Cook’s observations on meeting Chief Tamahano at Atou, Hawai’i, February 1778

He came off in a double canoe, and like the King of the Friendly islands, paid no regard to those who happened to lay in his way but ran against or over them without endeavouring in the least to avoid them; nor could they get out of his way as the people in them were obliged to lay down till he had passed. His attendants helped him into the Ship and placed him on the gangway, and were so carefull of him that they stood round him with their hands locked with each other, not suffering any one to come near him but Captain Clerke. (Beaglehole 1967: 281)

King’s observations on meeting the people of Nootka Sound, Vancouver Island, April 1778

One boat larger than the rest had as we suppos’d a Chief in her, or at least a man whose dress & manners were singular; he stood upright in the middle of the boat, & upon a plank laid across to be more conspicuous; the naked parts of his body & his Arms were painted with a red, & his face with a whitish Paint, his head was wildly Ornament’d with large feathers, which were tyed to a stiff string or sinew & fastend to the hair, so they hung in different directions projecting from the head. (Beaglehole 1967: 1392)

As James Cook and his men on the Resolution and Discovery sailed through Polynesia and the Pacific Northwest Coast of North America, they were treated to all manner of welcome rituals and ceremonial performances. The actions performed in these events were enlarged and emboldened by material items: boats, clothing, paint and feathers among others. In Polynesia, the dress, actions and general paraphernalia each person employed made their social position abundantly clear to the newcomers—a clarity which extended from ceremonial performances to everyday social interchanges. From the high-handed actions of the Hawaiian and Tongan chiefs described above to the terrifying tattooed faces of the New Zealand Māori warriors, while in Polynesia the European visitors were left in no doubt as to who was a person to be reckoned with.
By contrast, on the Northwest Coast Cook and his men struggled to pick out persons of rank. The extravagant costumes and gestures employed during welcome performances certainly stood out, but there was little to suggest that the individuals who performed such displays held socially elevated positions. Despite staying a month in Nootka Sound refitting their ships, the Europeans took their leave little wiser on this matter. King concluded in his journal: “We observd very little distinction in rank amongst them & could only guess at some Peoples being Chiefs” (Beaglehole 1967: 1413). In hindsight we know that although these observations were faithful, the conclusions drawn from them were in error. Differences in social status were as clearly drawn, and as acutely felt and fought over, among the people of Nootka Sound as they were in Polynesia (Marshall 1993, 2006)—so much so that close comparisons have since been drawn between the social systems of the Northwest Coast and those of the New Zealand Māori (e.g., Gell 1993, Mauss 1954, Wilson 1988). However, to the European newcomers the contrast could not have been starker between the explicitly asserted social messages evident in the high-handed actions of Hawaiian and Tongan chiefs, or those indelibly etched into the faces of Māori chiefs, and the utterly undistinguished countenance of their Northwest Coast counterparts.

Contrary to the impression gained by Cook and his men, the key difference was not degree of societal differentiation, so much as the manner in which social differences were materially displayed and the contexts in which they were performatively enacted. Until the mid-19th century material marking of social position and assertive displays of status were not a feature of everyday public life in Nootka Sound. The assertion of social position and its performative practices were reserved for specific ceremonial contexts (Marshall 2000a, 2000b). So while the people of Nootka Sound were acutely aware of and attentive to social differences, the European visitors remained largely ignorant of them. Cook and his men were, I suggest, seduced by the highly visible while overlooking the understated, contextual messages of others.

