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# Van veraf naar dichtbij: The standing of the antipodes in a flat world

INAUGURELE REDE DOOR PROF. DR. THOMAS WIDLOK

Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen



## INAUGURELE REDE

PROF. DR. THOMAS WIDLOK



Anthropologists have long considered the antipodes, the other side of the world, to be the best place to investigate other ways of life. But what is the standing of the antipodes, and the standing of research featuring the antipodes, if – as we are told in the 21st century – the world is considered to be flat, a level playing ground

where everyone is connected through modern means of communication? Thomas Widlok points out that despite globalization there are a number of important ways in which it still matters as to where people are positioned in this interconnected world. He shows how knowledge from as far away as the antipodes can be brought to bear on issues that are at the centre of current scientific attention, including fundamental questions of human cognition and of the modes of social relations between humans.

Thomas Widlok (Mülheim/Ruhr, 1965) was trained in anthropology at the London School of Economics (PhD 1994) and at the universities of Münster and Cologne (venia legendi 2004). He has taught in London, Heidelberg, Cologne and Durham and has been a research associate with the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology and continues to work with the Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics in Nijmegen. He has carried out long-term ethnographic field research in Australia and in southern Africa. Thomas Widlok is since 1 March 2008 professor for anthropology at Radboud University, with additional funding from the Volkswagen Foundation and (beginning in 2009) from the DFG – Collaborative Research Centre “Our Way to Europe” at Cologne University.

VAN VERAFF NAAR DICHTBIJ:  
THE STANDING OF THE ANTIPODES IN A FLAT WORLD

*Für meine Eltern*

**Van veraf naar dichtbij:  
The standing of the antipodes in a flat world**

*Rede uitgesproken bij de aanvaarding van het ambt van hoogleraar Antropologie van de Pacific aan de Faculteit der Sociale Wetenschappen van de Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen op vrijdag 6 maart 2009*

**door prof. dr. Thomas Widlok**

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## INTRODUCTION

The scientific driving force behind anthropology is the search for other ways of doing things. When we, as anthropologists, hear the phrase ‘There Is No Alternative’<sup>1</sup>, whether in terms of alternative political choices or alternative scientific explanations, our default response is to say: ‘Well, let’s go and find out first!’. The anthropological research strategy is to go out and investigate whether alternative ways of doing things are to be found and to reflect on the diverging possibilities that humans have developed. And if we cannot see or overlook alternatives from where we are, we have to explore the spectrum of human possibilities by looking elsewhere. As a consequence, anthropology is a mobile activity directed at those regions of the world which are particularly promising fields for finding human variation.

From a northern European perspective the furthest place one could go to in order to search for alternative ways – and to establish what the spectrum of human experience is – has been Australia and the Pacific, the antipodes.<sup>2</sup> The antipodeans, *tegenvoeters*, those standing with their feet opposite the place where we are, are not only the furthest away geographically, the ethnography of the Pacific has also led to some of the most challenging accounts we have about human society.<sup>3</sup>

But what happens to this research strategy when the world changes? What is the standing of the antipodes, and the standing of research featuring the antipodes, if – as we are told in the 21st century – the world is considered to be flat? A flat world<sup>4</sup> in the sense of a level playing ground where everyone is so well connected through modern means of communication that it does not matter where you are on the globe?

In my lecture, and as part of my appointment to teach here in Nijmegen, I investigate the extent to which – despite globalization – it still matters as to where and how people are positioned in this interconnected world. Moreover: To what extent do we manage to bring knowledge from regions as far away as the antipodes to bear on issues that are at the centre of current scientific attention, including fundamental questions of human cognition and of the modes of social relations between humans?

## MAPPING THE ANTIPODES – IN ETHNOGRAPHIC TERMS

Figure 1 shows what the Pacific looked like, by and large, back in 1992 when I first visited the University of Nijmegen where my colleagues from the Centre for Pacific Studies were organizing a conference which led to the foundation of the European Society for Oceanists, ESfO.<sup>5</sup> Nijmegen had, and still has, the only Centre for Pacific Studies in the Netherlands and beyond within a radius of several hundred kilometres, and it helped to place this antipodean region firmly on the map of university research and teaching. Only two ESfO conferences later, in Copenhagen in 1996, probably the best-known anthropologist of the Pacific, Marshall Sahlins, showed quite a different map. In his keynote speech he announced: ‘Let me show you a contemporary map of Tonga’, Tonga being a small group of small islands in the Pacific. The map he showed was a world map.



Tonga is a tiny island state located east of Australia. The Tongans, however, have gained a reputation not only as a seafaring people like other Polynesians but also for having extended their social networks across the globe. If you want to get a good picture of the Tongan economy, the distribution of the Tongan population and what influences Tongan society today, the world map (we were told) is the most appropriate representation because Tongans live in

all parts of the world, they are sending money across the globe and they are moving around on this (allegedly) flattened world using their own networks. And of course, it is not only the Tongans who live this way. What would a contemporary map of Samoa, a contemporary map of Australia, of the Netherlands, of Germany or of Ghana look like? It would also have to be a world map as much as Sahlins suggested for Tonga. Tongan society is 'globalized' as we now call it, as are all societies today, if in somewhat different ways and degrees.<sup>6</sup> And it is not only that Tongans participate in Europe, Asia or North America. The reverse also holds true. For instance, in a sense all of you will have been to Tuvalu, another small group of islands in the Pacific, because Tuvalu sells a critical part of its sovereign territory, namely the internet domain dot.tv, to dozens of European and American television companies.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, each of us may have to pay compensation to the people of Tuvalu because this is the first nation state that is likely to lose its national territory as a consequence of global warming and rising water tables and they may file a compensation claim against their antipodes who created this situation.

The world is therefore moving in on us, from far-off to close-by. But is this movement best captured by moving ourselves far-off into a position of observers from out of space with all relevant details disappearing from the eye? Here is an alternative, an ethnographic map of Tonga (see Figure 2), not based on greater distance but on participant observation. This is the map of an event, clearly dated and localized, a formal dinner at



Figure 1. A conventional map of Oceania. This particular map came with the office of my predecessor, as part of the Chair of Anthropology of the Pacific, more precisely the half-chair (0.5 fte) as it is currently funded.

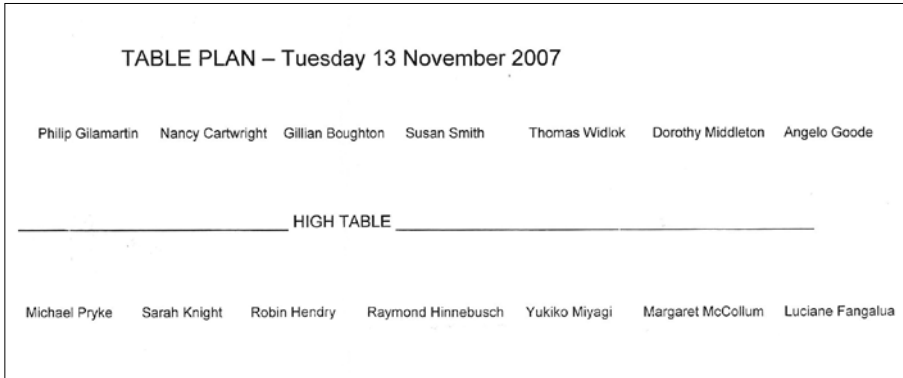


Figure 2. Seating plan of a formal dinner at St. Mary's College High Table, University Durham, 2007.

St. Mary's College, University Durham, where I taught before coming to Nijmegen. More precisely, it is the seating plan that the kitchen staff put up for the members of the Senior Common Room, the academic staff and visitors who sit at the high table. The observer of this event is not in outer space but sitting at the table together with the other participants, in this case a Filipino, an American, his Japanese partner, a Scot, some Native English, an Indian and – you will have guessed it – a Tongan, a young scholar named Luciane Fangalua who was on her way to do a PhD field study of the Arab-Jewish conflict in the Near East.<sup>8</sup>

Ethnographic maps are neither distant-global nor flat but they are participatory and closely follow individual biographies and personal networks. In our research we recognize and underline that the way humans are positioned matters greatly for what they can do.<sup>9</sup> Despite Tongans being theoretically everywhere, we rely on social institutions such as a high table formal dinner at an English university college (or an 'oratie' at a Dutch university for that matter) for bringing people together. The national networks of Tongans, Filipinos, Japanese, English and Germans do not intersect naturally, but they are *made* to intersect culturally at such events.

