concern. When an inalienable possession enters exchange or the marketplace, as *all* possessions eventually do, what determines its future value and its future potential as an inalienable possession is the status of its owner. This is why it matters so much to the other high-ranking kula players who gets a famous shell. It is also why New York art dealers try to control who has the right to buy a particular artist's work. As one potential collector said, money is not enough, and "buying from some galleries is like trying to get into society in London" (Greenspan 1988:88). In the same way, trying to get into the highest rungs of kula "society" is almost impossible for most kula players.

It is here that we see the similarity between capitalist systems and those I have been discussing. The paradox of keeping-while-giving among the Trobrianders and Samoans is no less relevant to their economies than it is to capitalist systems. Although the nexus of each case is different, the processes are surprisingly similar. While scholars beginning with Marx continue to emphasize how capitalist consumption is linked to hegemonic relations and their transformations, little attention has been paid to the relationship between consumption and keeping. Yet the market has always been, and remains today, deeply implicated in the relation between inalienable possessions as a storage of value and in the way inalienable possessions enter the market because of more immediate economic gain.

This is vividly illustrated in an episode from Edith Wharton's novel, *The Custom of the Country* (1987[1913]). In a pivotal scene, the American beauty Undine Spragg, living in France and married to the Marquis de Chelle, finds herself in debt because of her consuming passion for

luxurious clothes and jewels. Angry because her husband's income is spent not on her but on the upkeep of his family's large estates, she invites a dealer for an appraisal of tapestries that have been in the Marquis's family for four hundred years.

The dealer brings with him self-made millionaire Elmer Moffatt, reputed to be America's greatest collector of rare possessions. Undine believes that once her husband learns of the actual monetary value of the tapestries he will consent to their sale; she is shocked when he refuses. Moffatt tells Undine: "I understand why your husband won't sell those tapestries – till he's got to. His ancestors are *his* business: Wall Street's mine" (p. 323).

By the end of the book, Moffatt not only buys the tapestries to add to his vast collection but marries Undine as well. Thus Wharton explores how certain possessions resist commodification even when the reasons they do so are located in exchange itself. Provenience and fame enable antiques and art to become the storage of economic value, with their futures already imagined by collectors, auction houses, and museums.

In calling attention to these issues, the more general question that I raised earlier is whether there is more to be explored about the nature of objects than just their cultural meanings within a local cultural context, as important as they may be. This question is being asked with great frequency in the art world and especially in museums where non-Western artifacts have been loosened from their ethnographic moorings and reclassified as "art" in a Western context. The postmodern blurring of boundaries between high and low art illustrated in the 1986 auction of Andy Warhol's collectibles—a vast jumble of masterpieces and junk in which the junk took on great value—shows the increasing scale of attempts to make commodities into inalienable possessions, while inalienable possessions themselves are at times reduced to commodities.

Globally, it is becoming more difficult to resist exchange, and the hegemony of inalienable possessions remains partial and limited. Yet the economic and political advantages that come with resisting exchange are as strong as ever and attest to the strength of the paradox of keeping-while-giving. Since the end of the 19th century, the division between Western and "primitive" societies has been framed around the difference between "gift" and capitalist economies. But as we see from the paradox of keeping-while-giving, there are more similarities than differences, and we must begin to attend to these similarities. We can start by comparing the strategies people use to resist exchange and examining how such resistance intensifies exchange so that a kind of dialectic is established as keeping informs giving and giving informs keeping. At the center is the tension between economics and politics—between dense possessions and the hierarchical differences they attempt to define. The old boundaries of exchange theory are gone, and we are now marking a new beginning for the anthropology of material culture.

## notes

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1. I am by no means the only anthropologist who has been concerned with these kula questions (see, e.g., the articles in Leach and Leach 1983 and in Damon and Wagner 1989; see also Damon 1990). The work of Nancy Munn (notably 1986) has been especially influential and close to my own thinking about these issues.

2. Recently, Beidelman (1989) argued that anthropologists' long-term interest in Marcel Mauss's *The Gift* (1990[1925]) caused them to neglect Simmel's earlier work on exchange. In *The Philosophy of Money*, Simmel (1978[1907]) not only analyzes the social, economic, and political consequences of the modern money economy but also shows the relation between inalienable objects, commodities, and money.

3. Recently, Thomas (1991) has criticized my conceptualization of inalienable objects, claiming that I did not consider "the differences between particular kinds of valuables and the distinctive purposes which some may have" (p. 23). His comments, however, are based on an earlier article of mine (Weiner 1985) that specifically focused on Mauss's (1990[1925]) Maori examples of "the spirit of the gift." Such comparative differences are the focus of my book, *Inalienable Possessions* (1992) and of this article.

4. The hat was not a direct bequest to Christ Church, but passed through many owners including the actor Charles Kean, who wore it when he played Wolsey in Henry VIII. It was his daughter who finally sold it to Christ Church in the 19th century (Greenblatt 1990:161–162).
5. See Thomas (1991) for other examples of the “entanglement” of objects in historical processes.
6. For a description of how these shells are evaluated by kula players see Campbell 1983. Also see Munn 1986.
7. Recently, the crews participating in Jacques Cousteau’s expedition to Papua New Guinea presented a Trobriand chief with a newly made kula necklace in appreciation for his help during their stay in Kiriwina (Cousteau and Richards 1989:72–73).
8. For other global examples of the social, economic, and political significance of women’s roles in cloth production and exchange, see the articles in Weiner and Schneider 1989. Also see, for example, Schneider 1987.
9. Women’s production of pottery in other parts of the world is another area of study to consider in this regard. From a different but related perspective, I call attention to the preponderance of elite women who historically were among the world’s great collectors and the founders of museums.
10. For ethnographic details of these exchanges see Weiner 1989, 1992.
11. A description of such an event was recorded in 1846 in which a chief had an enormous barkcloth train 100 yards long. He was followed by “200 men with large *masis* [lengths of barkcloth] from their shoulders. Then two men carrying a long bamboo with four large *masis* tied up and hung on it . . . followed by 100 men with large *masis* . . . joined by 250 other men, similarly attired” (Henderson, quoted in Kooijman 1972:412).

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