In this paper I want to look beyond the immediate face value of objects to a more rounded understanding of objects and their agency. I suggest rethinking objects as social interventions and possible events rather than as portals to archaeological information. To do this I will develop a distinction drawn by feminist philosopher Elizabeth Grosz (1994) between lived and inscribed bodies and employ this distinction as a conceptual tool for thinking about the agency of objects, particularly Lapita pottery.
OBJECTS, AGENCY AND EVENTS

The unique properties conferred on objects by their material presence are employed by people to manifest, enlarge and extend social action. Objects are engaged as extensions of people’s bodies, of their social intentions, and of their social relations. In this sense objects can be said to exercise an agency which is like that of humans in that it refers to, and acts through people, but is not the same as human agency because objects do not of themselves exercise volition or intention (Robb 2004). Hence Gell (1998) distinguishes between the primary agency of intentional human beings, and the secondary agency of the objects through which people act and distribute personhood.

I describe artefacts as ‘social agents’ ….in view of the fact that objectification in artefact-form is how social agency manifests and realizes itself, via the proliferation of fragments of ‘primary’ intentional agents in their ‘secondary’ artefactual forms. (Gell 1998: 21)

The materiality of objects means people can, and do, employ them to make the intangible manifest, that is, to make the effects of human ideas, intentions and actions visible and materially present. As Malinowski (1922) demonstrated so brilliantly in his analysis of the Trobriand kula, exchanged objects materially embody the enduring presence of otherwise intangible, fleeting moments of social connection. Kula valuables are the embodiment of enduring social relationships. The materiality of objects gives them an ability to transcend, deny and amplify time. They can simultaneously, selectively and multiply refer to past, present and future moments, events, actions, persons (Strathern 1990: 29). Finally, objects enable people to exercise agency even when they are not present, to distribute themselves in time and space (Jeudy-Ballini and Juillerat (eds) 2002, Strathern 1988), and thereby facilitate the maintenance of social bonds between people in the absence of face-to-face contact, a unique and essential element of human societies (Gamble 1998, 2007).

Archaeologists are also interested in the agency of objects, looking to understand their social worlds as well as their material properties (De Marrais, Gosden and Renfrew 2004, Dobres 2000, Dobres and Robb 2000, Marshall 1998, Marshall and Gosden 1999). Building on Gell’s distributed object, John Robb proposes an archaeological companion, the extended artefact:

[M]aterial culture intervenes to structure human life through the genres, institutions, beliefs associated with them; because people cannot act in pure volition but necessarily experience and direct their volition through such fields of action, we necessarily structure our use of artefacts according to the field
of action the artefacts are embedded in. In other words, humans attempt an agency of why; material things provide the agency of how....To understand how material things are active – how their effective agency shapes human actions – we have to see not their naked skeleton, the thing itself, but the extended artefact, the artefact with its extension into social time and space. (Robb 2004: 133)

Robb goes on to suggest, as I have above, that objects may intervene in human affairs in a variety of ways, and some of those interventions are more assertive and explicit than others. More particularly, the sudden appearance of a distinctive new object in the archaeological record suggests some kind of social upheaval: “the rise to prominence of new key artefacts often heralds the moment in which a new genre of social action is formulated” (Robb 2004: 134). He cites the appearance of Bell Beaker pottery in Late Neolithic Europe as a case in point. Conversely, Robb points to the cow as an example of an extended artefact in Neolithic Italy that acted as a brake on change, a material agent of continuity promoting long-term stability over several millennia owing to its embeddedness within a series of intermeshing, interlocked institutions which reinforced each other and curbed radical innovation (Robb 2004: 136).

Robb is tentatively suggesting that the ability of objects to make the social manifest may be employed both to enable social change and to promote social continuity, and that different kinds of objects are created or employed for these contrasting purposes, i.e., to constitute new social contexts as opposed to maintaining an established social order. A similar argument has been advanced by Thomas (1999) in his speculative tracing of the historical development of the Polynesia tiputa ‘poncho’. This garment is an example of how “adapted and introduced types of cloth perhaps worked as a technology that made religious change, that is, conversion to Christianity, visible as a feature of people’s behaviour and domestic life” (Thomas 1999: 6). The active constitution of a unique new object, the tiputa, was a social strategy of empowerment tailored to the historically specific moment of early Christian conversion in Tahiti.