#### MAPPING THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE WORLD

The world may be called global or even flat but that does not mean that it is unstructured and equally permeable for each and everyone. This socio-cultural jungle remains the field of the anthropologist. Despite cheap global travelling and despite extensive reporting across large distances, we do not automatically encounter others in ways that allow us to benefit from distant bodies of knowledge and to get to understand other modes of thinking and acting, unless we make a specific effort.

Our teaching and our research here in anthropology is geared towards this effort of not only *collecting* antipodean knowledge but also of *connecting* to it.<sup>10</sup> Let me show

you yet another map to exemplify this point. This map was recently published by *Die Zeit*, probably the most renowned German weekly newspaper, as part of a series of articles and a book entitled 'the knowledge of the world'. A title like 'the knowledge of the world' fills the average anthropologist with anticipation but at the same time with apprehension. And rightly so. The map is an apt illustration for what we in our introductory lectures in anthropology call 'European bias'. It is a truly skewed map. It is skewed in its geographical representation since the land masses of the northern hemisphere appear to be much larger than those of the southern hemisphere whereas in reality they are actually smaller in size. As you all know, turning a roundish globe into a flat representation on paper is not a simple task but one that can be resolved in different ways.<sup>11</sup> Anthropologically more telling is how the map makers have resolved the task of reducing the doubtlessly large number of human inventions to a total of 52, namely but cutting out more or less everything that is happening below the equator. The mode of reduction they have gone for has a long tradition in Europe and North America, namely to simply ignore the cultural creativity of the antipodes. For as long as Europeans continue to draw maps that leave the other half of the globe basically empty, a chair for the anthropology of antipodean regions at this university is indispensable. Let me therefore, in very broad terms, outline a few of those antipodean contributions to world knowledge, thereby filling this empty map. And, as I shall point out, there is more to it. Each of these features of the Pacific region opens a new door to key fields of research into the human condition more generally.<sup>12</sup>



Figure 3. Map of the world published by *Die Zeit* (see [www.zeit.de/bildungskanaon/liste](http://www.zeit.de/bildungskanaon/liste)).

## ANTIPODEAN INVENTIONS

The first thing to add to this map of world knowledge, or similar maps that include *Oceania*, is orientation at sea.

Micronesian mariners voyaged across hundreds of miles of open sea for at least as long as Europeans did. We have a detailed ethnographic record of the star course system used on Puluwat Atoll where local navigators made use of an extensive memory of successive rising and setting points of stars as one travelled from one island to the other. They make use of *etak*, that is reference islands, which are usually invisible beyond the horizon or simply 'imagined' islands in order to find the exact course.

Thus the Micronesians, too, have been imagining what is beyond the visible horizon and manage to overcome large distances. For a possible world heritage list for intangible knowledge systems the Micronesian Etak system would be a prime candidate. But this is not only about rehabilitating a non-European cultural tradition. We are also led to ask what we are to learn about human cognitive skills from a comparison of this orientation system with the navigation by, say, the average Dutch skipper. Both systems of orientation are examples of distributed cognition because the navigation does not take place solely in the mind of the navigator. On modern ships cognition includes the gadgets used, compass, maps and other tools, but also the positioning of sailors on their observations points etc. Micronesian navigation makes use of narratives, known constellations of stars and islands and it relies on the sailors taking up environmental clues about the time and the distance covered between observations. In both cases the skill of the navigators is that of bringing a number of media and their immediate bodily sensations into coordination with one another. Moreover, like with many terrestrial systems of orientation we see how a complex system of orientation need not start off with generic terms but can be generated on the basis of a regional set of named places. In other words we can reconnect specialized navigation with everyday wayfinding and we can understand the process whereby one has developed out of the other. If complex cognitive skills such as navigation are typically distributed, this directs our future research attention away from looking solely at technical gadgets or at the individual isolated in experiments and instead towards the interface between human agents and their tools and environment in this process.<sup>13</sup>

My second example of Pacific practices that can help to fill the gaps on our map underlines this point: Aboriginal fire regimes. In the past they prevented the disastrous fires that we see in Australia today. We know that Australian Aborigines have been using fire for thousands of years to shape the continent but they had a fire regime that effectively prevented the large-scale, disastrous fires that destroy much of Australia today. The Aboriginal fire regime was made possible through a mobile land use pattern that created a mosaic of regularly burnt patches which effectively prevents the accumulation of large amounts of fuel and uncontrolled large-scale fires. Prohibiting all uses of fire since colonization began lead to ever greater and more disastrous fires. As a consequence

the Ministry of Agriculture and other government agencies in Australia today have been alerted to Aboriginal systems for preventing large scale bush fires. However, they continue to have difficulties incorporating this knowledge, because very much like that of the Micronesian navigators, it consists of a plurality of regional systems that appear to resist to be generalized across the continent and across the diversity of cases. The fundamental research question behind this is whether what is sometimes called 'indigenous knowledge systems' of resource management can be used across regions without repeating the errors of environmental expert systems that claim universal applicability but at the price of neglecting the particulars of the diverse settings at hand.<sup>14</sup>

While modern environmentalists occasionally superimpose their own ideas of 'mother earth' onto the ideas and practices of groups like the Australian Aborigines, it is important to point out that the expert systems of western environmentalism largely follow a completely different, namely a modernist logic of distancing.<sup>15</sup> In Western environmentalism responsibility towards the earth as a whole, the global climate and biodiversity on the planet, is based on increasing distance and abstraction. Human agents, abstracted as 'humanity', are asked to overcome not only their own limited interests and perspectives as social persons but also that of a separate species – taking a global view instead. The price to be paid is that of distancing oneself ever more and of seeing oneself, paradoxically, as being independent in perspective from the concrete lifeworld. The universalizing notion that 'we' as humans are 'one' not only with all humans across the world but with even the smallest on all living beings, whether animal, tree or parasite, is based on positioning ourselves as if looking at 'the globe' from a distance, disregarding how the particulars condition our perspective.

By contrast, when Aboriginal elders take the schoolchildren to the desert and tell them about edible grubs and about 'cleaning' the land through the use of fire, we may call it 'totemism' but they explain it in terms of 'being of the same skin'. I shall have to say more about the notion of skin in a moment, here it is important to point out that indigenous Australians did not protect their totems because they were interested in an abstract, ultimately quantitative, notion of biodiversity but because they saw their own biography and that of *certain* animals as connected through *concrete* places, associated with *specific* creative beings. 'Being of one skin' creates particular ties between persons and personalized beings at particular places. While it is a matter of changing political coalitions in how far indigenous people and environmentalists have successfully bridged their different views, the scientific research agenda that emerges from this investigates the more fundamental question of possibilities for developing modes of environmental perception and action that can operate across regions and places without succumbing to the illusion of being context-independent knowledge.

The resistance against generalization across regions that eclipses the contexts of its origin is also relevant for the next Pacific invention which I would like to put onto the map, namely money and local currencies. The Pacific is rich in what we call 'special

purpose monies' and what used to be called 'primitive money', made of shells, animal teeth, bones, feathers or stones. One of the best known examples is Yapese stone money, often depicted in European children's books (see Figure 4). This stone money is used on the Micronesian island of Yap, way east of the Philippines and it has the form of stone disks up to two meters in diameter. Brought to Yap in small outrigger canoes from another island 500 km away, it takes up to 30 men to carry the disks and up to one year from the quarry to cash it in at Yap. Given its size it is usually dumped at the roadside on Yap, and never moved again, so that people need to memorize which one is theirs when it 'changes hand'.

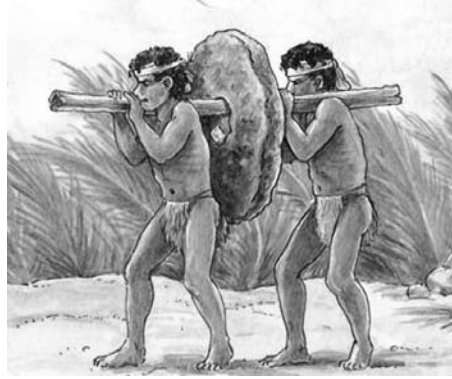


Figure 4. Images of Yapese stone money as depicted in a popular science book for children (A. Weinhold, *Unser Geld*, Ravensburg 2001).