The implication is that these newly constituted, assertive objects, with their ability to intervene in and direct human social action, constitute events (Sahlins 1985, 2000, Strathern 1990: 26). While objects can be agents of both change and continuity, some objects, such as Bell Beaker pottery or the tiputa, actively intervene to change the orderly flow of established social worlds. “What makes an act or incident [or object] an event is precisely its contrast to the going order of things, its disruption of that order” (Sahlins 2000: 301). Objects are particularly well suited agents of such events because their materiality gives them the ability to render time slippery—to “evoke past and
future simultaneously” and hence to create a relation between happening and structure such that the world may be represented as both radically different, and as if “everything happens as if nothing happened” (Sahlins 1985: 30, Strathern 1990: 27, Thomas 1999: 18). And just as there can be no event without system (Sahlins 2000: 299), no object can become an event unless it is simultaneously of, but also distinct from, its social context.

LIVED AND INSCRIBED OBJECTS

For feminists the struggle to theorise the relationship between structure, practice and event has been phrased in terms of bodies: how to theorise bodies in ways which respect and value their materiality—their undeniable physical presence—while also allowing them cultural, social and individual specificity and agency? The sex/gender distinction has taken us a long way towards this goal but as critiques by post-structuralist feminists such as Butler (1990, 1993, 2004) have demonstrated, gender is not enough. To accomplish the job feminists worked to reclaim corporeality through the idea of the lived body (Grosz 1994, Moi 1999, Young 2005). “The lived body is a unified idea of a physical body acting and experiencing in a specific sociocultural context; it is body-in-situation” (Young 2005: 16). While the lived body is a specific, corporeal, social agent, gender locates, structures and positions those bodies within the wider society (Moi 1999, Young 2005).

In her book *Volatile Bodies*, Elizabeth Grosz (1994) distinguishes between two kinds of bodily subjectivity: lived and inscribed. Bodies as lived are bodies which acquire meaning and identity in discourse and social action. They are the “inside out”, the outer expression of a body’s interior, internalised lived experience. In contrast, bodies as inscriptive surfaces have meanings inscribed or fixed into their bodily surfaces. They are the “outside in”, the imprint of the outside world imposed into the body. Grosz’s concern was to understand the female body in its many specificities while also valuing its corporeality. Her distinction between lived and inscribed subjectivity I argue can be turned to the analysis of objects whose materiality and agency is intimately bound up with the bodies and lives of the people they reference.

Just as a lived body is a subjective body lived in a specific context, lived objects acquire meaning in the context of social action. Meaning is not prescribed by form; it is contextual and may change at any time. Like the chiefs of Nootka Sound, the immediate appearance of a lived object offers few clues to its social life and meaning. An everyday, lived object such as a cooking pot or floor mat may seem undistinguished in its apparently simple functionality, but could become a powerful object, even a valuable, when taken up in social action. Such valuing can only be known by examining the context of its life,
because the potency of such an object “is only evident through its effects” (Jeudy-Ballini and Juillerat 2002: 5). Such potency may be temporary, restricted to a specified moment or context rather than integral to its ongoing life.

Consider, for example, Samoan and Tongan fine mats. An old ragged mat may at first glance be undistinguished in appearance but it could be the most socially powerful item in a pile of hundreds of gifts offered at a presentation (Kaeppler 1999, Tcherkezoff 2002). Powerful lived objects or valuables such as these will be difficult to identify archaeologically because they can only be recognised by context. They do not announce themselves—they must be sought out, their context painstakingly compiled, like Robb’s Neolithic cow.

In contrast inscribed objects, like a tattooed Māori chief, have meaning incorporated into their body in the course of their making. Meaning is prescribed in advance of social action. An attempt is made to materially, and thereby socially, fix meaning. An inscribed object announces itself; it does not wait upon social action to make its message apparent. Even so, inscribed objects will inevitably both lose and acquire meanings and significance in the course of their lives. Inscribed objects are by definition marked out as socially powerful, as valuables.