What more evidence do we need to state that this is indeed primitive money? The Yapese continue to be proud of their money and clips of its current use are put on YouTube for the world to see. Haven't they understood that large stone disks are as problematic to exchange as large animals cut into half? To make things worse, it has even been suggested that the use of huge stone disks have historically developed out of using smaller disks that they were able to carry around readily like coins. What are the reasons for having cumbersome stone disks for money?

For one, this currency was hard to copy and it kept its value through scarcity very much like other materials 'of little use' do elsewhere, for instance gold. But again this is not a matter of simply comparing European sort of coins against other items in isolation. Rather through a comparative perspective it emerges that not all monies receive all functions that may be attached to them.<sup>16</sup> Each money can serve a bundle of functions: It may be good to measure value, as an item of exchange and as a means of payment. Money that serves only some of these functions we call 'special purpose money' in comparison to 'general purpose money'. Special purpose money may only be used in a certain exchange sphere, e.g. for paying bridewealth, for buying rights to land or for converting airline miles into upgrades. In some parts of Papua New Guinea provincial governments today allow parallel currencies of this sort to co-exist with western-style money which is thereby in fact *also* reduced to a special purpose money because it cannot buy everything. Thus we are not talking about two types of money but rather of two ways of dealing with money. And with the current financial crises these PNG provinces,

just like alternative exchange circles in the West, try to insulate themselves from the vagaries of global money flows. And as soon as (or as long as) there are alternative means of exchange the emergence of a totally general purpose money is prevented. In fact, we may go as far as to say that money, together with 'the market' as its counterpart, is always connected to a base from which it originates and on which it depends in times of crises.<sup>17</sup> A major aspect of our current financial problems has to do with attempts to generalize the general purpose money even further by including future harvests and other 'futures' and by putting a price on guesses, hopes and fears to do with the future movement of stocks or about the past rating of credits. Speculative goods are connected to those used in the everyday to buy bread and butter, a kind of generalization that special purpose money uses resist.

There is a plethora of money forms in the Pacific: stone, shells, feathers, rings, pearls, animal teeth or mats. However, the relevant distinction is not between the different materials and forms. The relevant distinction is between strategies of either *generalizing* money across purposes and those of *limiting* it to some specific purposes. The plurality of moneys in the Pacific reminds us that humans have invented both strategies and that they can use them concurrently. The research questions that emerge in this field are those of identifying future ways of shaping the role of money, of reminding us that there are 'monies' in the plural, and of exploring how best to combine different forms of money and to connect markets to their base. Could we, for instance, make sure – by using special purpose money – that the local price for maize and other basic foods does not rocket immediately as expectations about the future market of oil and biofuels are subject to speculation at the stock market? Thus, in terms of our future research agenda the money forms of the Pacific, faraway as they may seem, lead us directly to our situation today and fieldwork in the Pacific stimulates fieldwork at home, from far-off to close-by. And the close-by does also include a ceremony like the one we are all participating in right now: a candidate receives a new status, in our case that of professor. Considerable expenses are being made in terms of time and money invoking yet another human invention I would like to map, namely ritualized feasts of exchange and distribution run by what in Melanesian pidgin are called 'Big Men'.<sup>18</sup>

For this event, today, the *Pedel* has sent out roughly one thousand invitations, largely to the important men (and women) of Radboud University. With all respect to the academic traditions of this university: In Melanesia a person known as a Big Man would think of this as rather ordinary and of small scale and Melanesians may be somewhat surprised about the low number of pigs being slaughtered given the high status that is conveyed. Competitive feasting, called *Moka* in the New Guinea Highlands, is a characteristic feature of many parts of the Pacific, right across from the American North West Coast to Papua New Guinea, deserving a prominent place on our map. In these distributive feasts a person receives status by giving away large quantities of food, yams

and pigs, as well as other items. He (usually a he) tries to outdo others in the process by giving away ever larger quantities. This practice of feasting for gaining status is best described in the Pacific but more generally it has been suggested that the practice of affluent feasting may in fact have been the origin of hierarchical and differentiated social organization in human history that laid the basis for complex technical innovation, and not the other way around.<sup>19</sup>

At a comparative level this indicates that distribution and transfer are at least as important as production. Moreover, what may appear to be balanced reciprocal exchange, ceremonial gifts exchanged against status, or invitation against counter-invitation, may have a much stronger element of uncertainty and of one-sidedness than is usually considered. This puts questions of morality, of expectations and apprehensions connected with distribution back on the agenda. From far-off to close-by in this instance is to leave the birds-eye-perspective that collapses the view of person A giving to person B with that person B giving something in return to person A, as if this balancing out was the main driving force. Once we take the perspective of the agents more seriously we realize that when giving, either in sharing or in other modes of transfer, there is a considerable element of uncertainty as to whether and what may be received in return.<sup>20</sup>

There is of course much more to such an event as a distributive feast, whether in New Guinea or in Nijmegen, but in the interest of the feast at the end of this lecture let me be brief by adding quickly two further Pacific features, namely ritualization and the dividual person, to our map. Both are closely related to the distributive feasts.

What is called 'ritual' is often subsumed under 'law', 'duty', 'work', 'obligation' and is still called 'business' by Australian Aborigines today.<sup>21</sup> The European self-image of rational modernity, by contrast, does need a sharp contrast between ritual and work. By the means of this distinction rational actions and social forms are 'purified' from the apparently irrational while at the same time retaining a residual sphere, called 'ritual', for those forms of actions and events that seem to have value and function but that do not fit the notion of 'rational action'. Antipodean ritual is not only a mirror for the European identity as being 'modern', it is also considered to be a repository insofar as there is also a growing interest in the West today for re-introducing ritual forms, across a range of diverse domains, from health care and therapies, across family life and counselling to personnel management.<sup>22</sup>

Similarly, when anthropologists working in Melanesia state that the dominant concept of personhood in this region is that of a 'dividual' person, there is also always an implicit critique of the western notion of *individual* implied.<sup>23</sup> In Melanesia (and beyond) exchanging objects with others is seen to have effect on the person through that exchange. Persons are conceived of as being 'dividuals' by birth, constituted by social relations that generate persons. They only become more individualized persons



through strategic competitive feasting, through exchanging objects that provide them with renown name and status.

This leads me to the last prominent Pacific practice that I want to map, namely the practice of tattooing.<sup>24</sup> Whereas Europeans tend to consider ornaments of the skin to be marginal to the human person, the logic of individuals in the Pacific suggests that if you as a person are above all the product of your relations then that part of the body, namely the skin, that connects you with (and separates you from) other human beings becomes crucially important.<sup>25</sup>

Tattoos are evidently a Pacific invention. *Tattoo* (like *taboo*) is one of the few Pacific words that have entered most European languages and so has the technique of inserting pigments under the skin, first learned by sailors who travelled the southern seas and who then brought it to Europe, initially spread among other marginals of European society (such as prostitutes and criminals) but now to the mainstream. It is the same technique but the social purposes to which it is put could hardly be more diverse.<sup>26</sup> To cut a long story short, the main purpose of tattooing in the Pacific is that of protecting the person, while at the same time testifying the vulnerability of ordinary humans. Tattooing was obligatory and it marked humans not only in their capacities as individuals (just like exchanging objects) related to one another but also towards gods and godlike chiefs who were the only ones thought to be un-tattooed. A lack of tattoos therefore raised one above the fate of the ordinary mortals who are tied to their wet body underlined by a tattooed skin. Consequently, to enable their eternal life we find in many parts of the Pacific a removal of the tattooed skin from the bodies of the deceased.

In the Pacific, forms of tattooing correlate with forms of social organization and tattooing helped to reproduce the social order by reproducing social roles and relationships. The first Europeans to record Pacific tattoos were flabbergasted by the variety of forms. Karl von den Steinen, born 7. March 1855 in Mülheim an der Ruhr, collected hundreds of tattoos on the Marquesas at the time when they became forbidden under the colonial and missionary regime. His ethnography is today highly prized by the Marquesans themselves but also by tattooing enthusiasts around the world, and it forms the basis for a comparative anthropological theory of body modification.<sup>27</sup>

#### FROM FAR-OFF TO CLOSE-BY – IN ANTHROPOLOGICAL TERMS

At this point of our tour de force across the Pacific, our antipodes, filling an otherwise empty map, I want you to return with me to the Social Science Faculty of Radboud University, a familiar place to many of you which I will try to make somewhat unfamiliar and tattooing may serve as a point of departure.

Tattoos in the Pacific were not simply outer adornments but corresponded to ‘inner’ characteristics of a person. Thereby, the skin became the organ that was identified with the person. You may think of it as strange that a single organ, large in surface but

with a largely mediating function, is considered to be quasi identical with the complex person as a wilful, emotional and conscious agent. However, you need not go that far to find researchers just across the parking lot from this aula, in the neurosciences of our Social Science Faculty who also think that one organ is the key to the human person – except that the organ they have singled out is not the skin but the brain.<sup>28</sup>

I am sure that this is the point at which some of our colleagues from neighbouring disciplines wish that anthropologists should have stayed in far-off places such as the Pacific because the message that we bring along on our return journey questions some of the key assumptions on which the dominant western image of the human being is based. I say ‘the dominant western image’ because there are in fact critical voices within the neurosciences



Figure 5. This is not a brain. (Ceci n'est pas un cerveau).

who present what to the anthropologist seem like Pacific arguments in the current debate about the implications of neuroscientific findings for the way in which we understand ourselves as humans.<sup>29</sup>

The Pacific ethnography, just like the dissident voices in the neurosciences, suggests that personal identity and human consciousness are not purely ‘mental’ phenomena and even less limited to processes in the brain. From an anthropological perspective the problem already sets in when locating the subjective in the realm of apparently bodiless ideas and when disconnecting it as ‘culture’ from the human body and its engagement with the world. When it comes to your personal identity, as the Pacific ethnography suggests, nothing is non-material. Personal identity and subjectivity are *reflected* in activities that take place in parts in your brain, but also in your skin, and we might add in all other parts of your body and in bodily interaction, as well. This questions the notion that consciousness can be banned from its corporeal embeddedness in living human beings. It also suggests that the notion of perceptions and representations as self-extracting mental programmes is misleading large quarters of the neurosciences. Some neuroscientists make it worse by not only inheriting the equation of subjective consciousness with ‘the mental’ but by then continuing along this path equating ‘the mental’ with ‘the brain’ when mental representations become equated with more or less localized patterns of cerebral activity.

I think the biggest task ahead for anthropology is to overcome the comfortable division of labour that limited us to non-western studies. It is time to join forces with other disciplines interested in the fundamental questions of human existence, for instance with those directions in psychological and philosophical research that resist the move to treat our subjective experience of our own body and of the world out there as if they were only constructs of the brain or alternatively of some immaterial entity called culture. The critique of mainstream neurosciences argues that while representations always refer to an image of something *for someone* this subjective someone is being glossed over by most neuroscientists when they say that representations are stored in the brain as if it was a computer hard disk. In other words, our argument is that information about the world (and oneself) is not stored as a self-contained representation in the brain, and mental states by themselves are not descriptions of the world. By contrast, the brain and the mind only *participate* in the situations from which corporeal agents are able to derive the relevant contents in social agency.<sup>30</sup> We, as situated and living human beings, and not our brain as an organ, generate representations as options for acting in a certain way. This is the point at which variation and the anthropological

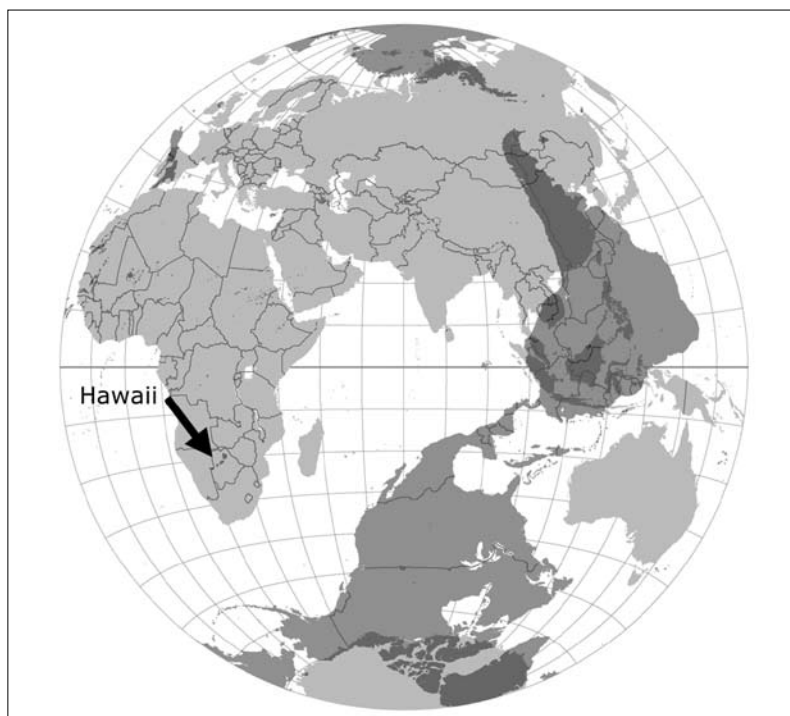


Figure 6. Another perspective on the antipodes.

search for alternatives re-enters. If it is our living body that mediates between the brain and our ideas then we may also expect that our particular perspectives as corporeal beings differ due to our experiences and positions in society and, I would want to add, also with respect to our position on the globe. Exposing yourself, bodily, to other ways of life in field research therefore remains a critical anthropological research strategy.

#### CONCLUSION

In anthropology we study ourselves as social human beings. Our goal, to search for alternative ways of doing things, has led us to bridge between far-off places, bridging between the antipodes, and moving from an exclusive Western 'us' to an inclusive globalized 'us'.<sup>31</sup> In this process we have come a long way, we have gone off to far-off places and we come back really close-by, right to the corporeal processes of human life. This is because anthropology not only bridges far-off places but also creates bridges between our knowledge about the brain, our body and about its environment, including the culturally and socially shaped environment, by tying it back to the shared experience of living beings.

Our future contribution to these questions will be inspired by the Pacific lifeworld but it will not be limited by it. After all, when considering the question of antipodes from the Pacific we also come to realize that it covers a much wider comparative spectrum than just opposing 'the West' and 'the Rest'. If, for instance, you are in a place like Hawaii you should not necessarily be looking at Europe as an antipode but at southern Africa.<sup>32</sup> This invites a plurality of comparative views that provide further new insights, also for Europeans, but that will have to be covered by further lectures.

So, for now, let me complete *this* lecture with some words of thanks.

#### BESLUIT

Van veraf naar dichtbij. Dat geldt ook voor mijn persoonlijke biografie en mijn dank gaat naar al diegenen, die het mogelijk hebben gemaakt dat ik als antropoloog ver weg kon gaan maar nu ook dichtbij kan werken. Vanuit Nijmegen is Duitsland – geografisch – dichtbij maar in meerdere opzichten is het ook veraf. Ik dank het College van Bestuur van deze universiteit en de Faculteit Sociale Wetenschappen dat ze mij ongeacht mijn afkomst tot hoogleraar benoemd hebben. Ik probeerde het te vergemakkelijken door te onderstrepen dat twee van mijn overgrootouders uit Nijmegen kwamen, maar het was geen relevant aanstellingscriterium, en dat is maar goed ook. Te gelijkertijd ben ik blij dat Radboud Universiteit in dezelfde maand dat mijn contract begon, zich als tweetalige universiteit uitriep. Dat viel mee omdat mijn overgrootouders hun taalkennis niet door de generaties heen meegegeven hebben. Dus wordt deze oratie engelstalig geprint en ze eindigt nu drietalig.

My first note of thanks has to go to Steve Levinson and Gunter Senft who were the first ones to bring me to Nijmegen for the first time, pretty much exactly 17 years ago, by offering a Max Planck PhD scholarship. Over the years they have supported my clumsy steps through various academic institutions and in various countries with the result that I still knock at their door when I need advice. I appreciate your support.

Mijn dank gaat ook naar Edith Sjoerdsma, en verder naar Ad Verbunt, Rainer Dirksmeyer, Paul Trilsbeek en andere mensen achter de coulissen van het Max Planck Instituut, die in het dagelijks leven helpen als je door computer crashes en dergelijke catastrofes niet verder kunt. Dat geldt ook voor ondersteunende medewerkers op mijn nieuwe werkplek, Hanneke Hageman in het faculteitsbureau en Hilde Verkuijlen, talentvolle taaleraar en ambassadeur van het Nederlandse leven buiten de campus. Op dezelfde manier wil ik graag mijn nieuwe collega's in de opleiding antropologie en ontwikkelingssociologie dank zeggen, die me hier met open armen hebben ontvangen. Ik waardeer dat jullie de frustratie over slechte berichten over bezuinigingen enz. niet aan mij als de berichtgever hebben overdragen. Met name mijne twee voorgangers, Ad Borsboom en Frans Hüsken, hebben me geholpen een weg door het institutionele oerwoud te vinden. Eric Venbrux was niet alleen jarenlang mijn beste contact met de Nijmeegse antropologie maar hij is nu een vriend en een collega tegelijkertijd. Ik hoop dat wij de mogelijkheid krijgen de antropologie in Nijmegen weer in een ondersteunende omgeving te laten groeien.