Inscribed objects are relatively rare in historic and contemporary Polynesia. One example is the intricately worked pearl shell and sperm whale tooth breastplates made by Tongan boat builders for Fijian chiefs (Clunie 1986). Inscribed objects are also comparatively rare in prehistory but their enhanced visibility ensures they receive the lion’s share of archaeological attention. Lapita pottery, as discussed below, is a case in point and another comparable example is the Aztec Black-on-Orange and Black-and-White-on-Red bowls and plates discussed by Brumfiel (2004).

Gell’s (1993) analysis of tattooing in Polynesia also illustrates the distinction I am drawing between lived and inscribed objects. Here the artefact (tattoo) as body is especially pertinent since tattoos are fully incorporated into the body of the person whose agency they take up. On one hand there are the highly visible tattoos of New Zealand Māori and Marquesan warriors; these inscribed objects literally shout their message to any audience. At the opposite extreme is the non-tattoo, the completely unmarked but highly valued bodies of Tongan nobility who ranked close to gods. Here is the ultimate lived body as valuable—its value unmarked, unseen, but highly potent. Like a buried Samoan fine mat, it is the ultimate point of reference, the standard against which the value of all comparable bodies/artefacts is measured (Tcherkezoff 2002). Between these two extremes are the more modest, less extensive, and often cloaked tattoos common in Samoa, Fiji and Hawai‘i, whose agency is more nuanced: partially asserted, partially subject to context.
In drawing a distinction between lived and inscribed objects my goal is to highlight a key difference in the way material features of objects articulate with the agency they exercise and the social roles they are asked to perform. Like differences in the way Hawaiian, Māori and Nootka Sound chiefs display and negotiate social status, or variation across Polynesia in the extent and placement of tattoos, both the degree to which meaning is made intrinsic to an object, and the way it is performatively enacted in lived social action, are critical to the kind of agency it will exercise. In particular, the more explicit an object’s meaning is made, the more overtly meaning is stated through inscription into the object itself rather than reserved for performative iteration in action, the more that object acts to self-consciously create, assert and make something so. In contrast, a lived object by definition requires people to have prior social knowledge of it for it to be meaningful and is therefore more amenable to the consolidation or confirmation of social relations already acknowledged and embedded in practice than to the introduction of novel social practices.

RETHINKING THE INCEPTION OF LAPITA

To demonstrate the analytical potential of the distinction between lived and inscribed objects outlined above, I use it to rethink Lapita objects, particularly Lapita pottery. My primary aim is to shift attention away from the conventional archaeological questions asked of objects—how and when were they made—to questions concerning their agency; to explore how people might have employed Lapita objects as agents to advance social and political agendas, and to ask, following Robb (2004: 134), whether the rise to prominence of a new genre of Lapita artefacts did indeed herald an event, a moment in which a new forum for social action was being formulated.

Lapita archaeology has transformed our understanding of the peopling of the Pacific (Anderson et al. 2001, Green 2003). It has enabled us to follow the seaborne movement of Austronesian settlers from Island Southeast Asia into the Bismarck Archipelago some three and a half thousand years ago (Bedford and Sand 2007, Bellwood 2005, Pawley 2007, Spriggs 2007, Tsang 2007), and the subsequent expansion of their descendants into Melanesia, Western Polynesia, and eventually to the furthest corners of East Polynesia: Hawai‘i, Easter Island and New Zealand (Fig. 1). We have, as Best (2002: 15) puts it, become quite proficient at the “when” and “how” of Lapita, and we are now beginning to explore its meaning—to ask what Lapita artefacts might have meant for the people who made and used them (Bedford et al. (eds) 2007; Best 2002; Chiu 2003, 2005, 2007; Galipaud 2006; Gosden 2004; Irwin 1998; Kirch and Green 2001; Marshall 1985; Sand 2007a; Spriggs 1990, 1993, 2007; Terrell and Schechter 2007).
Figure 1. Key island groups in Oceania. Drawn by Penny Copeland.
The oldest Lapita sites are in the Mussau Islands of the Bismarck Archipelago (Fig. 2). They document a people who lived from the sea, kept domesticated dogs, pigs and chickens, and cultivated root and tree crops (Kirch 1987, 1997, 2000; Summerhayes 2001, 2007: 148-49). Their dwellings were built along beach terraces and elevated on stilts over intertidal waters. These early Lapita people produced, imported and used an extensive assemblage of artefacts. Archaeologically recoverable objects from this repertoire include stone and shell adzes, oven stones, small bone items, pottery, and a variety of shell fishhooks, beads, armbands and other decorative items. The lived Lapita assemblage consists of those objects with no explicit, encoded, meaning written into or onto their bodies, and includes plain pottery. The key component of the inscribed Lapita assemblage is pottery decorated with dentate-stamped designs.