Apart from those who brought me here, I also need to thank those who allowed me to arrive elsewhere and to become an anthropologist in the first place. Michael Long of the Royal Flying Doctor Service of Australia gave me the opportunity to confront with empirical reality what were initially little more than escapist dreams of the antipodes developed by an adolescent European. In a sense my first spell of field research took place between Baddaginnie in Victoria and the Victoria section of the RFDs in the Kimberleys. Amongst other things you taught me how important investing in young people is, critical for someone who sets out to teach at a university.

James Woodburn of the London School of Economics and Political Science took me on as a student. You taught me and your other students not only a passionate way of doing anthropology, especially with hunter-gatherers, but also a passion for virtues that are particularly cultivated in England, above all fairness, originality and the creation of reliable procedures. You may not realize it, but this part of his teaching and example continues to be important for me as I am now working at institutions at this side of the channel. The best of the open-minded and person-oriented anglo-saxon academic style was also conveyed to me through other teachers and colleagues: Alan Barnard of Edinburgh University, Robert Gordon of the University of Vermont and Robert Layton of the University of Durham.

Jetzt kommt der schwierigste und wichtigste Teil dieser Rede, schwierig allein

deshalb, weil die, die mich besonders gut kennen, und um die es jetzt geht, wissen wie nah ich am Wasser gebaut habe, wenn es um Menschen in meiner Nähe geht. Dazu gehören viele Freunde, Verwandte, Nachbarn und Weggefährten, die ich heute eingeladen habe. Viele sind hier in mehrfacher Funktion, als Freunde und zugleich als Kollegen aus anderen Universitäten: In der Corona Prof. Werner Haußmann, und Prof. Sabine Klocke-Daffa von den Universitäten Duisburg-Essen und Münster.

Ich möchte nicht alle einzeln nennen, die sich hier eingefunden haben, die Liste ist glücklicherweise zu lang. Alleen drie wil ik plaatsvervangend noemen.

Dr. Jan-Bart Gewalt, Universiteit Leiden, een insider en een outsider tegelijkertijd wat de Nederlandse academia, het openbare Nederlandse leven en cultuur betreft. Een goede vriend en ofschoon historicus ertoe in staat te begrijpen hoe antropologen denken en ook in staat zelf een goede antropoloog te worden, voor het geval dat er geen geschiedkunde was. Bedankt voor je aanmoedigen.

Norbert Heinemann, psycholoog maar helaas niet hier aan de universiteit, de enige Duitser die ik ken die met opzet oranje aantrekt als het over voetbal gaat. Hij heeft steeds gevraagd waarom ik altijd ver weg ga in plaats van werk te zoeken in Nijmegen zodat ik in de regio Nederrijn kan blijven. Bedankt voor jouw advies.

Dr. Thomas Christiansen, professor of politics, University of Maastricht. We met in the queue registering as overseas students at the London School of Economics. Since then our biographies have been quite different from one another but they have both led us to university chairs in the Netherlands. I am looking forward to continue comparing notes with you about our experiences in the Dutch academic system.

Zum Schluss zurück zu den Anfängen. Meine Eltern, Ursula und Gerhard Widlok, haben mich ununterbrochen unterstützt, seitdem sie mich nach dem Heiligen Thomas van Aquin benannt haben. Dessen Namenstag feiern wir morgen und er sitzt nebenan auf einem steinernen Sockel. Ihr konntet natürlich nicht wissen, dass ich einmal an der Thomas van Aquinostraat würde arbeiten, aber Ihr habt meinen Weg immer unterstützt. Diese Vorlesung widme ich Euch, denn Ihr habt als Eltern genau die richtige Balance getroffen, die nötig ist, um Kinder einerseits ihren eigenen Weg gehen zu lassen, auch wenn nötig weit weg, und sie zugleich immer auf unterschiedlichste Weise zu unterstützen, so dass sie ganz freiwillig und immer wieder sehr gerne zurück kommen. Wir hoffen, dass uns das mit unseren eigenen Kindern auch gelingt.

Lorna und Merle. Ihr habt einen Vater, der ist zwar durch seinen Beruf oft da, wenn andere Väter arbeiten, aber irgendwie auch immer ein Stückweit nicht da, weil er oft in Gedanken oder über den Computer mit seiner Arbeit verbunden ist, wenn andere längst Feierabend haben. Das ist nicht immer ganz leicht, und ich fürchte Wissenschaftler zu sein, ist für Euch dadurch kein Wunschberuf. Umso mehr bin ich froh,

dass Ihr die wichtigsten Eigenschaften pflegt und entwickelt, die man auch in der Wissenschaft braucht: Die Neugier und das Interesse am Neuen, Redlichkeit bei dem, was man tut, vor allem wenn man es mit anderen Menschen zu tun hat.

Dagmar, wir sind bereits länger zusammen als ich jemals bei dieser oder irgend einer anderen Universität arbeiten werde, und dass selbst dann, wenn wir die Wochen und Monate einrechnen, in denen ich mich in den entfernteren Winkeln dieser Welt aufgehalten habe. Dieses gemeinsame Leben ist vor allem durch Deine Hartnäckigkeit, Nachsichtigkeit und Liebe gelungen und dafür danke ich Dir. Ich hätte diese Professur nicht antreten wollen, wenn ich dadurch von Dir getrennt worden wäre.

*Ik heb gezegd.*

## NOTES

1. This phrase came to stand for the politics of former British prime minister M. Thatcher (see Berlinski 2008). More generally, the so-called TINA-principle has been criticized as a rhetorical means used by politicians (including occasionally by university administrators and others) to go through with an unpopular decision, to prevent that it is being critically discussed and that it needs to be properly justified. The corresponding counter slogans are 'another world is possible' and 'There Are Thousands of Alternatives' (see George 2004). While anthropology provides the opportunity to empirically test whether and under what conditions alternatives emerge or disappear, it seeks to also account for the fact that these results are immediately subject to political rhetoric.
2. While the Pacific has been the furthest place away (from a European perspective), the nearest place of difference has been southern Italy, or the larger Mediterranean region for that matter. As Hauschild (2002:11-12) has pointed out, Italy has always been, at least for the northern Europeans, the closest Other, enabling a 'defamiliarizing' perspective which allows us recognize the durable inventions that form cultural reserves and allow for the non-anticipated to enter our knowledge of the world. If Carlo Levi (1982) was right that 'Christ stopped at Eboli' then anything south of Eboli in Italy was where anthropologists wanted to go to explore what the human condition was. The anthropological definition of 'the antipodes', I therefore suggest, differs from the geographical one. At Nijmegen, as in many other places, the anthropology of the Pacific (see Borsboom 1996, Otto and Borsboom 1997, Venbrux 1995) productively coexists with the anthropology of the Mediterranean (see Driessen 2005) but also with anthropology at home (see Venbrux et al. 2009, Marks and Gaunt 2009) and with comparative perspectives (Notermans, Hermkens and Jansen 2009). Antipodean comparisons (in the anthropological sense) not only take place between north and south but also between south and south, east and west, and any other contrastive pair one may think of. While from a more narrow Dutch perspective the nearest place of difference may appear to be Belgium (or possibly Germany, England or Limburg) the anthropological aim is to broaden the spectrum in all directions that promise to be productive. The antipodes are a relational place more than a geographical one.
3. The cultural imagination of a place where everything is inverted is, of course, much older than the earliest reports from travels *around* the world like the one by George Forster (1971a[1777]). Forster, the first well-known German scholar sailing under the British flag, in this case that of Captain Cook's fleet, visited Australia and the Pacific Islands to describe life in the South Seas. Explorer accounts suggested that the antipodes, the other side of the world (where the *tegenvoeters* lived) provided the best place for investigating other ways of life (see Borsboom 1988). The result was that some of the most detailed and most challenging accounts we have about human society and culture (e.g. Emile Durkheim 1912, Sigmund Freud 2000 [1912-13]) base themselves on the ethnography of the Pacific. However, this European movement goes back to earlier moves of discovering 'the new world' which came to be associated with *Gegenerde*, the place beyond the oceans, (then) out of human reach, to which paradise was assumed to have been moved after original sin (see Zweig 2006: 29-30). In other words, the search for other ways of life has long been fuelled by searches for alternatives including attempts to regain paradise. The anthropology of the Pacific does not claim to reach the aim of regaining paradise; in fact it spends much of its energy to show that the Pacific is not the romantic kind of place that Europeans saw in it. However, it is remarkable how much Pacific ethnography is influencing alternative and innovative ways of dealing with topics as far apart as new forms of exchange in



financial crises, new forms of identities in organ-trade and DNA-identification, new modes of perceiving the environment or a rediscovery of ritual and ceremonial interaction (see below). It is noteworthy that it is not a recent phenomenon that those travelling to the Pacific feel they have a contribution to make to a better understanding of the places from which they have set out in the first place. Even George Foster did not only write a book about his travel to the Pacific and around the world, but also about his experiences of travelling through the lower Rhine, the low countries and England, capturing life at the time of the French revolution (1971b[1791]).