Figure 2. The distribution and frequency of sites containing dentate-stamped Lapita pottery. Drawn by Penny Copeland from Anderson et al. 2001 and Bedford and Sand 2007.
Lived objects included most, if not all, the bone, stone and shell objects. Some were probably valuables but this is difficult to determine as detailed contextual data is not available. We do know that many stone items, including obsidian, chert and oven stones, were imported as these materials do not occur naturally on the Mussau Islands. Green (2002a: 29) suggests the stone was obtained in two socially distinct ways. Objects such as oven stones and other items of purely utilitarian value were obtained through local trade over short distances. In contrast, obsidian and chert were moved over long distances in socially significant exchange networks and it is on this basis Green identifies them as potential valuables (Green and Kirch 1997). Since the feature marking them out is their exotic material, chert and obsidian objects might be considered inscribed, rather than lived, valuables. Kirch (1997: 236-37) argues that some shell artefacts such as rings, discs, beads and worked plaques were valuables based on their similarity to ethnographically recorded shell exchange valuables and evidence for their specialised manufacture at the site of Talepakemalai. Again the case is made largely, though not entirely, on the basis of properties intrinsic to the manufacture of the object, suggesting possible inscribed rather than lived valuables. However, until detailed information on context of use becomes available, a strong case cannot be made for the engagement of these stone and shell objects as either inscribed or lived valuables.

Lived pottery consisted of slipped plain, or primarily plain, pots, jars and bowls. These pots were thin-walled and well made using a paddle and anvil technique, and derive from similar red slipped wares recovered from earlier and contemporary sites in Island Southeast Asia (Bellwood 2005, Spriggs 2007, Tsang 2007). They make up the majority of the pottery and are dominated by globular pots (Fig. 3), which were probably used for storage and cooking as they are primarily found in living, cooking and midden areas along the beach terraces—fewer were recovered from around the stilt houses. Surprisingly, up to 90 percent of this pottery, or material used in its manufacture, was imported from as many as eleven disparate sources (Kirch 1997: 145). It is possible that lived pots were sometimes engaged as valuables but the detailed information on context required to identify such practice is not currently available.

Into this lived ceramic assemblage a remarkable new object was suddenly introduced—inscribed pottery. Its decoration was applied using a variety of techniques including incising, rocker stamping, carving, shell and fingernail impressing and appliqué, but the distinctive, defining technique was dentate-stamping where decorative motifs were applied using toothed combs or stamps (Ambrose 2007, Kirch 1987: 169). Dentate-stamping tools have been recovered archaeologically and are similar to implements recorded archaeologically and ethnographically for tattooing (Szabo and Summerhayes
Designs might also be painted or highlighted using a paste of white coral lime (Bedford 2007, Kirch 1997: 122, Spriggs 2007: 109). Precursors for these decorative techniques have recently been identified from sites in Taiwan, the Philippines and Sulawesi (Spriggs 2007, Tsang 2007), but not in New Guinea. It seems that the Lapita design system as a whole came together suddenly and was already fully formed when it appears in the earliest sites of the Bismarck Archipelago (Bedford and Sand 2007: 2, Summerhayes 2007: 146-47). It has therefore been argued that Lapita dentate stamping was transposed to pots from other media such as metal objects, barkcloth or tattooing (Green 1979, 1990; Kirch 1997: 141-43). Tattooing is considered the most likely and it would imply that the surface of the pot was inscribed in a manner directly comparable to the tattooing of a person’s skin (Kirch 1997:

Figure 3. Inscribed and lived pots from the Mussau Islands: 1. plain globular pot, 2. dentate-stamped flat-bottomed dish with a labyrinth design, 3. ring foot stand with cut outs, 4. dentate-stamped cylinder stand with face design. Drawn by Penny Copeland from illustrations in Kirch 1997 and 2000.
142-43), a suggestion strengthened by the recent recovery in New Guinea of three modelled ceramic faces, two of which have dentate-stamped designs (Torrence and White 2001).

The sudden appearance of a complex, novel object like inscribed Lapita suggests an event engendered by people acting to materialise specific social goals. But what kinds of social claims did this new inscribed pottery make? Current consensus strongly favours the argument that they were the “social glue” holding Lapita communities together in the face of upheaval engendered by migration and colonisation (Spriggs 1997: 152). Kirch (1997: 140) sees decorated pots as high value prestige objects that “must have occupied a significant role in the social life of the Lapita people”, while Gosden (2004: 39) describes them as “aesthetically-laden objects” whose power of representation was so great it “defied the expressive capacities of language” and was able to “hint at connections between the phenomenal and cosmological worlds”. Drawing a parallel with designs on Muslim prayer rugs Best (2002: 62) also argues inscribed Lapita had “an important religious/social dimension” and the decorated pots “are statements on both the societies’ and the individuals’ roles in this world, and their hopes and fears for the next, attempting to communicate, through a decorated interface, with the unknown and unknowable” (Best 2002: 62).

Kirch (1997: 143, 152) similarly considers decorated Lapita to be “ritually charged”, carrying “representations of human beings, living or dead, real or mythical”, while Green (2003: 112-13) suggests the faces in the decoration were those of ancestors central to the construction of a common identity, or sense of ethnicity, a theme recently continued by Spriggs (2007: 116-17). Chiu (2005, 2007) goes further. She suggests the designs referred to specific ancestors or social groups and functioned in a manner comparable to the house crests of northern Northwest Coast cultures. All this may indeed be the case, but why were these messages inscribed on pots and why at this particular moment (Best 2002, Spriggs 2002: 53)? What do we know about inscribed Lapita that might tell us more precisely what it was invented to do?

Firstly, the earliest inscribed pottery includes a very restricted range of vessels: cylinder stands, open bowls supported by pedestal or ring foot stands (Fig. 3). This choice of vessels points to use for serving and displaying food or other items. At Talepakemalai, the earliest Lapita site on Mussau, inscribed pottery accounts for 16 percent of the pottery recovered from around the stilt houses, but it is rare on the beach terraces where plain pottery is abundant. Surprisingly, inscribed vessels are generally thicker, coarser and of poorer quality manufacture than lived vessels, and may employ different tempers. It is even possible that lived and inscribed vessels were made by different groups of potters (Kirch 1997: 151-52). Inscribed pottery thus shares very
little with lived pottery: it is of different manufacture, it comprises different vessels forms, it is used for different tasks—serving and display rather than storage or cooking, and its context of use is spatially separate (Kirch 1997: 139). Inscribed Lapita is an object set apart.