4. See Thomas Friedman (2005), and for a critique see Stiglitz (2006) and Florida (2005) who observed that not only is the world not flat but that it is in the process of becoming even less flat. One of the best recent refutations of the notion that the internet and electronic communication is creating a flat world was written by an anthropologist generalizing from Melanesian insights. Dalsgaard (2008) has shown that the network-based tools such as 'facebook' are instrumental in the creation of hierarchy between participants very much like social differentiation in processes of Melanesian exchange. The world of the internet may appear 'flat' when looking at it two-dimensionally 'on paper' as a network of a large number of computers. When considering the practical use of the internet not only reflects the ranking and social differentiation that already exists but in fact provides new venues for creating rank and inequality (Dalsgaard 2008:10).
5. Figure 1 shows a conventional map (in fact an old school map) of what in anthropological terms is considered to be Oceania as an ethnographic region, namely Australia, and the Islands of Melanesia (including West Papua and Papua New Guinea), Micronesia (north of New Guinea) and Polynesia (the area spreading from New Zealand to Hawaii and beyond). I use the terms Oceania and the Pacific synonymously which is commonly done with the understanding that Australia and the Pacific islands are in fact quite distinct in many ways. This parallel use of 'Oceania' and 'the Pacific' is also employed by organizations such as the European Society for Oceanists (see <http://cc.joensuu.fi/esfo/>) and in standard anthropological works (see for instance Swain and Trompf 1995). Recently, the continuities between Australia and other parts of Oceania, especially Papua New Guinea, have once again been highlighted (see Swain 1993, Rumsey and Weiner 2001).
6. For details on the Tongans overseas see Morton (2003). There are a number of researchers associated with Nijmegen anthropology who are working on Tonga, including van der Grijp, the first Dutch anthropologist to carry out long-term field research on these islands (1993).
7. En Nederlanders gaan vaak naar het virtuele grondgebied van het pacifisch eiland Niue, of [punt.nu](http://punt.nu). Dat geldt ook voor de antropologische studentenvereniging [umoja punt nu](http://punt.nu). In 2005 only 1500 Niueans lived on the island itself, 22 000 lived in New Zealand, see [http://www.gov.nu/The\\_Island/Population\\_and\\_Welfare/MenuId/94.aspx](http://www.gov.nu/The_Island/Population_and_Welfare/MenuId/94.aspx)
8. Luciane Fanguhua's interest in the Near East is another instance of the wider notion of an antipodean perspective that I am advocating here. I suggest that antipodean interests should be emancipated from both the eurocentrism of earlier periods but also from the geocentrism of a notion of antipodes solely tied to longitude and latitude rather than also solicitude and vicissitude. Antipodean constellations are those that raise our interest and concern through contrasts and similarities (see Godelier 1991) and that remind us to take account of 'the lie of the land' people live in (see Carter 1996). During the above-mentioned dinner Fanguhua told me that there was a great number of Tongans living in Düsseldorf, my home destination as I was flying back and forth between England and Germany. Statistically, therefore it would have been much more

likely for me to encounter a Tongan in Düsseldorf, which – however – I had never done wittingly since it had not been my concern. Putting ourselves into outer space from where we can see the globe as a whole, does not help when trying to situate oneself among the Tongans or any other group of people for that matter. And calculating the statistical probability of meeting a Tongan in the street, is no substitute for actually meeting a Tongan in the street. Thus, a more anthropological map keeps the particulars of time and space without being an idealized map of geographically isolated villages or islands. The examples given below illustrate what the standing of the antipodes is with regard to a number of fields of research in a situation in which the antipodeans are no longer standing against our feet but rather sitting among us at the dinner table.

9. Despite the refutation of a flat world (see note 4, above), we should not overlook that the new means of communication do change the relation between geographical space and social position even though they are not levelling the ground. For instance, members of the ‘global Rotuman community’ may – without being anywhere near Rotuma – post messages on Rotuma-net, the internet platform of Rotuma, another Polynesian island studied by Ragnhild Scheifes, a PhD student from our department. Anyone may post their views and creative work relating to the islands of Fiji on [www.fjispokerscorner.com](http://www.fjispokerscorner.com). You may also watch Aboriginal rituals on the internet without travelling to Australia, even though the alleged ‘placelessness’ of the internet is debated (see Altena, Notermans and Widlok in press). While the internet may be alleged to be the prototypical example of a flattening world this turns out to be wrong both quantitatively (see Florida 2005) and qualitatively (see note 4 above): It is an illusion that moving from site to site on the internet was without bodily or spatial implications. Moreover, as we all know, not all sites are available from all locations and there are subtle means to guide the internet surfer on the basis of the country where the computer is located from which the internet is accessed.
10. The task therefore has shifted somewhat from going to faraway places and collecting information to that of bringing the existing information closer to those who in principle already are well-connected to information from around the world. This is so despite the fact that there are still considerable gaps on the map in terms of ethnographic knowledge. Putting things onto the collective ‘mental’ maps of as many people as possible is a research programme that will never reach completion because in that process new open questions emerge all the time. Anthropologists keep going to faraway places not because these are totally unknown regions but because it helps generating new questions (and answers) in a comparative perspective. Moreover, it is not only the faraway that is brought closer to home but at the same time through that movement we also try to create distance to our own cultural context, distance that is necessary for a critical stance and for discovering alternatives. In this sense we are ‘making the exotic familiar and the familiar exotic’ (Eriksen 2004:34). The purpose of both these movements is above all to make sure that the knowledge generated through ethnography does connect to the questions and experiences of humans beyond the limits of their region of residence.
11. The debate of how to turn a roundish globe into a flat representation is usually reduced to the opposition between the Gerhard Mercator projection (useful for navigation) and the Gall-Peters projection (useful for getting a sense of the relative size of land masses). This not only reminds us that it is as easy to lie with maps (see Monmonier 1996) as it is to lie with statistics but above all that maps, like textual or numerical representations, are created to serve an interest and to represent something for somebody in a particular setting (see below). Since an unwarranted trust in maps (or numbers for that matter) seems more widely spread

than mistrust in words, the problematic nature of maps providing the illusion of a disinterested summary or canon of knowledge needs to be underlined.

12. My account may be read in two ways, firstly (in the main text) as an outline a few largely forgotten anti-podean innovations from the ethnography of the Pacific (see also Widlok 2008a) and secondly (indicated in the footnotes) an outline of the scholarly debates in social theory that have been fuelled through Pacific ethnography.
13. Pacific orientation knowledge relies on narratives of journeys rather than maps or navigation gadgets and it is a regional system that was not turned into a global positioning system. However, Hutchins concluded that 'before the introduction of the magnetic compass (around 1100 A.D.), navigation in European waters looked a good deal like a rather unsophisticated version of Micronesian navigation' (1995:93). The earliest systematic ethnographic accounts of Micronesian orientation and navigational skills that we have were not satisfied with providing a good record of the remarkable skills of Micronesians who had little technology at their disposal (see Gladwin 1970, Lewis 1994, for more sources see Goetzfridt 1992 and Feinberg 1995). Gladwin, for instance, had the more general aim of broadening our understanding of cognition by going beyond standardized intelligence tests in which non-Europeans, but also non-academic Euro-Americans, were receiving notoriously bad results. By incorporating the kind of cognitive skills employed by Puluwat navigators and presumably by New York City taxi drivers alike, and by comparing them to the kind of skills conventionally tested by psychologists, Gladwin is able to show that we are not so much dealing with a simple distinction between abstract and concrete thinking but rather with a spectrum between thinking innovatively and thinking with a minimum of conscious deliberation (Gladwin 1970: 223-224). Ever since spatial orientation, and the skills of Pacific people in this domain, has been a field for cutting-edge debates on human cognition, above all between mental-map theories and practical mastery theories (Gell 1995, Widlok 1997a, Ingold 2000, Levinson 2003, Aporta and Higgs 2005) and with recent attempts to combine the two (Istomin and Dwyer 2009). The now dominant global view of the world assumed by western geography lends itself to global navigation but it comes at a cost. It also lends itself to entertain the illusion that knowledge is accumulated independently of the position of the observer who laterally moves on from one site to the other and as if the movement in between sites was little more than an irrelevant interstice (see Ingold 2000, 2007). This raises new research questions that go beyond the domain of orientation. It challenges the currently still dominant mentalist paradigm in the cognitive sciences by asking how agency can be put back into our investigation of human cognition.
14. Research on the role of Australian and other Pacific indigenous people in environmental change has not only had an applied dimension of solving problems on the ground (see Kohen 1995, Lewis 1989, Rose 1995, Widlok 2008b). More generally, it has been instrumental in our understanding of the relation between humans and the world they live in (see Ingold 2000). Discussing the ways in which indigenous Australians and others conceive of their world not just as *Umwelt* (environment) but as *Mitwelt* (lived-in world) has opened up a whole new debate about the dominant Western environmentalism and the fact that it is largely based on the same modernist assumptions as those positions with which environmentalists engage in public debate (Argyrou 2005, see also Strang 1997, Milton 2002) while disregarding the much more radical alternative modes of engaging with the world that emerge from ethnographic descriptions in the Pacific and other 'remote' settings (Widlok 2008c). It has also raised intricate debates about the properties of environmental knowledge

and about the question in how far environmental knowledge is, or should be, property that needs protection in terms of intellectual property rights (see van Meijl in press).

15. So far I have dealt with what may be called category one mistakes, namely the mistake of not seeing cultural inventions where they do exist. But anthropology also has the task of discovering and rectifying category two mistakes, namely those of attributing cultural ideas where they do not exist or rather, where they exist in a rather very different way than what Europeans imagine to be the case. The most prominent of these mistakes is probably that of attributing to antipodeans and other 'others' the status of eco-saints, of living in harmony with the environment, of praying to 'mother nature' and of identifying with other natural species and with nature generally (Argyrou 2005, see above).
16. If there is any truth in the statement that money is to the West what kinship is to the Rest, then Pacific ethnography has not only had its impact on a broader understanding of human kinship (see below) but similarly on money (Akin and Robbins 1999, see also Gregory 1997). While the early ethnography of money forms in the Pacific may now seem as a collection of curio (see Petri 1936, Dalton 1965), it has led to an impressive record, especially in the New Melanesian Ethnography, that deals with fundamental questions of gift exchange (Gregory 1982, Strathern 1988, Stewart and Strathern 2008), the (in)alienability of objects (Weiner 1992, Godelier 1999), the agency of objects (see Gell 1998, Hermkens 2005) and the separation between subject and object more generally (Jeudy-Ballini and Juillerat 2002). Thus, with regard to alternative cultural forms (of money, for instance), anthropologists have not been advocating a simple cultural transfer from the Pacific. Like all forms of money, Pacific money, too, has been appropriated by power holders, as for instance, the Yapese stone money was largely confiscated by village chiefs as soon as it was brought to the island and it was used to cement the communal political structure (see Petri 1936:207). Instead of suggesting direct cultural imports, the ethnography of the Pacific puts us at the centre of innovative and original thinking and reflection about present and future of key issues of present day human pre-occupation: value, money, finance, rationality and relatedness (see Hart and Ortiz 2008, Widlok 2008a).
17. See Gudeman 2001, 2008, see also Carrier 2007.
18. There is no space to adequately present the discussions that have been emerging in the field of Pacific 'Big-manship' (Godelier 1986, Godelier and Strathern 1991) but only to indicate that the increasing commercialization of higher education (Cooper 2004), the role of the construction of status and hierarchy in the current financial crisis (Hart and Ortiz 2008) and the role of persons, the state and the market in processes of distribution and access (Hart 2000, 2007, Carrier and Miller 1999) have all been discussed in the light of this Melanesian ethnography. We have very detailed records as to how Melanesian men organize their social networks, the workforce of their wives and relatives (see Godelier 1986, Godelier and Strathern 1991). This also helps us understanding schemes of competitive status achievement among men (mostly men) in the West when they are stepping up the professional ladder – or when they strive to become a renown bird-spotter for that matter (see Liep 2001). It appears that Melanesian social systems and their emphasis on a relative equality of opportunity while at the same time being highly competitive and status-oriented provide a particularly rich source for the analysis and critique for current post-industrial societies in which the consolidation of difference is equally eclipsed in an ideology of free exchange and personal entrepreneurship.

19. See, for instance, Hayden (1994) and Keeley (1988) for alternative approaches with regard to the question of emerging complexity. Why do exchange feasts do not generally feature in books about the great inventions of humankind? One reason is that our notion of invention is focused on objects and technology rather than processes and organizational forms (see Wagner 1975). Another reason is that we consider money the one invention that has overshadowed all other forms of exchange. Pacific and other antipodean examples suggest that horticulturalists, fishermen and even foragers were able to regularly generate a surplus. People in the Pacific had more yams and pigs than they needed to feed themselves. With extra resources and extra time at their hands they developed systems of competitive feasting which allowed a conversion of surplus food into what we now call other forms of capital, namely status, obligations and reputation, social and cultural capital. Distribution therefore provides an alternative route to complexity than that led by demography or technology. There is a host of challenging research questions that loom behind our knowledge about Pacific and other systems of distribution, of exchange, of transfer and of sharing. In how far do different systems of transfer, and more precisely our expectations about how things will be distributed, influence our economic behaviour? Distribution and transfer are not simply afterthoughts that follow production but they, and the expectations connected to them, in a sense precede production. This could trigger a considerable shift in the research agenda of industry and commerce: Instead of treating questions of exchange and transfer primarily in terms of logistics and as driven by technical innovation these questions are re-connected to discourses of morality.
20. See Hunt (2000). As Weiner has pointed out, the motivation involved in many forms of exchange is, in fact, not reciprocal transfer but 'keeping while giving' - ultimately in an attempt to deny the inevitability of processes of change, decay and mortality (Weiner 1992:7, see Mauss 1989).
21. Widlok (1992, 1997b), see also Kolig 1981.
22. Research on rituals is currently particularly strong in Nijmegen anthropology, and I refrain from discussing it in detail here (see, for example Grimes et al. in press). The point to highlight here is that interest and research regarding ritual, too, has had an unprecedented and unexpected upsurge recently. The functional necessity of ritual is being re-discovered in a wide range of modern settings including health and therapy, personnel development, leadership and education (see Belliger and Krieger 2008, Widlok 2009). Examples are rituals in medicine, concerning the relation between doctor and patient, rituals in organizations, in managing personnel and large companies, rituals in politics and economics as well as in the bringing up of children and in the educational system, including the universities. Moreover, the emphasis on performance in ritual has gone beyond the field of ritual studies and has informed social theory at large, breathing new life into the rather stale sociological opposition between agency and structure. Studies of ritualization are, of course, not limited to the Pacific but it is, again, surprising how much influence Pacific ethnography has had on theoretical debates on religion more generally (for instance Rappaport 1999, see also Hiatt 1996). The comparative approach to ritual studies is also cultivated at Nijmegen and beyond (see de Coppet and Iteanu 1995, Notermans, Hermkens and Jansen 2009). People in the Pacific have shown to be very creative in the exchange and creation of rituals, in changing Christian rituals, in merging Christian with other traditions and in combining moralities from different sources (see Borsboom 1998, 2008, Otto 1998, 2005, Swain and Trompf 1993, and contributions in Barker 2007). The rituals of Aboriginal Australians are a case in point. They are popular with New Agers and neo-pagans, but they have also taken centre stage for the Australian

nation state. Hardly any opening of a new public building, bridge or picnic site takes place without the descendents of local Aborigines performing a 'smoking ceremony', a short ritual that 'cleanses' the place. More importantly, it reconciles white and black Australians, giving the non-Aboriginal Australians a sense of justification and belonging, of not only being a 'young nation' but one that can legitimately connect to one of the 'oldest' traditions of the world (see Altena, Notermans and Widlok in press). However, the main point about research on ritual is not the possibility of re-importing rituals from antipodean sources but that the hole category of 'ritual', of seemingly irrational behaviour, seems to be critical for our western understanding on how the world works.

23. The ethnography of Melanesian personhood has had an enormous impact on anthropological theory at large and even more widely on social thought about personhood. Following the work of Strathern (1988) and Wagner (1991) anthropologists have shaken the foundations of western philosophical thinking by questioning the subject-object distinction and by prioritizing relations over entities. Within a few years the notion of 'dividual' personhood was no longer considered a peculiarity of Melanesian culture but it provided a comparative framework for thinking about personhood elsewhere: in south Asia (Busby 1997) as well as pre-modern European personhood (Fowler 2004) and with regard to the changing notions of personhood in the age of biogenetic technology (Carsten 2004, Strathern 2002). Melanesian ethnography questioned the notion that 'the human person' was a fixed entity and concepts of dividual or relational personhood became critical for understanding the challenges provided to personhood in ultra-modern contexts of cloning and new reproductive technologies as well as in new forms of family or kin relations that all touch upon the distinction between nature and culture (see Wagner 1975, Strathern 2002). Far from being an 'exotic' pre-occupation the ethnographic knowledge of Pacific personhood has helped to de-familiarize what Westerners thought to be fixed and unchanging concepts of 'the person' (see Carrithers et al. 1985). Thus, there is more at stake here than another instance of mirror imaging, of Europeans who are keen to construct 'communalism' or even 'communism' of the antipodes as a contrast to their own individualism, the root invention for the most valued western political ideas such as personal liberty. It did not take the ethnographers long to realize that there was at least as much conflict and strategizing going on between persons in the Pacific (not only among the Big Men) as in the West. Moreover, the notion that persons are not necessarily emerging from a kernel deep down inside but through their relations rings true not only with Melanesians. After all, relations do predate persons, not only the relationship of the parents but every person can be seen first and foremost as the product of pre-existing relationships and as continually changing in the process of having relationships with others. The idea is therefore attractive to Europeans to are suspicious against the dominant western view of isolating humans from their social network, for instance when treating their illnesses or when defining their handicaps and achievement.
24. See Gell (1993), the original ethnographic sources are presented by Handy 2008 [1922] and von den Steinen (1925). Ellis (2008) and Thomas et al. (2005) provide an investigation of the role of tattoos in the shared history of Europe and the Pacific.
25. Again, the anthropology of body (decoration), of pain and violence, is a strong research focus amongst anthropologists working in Nijmegen (see Driessen [2002] who also deals specifically with tattooing) and has been a major field of research within anthropology more generally. It would be presumptuous to attempt to summarize here the rich ethnographic and theoretical contributions that are made in this field. Suffice to

say that in this domain, too, Pacific ethnography has had a considerable influence. Whether the initiation of boys in Aboriginal Australia or the body decoration of people at Mt Hagen, Papua New Guinea (see Strathern 1979), the key theoretical lesson learned by those inspired by this ethnography is that changes to the body (whether decoration or mutilation) are not external decorum but go to the heart of how the self is presented and conceived of in its social network. The skin is indeed 'key to our biology, our sensory experiences, our information gathering, and our relationship with others' (Jablonski 2006:1) and the Pacific ethnography in its diversity is a tribute to this.

26. There is a critical difference between Pacific tattoos and western tattoos, especially in their most recent version which in fact allows them to be removed at a later stage in life. This latest technical innovation of removing tattoos in fact reduces them to skin paintings that can be taken off. The whole point of Pacific tattoos was that the individual was marked and could not take them off. A tattoo reminded everyone of his or her status as a bodily being who literally could not get out of their skin. Only high chiefs or indeed gods were considered to be able to live without tattoos (and according to that logic deceased had to be skinned if they were to live forever). The tattoo was therefore nothing marginal to the individual, it underlined the mortality of each person. If the person is considered first and foremost a result of his or her relations with others then the organ that has most contact with others, namely the skin is appropriately seen as the seat of one's personality. Tattoos in the Pacific were not outer adornments but 'inner' characteristics of a person. This goes beyond the practice of tattooing. Aborigines speak of their 'skin' and 'skin name' when they talk about their social identity as part of a section of moiety, a kin group. It is an integral part of their being.
27. Gell distinguishes three elements in tattooing, firstly wounding the skin by inserting pigments, secondly scarring in the process of scab-formation, and thirdly acquiring a permanent mark on the skin (see Gell 1998:304). In most of Polynesia the last mentioned moment, creating visible marks on the skin, was secondary. It was not a graphic art of designs but one that often emphasized the bloodletting in phase one of tattooing, testifying to the fact that one had undergone certain rituals that connect persons not only by word as friends or marriage partners but by substance by sharing the same blood. In some parts of Polynesia the second phase was central, that of enduring pain, of healing, as in initiation of young men, also in the political sense of warriors subjecting themselves to authority and the social cause. Within the Pacific as a region the Marquesas (together with New Zealand and Easter Island) did put more stress on the third element, namely that of tattoos becoming trophies, visible signs of individual achievement (see also Thomas 1990). In this sense they are in fact closest to our western tattooing practices, which are largely driven by the third element (that of the finished design) with an element of self-inflicted body modification, the wounding as endured by the individual (the first element). In recent decades this has opened a highly productive field of anthropological research, the anthropology of the body. The question is how a body that is anatomically pretty much the same across regions and in combination with a basic technique like tattooing being spread with little change across the world would still lead to such a diversity of systems of social reproduction, in which – for instance – being tattooed can in a variety of ways be seen either as an absolute necessity for keeping the social order intact, as in Polynesia, or as something that is considered purely individual and without any social impact at all, as in the West today. Moreover, if the human body can be inscribed by social and biographical factors in so many different ways and with so fundamental implications, how useful is it to consider it to be 'basically' the same body for every human being?

28. Is it going too far to equate the ontological standing of skin in the Pacific with that of the brain in the West? In terms of evolution the brain is indeed a skin folded in manifold ways. Moreover it is also clear that the brain itself, taken out of a living body, is little more than a grey mass, unable to feel anything, not even pain. Fuchs (2008) has provided a very thoughtful and comprehensive critique of the cerebrocentric notions of personhood – or brainhood as it may be more appropriately called (see Figure 5).
29. See for instance Casasanto (2009) who is pioneering this research at the Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics in Nijmegen and who has shown how mental and (other) bodily processes are closely linked in practice.
30. Anthropologists who have long been familiar with a diversity of ways to conceptualize what makes a human have consequently been reluctant to accept that the dualistic division of humans into a bodily-material and a subjective-mental part was a naturally given distinction. However, the dominant way within the neurosciences of doing away with this duality is equally suspect because it is cerebrocentric, taking the brain to stand for the human, and it does not recognize that the naturalistic way of looking at the brain is fact based on our interpersonal mode of sharing a life together and of gaining insight into one another's life (see Fuchs 2008:146). This is not to say that there is no physiological basis for perception or cognition more generally, but rather that it is not the brain alone that creates this basis but a larger system of the organism in its environment. The brain does not *contain* meaningful information but as patterns of neural activity it participates in situations where agents create contents and skill. It is not about retrieving memory but about providing 'open loops' for experience in the sense of a readiness to act in anticipation of certain situations. Situations differ depending on the constellation of participants and how they position themselves towards one another. Therefore, what we have called 'cultural variation' is in fact embodied variation and the brain participates in this variation, as do other parts of your body, including your skin, for instance. For future research this means that we have come a long way, we have gone off to far-off places and we come back really close by, right to the corporeal processes between the brain, the living being and his or her environment, including the culturally and socially shaped environment. For future research this means that we will not accept that anything that is qualitative and subjective in the processes of perception and cognition is reduced to the realm of ideas and that brain activity is taken to be the only material and corporeal manifestation of cognition. We will not let the neurosciences get away with it. The world is not flat but it is connected enough to allow us to bring knowledge from regions as far away as the antipodes to bear on issues that are not only right in front of our eyes but are said to bear on what goes on behind and between our eyes.
31. See Ingold (1996:xviii).
32. See Figure 6.





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