Secondly, inscribed Lapita pots refer to people, possibly even specific persons. In addition to the link with tattooing, many of the earliest inscribed pots have a central frieze carrying designs based on the human face or eye (Fig. 3). Some have friezes in which multiple faces are woven into a single design motif (Kirch 1997: 139, Spriggs 1990, 1993, 2002). The message of dentate-stamped decoration, as many have already pointed out, explicitly ties the bodies of pots to those of people, whether specific or generic, past or present, mortal or mythic. Terrell and Schechter (2007) have recently argued some face motifs depict turtles, or a person riding on the back of a turtle, as related in the myth of “The Turtle and the Island”, suggesting a symbolic linkage between persons, pots, designs, myths, and the social promotion or legitimisation of voyaging and colonisation. While any object can be a metaphoric embodiment of a person or of people more generally (Jeudy-Ballini and Juillerat 2002), this link is often direct and explicit for pottery (David, Stemer and Gavua 1988), and it is especially so for inscribed Lapita.

Thirdly, an inscribed Lapita vessel is the servant of its decoration: the vessel exists to carry the message—decoration is not applied to enhance the vessel. The carinated forms and comparatively large size of inscribed vessels (Clark 2007) create demarcated spaces for the application of designs. While great attention was lavished on decoration, the technical proficiency of vessel manufacture was adequate but seldom more (Chiu 2003: 176, Spriggs 2002: 54). In short, the decoration was so significant “it could be said that the pots were applied to it, rather than it to the pots” (Best 2002: 56, 63)—a point also made by Chiu (2005: 25) and Marshall et al. (2000: 89). In addition, the inscribed message is heavily over-determined. Terrell and Schechter (2007: 72, 75) point to high levels of repetition and redundancy in the Lapita message: “different elements in the total design field evidently repeat or reiterate more or less the same symbolic theme or concept”, and there are multiple levels of synecdoche where the part stands for the whole—an eye for a face, a face for a person, an abstracted design element for a naturalistic face. The decorative images were wrapped around and into the vessel’s body, their messages repeated, reiterated, amplified. Cook and his men would have got this message.

Fourth and finally, despite its subjugation to the message, a pot was nevertheless the vehicle chosen to carry the Lapita message—why? Pottery vessels are everywhere associated with food and social interchange. Pots commonly occupy positions at the centre of social action. Cylinder stands and pedestal vessels, designed to elevate and visually amplify the presentation
of their contents, are well suited to such a role. The use of designated dishes
or vessels for particular food preparation techniques and for serving specific
foods was established in China during the Neolithic period (Barnes 1999).
By the following Shang dynasty in the 2nd millennium BC, high status
foods, such as grain dishes, could only be served in inscribed bronze vessels
and possession of these vessels was necessary for carrying out ritual feasts,
effectively restricting access to the social arenas in which status and power
were negotiated. I am suggesting that inscribed Lapita was invented to
display and thereby materially lay claim to the lived valuables, including
foods, through which power and status were negotiated. Inscribed vessels
carrying explicit amplified messages held and displayed valuables, possibly
including turtle meat, during socially constitutive events (Allen 2007, Chiu
2005: 25, Terrell and Schechter 2007). The choice of pottery serving vessels
with stands placed the Lapita message at the centre of rituals of encounter
in which the presentation and sharing of selected valued items was a critical
component. Inscribed Lapita vessels ensured valued items would be seen and
acknowledged by all in these ritually powerful settings.

By choosing pots as the medium for its message inscribed Lapita brought
together the bodies of pots with those of persons, set these bodies apart, and
placed them at the centre of powerful, performative, social action. In flexing
its muscle in this way, inscribed Lapita acted as the agent of a person or
group of people influential enough to enable them to introduce an assertive
new object into established arenas for social action, and within these settings
to performatively constitute the social order these new objects aspired to.
Inscribed pots were potent agents performatively linking themselves to
implied or designated persons in pursuit of specific social goals. In one of
the stilt houses at Talepakemalai Kirch (1997: 140) identified a concentration
of dentate-stamped pottery in association with a unique bone human figurine
and a “substantial range of shell valuables”—evidence he suggests for a place
and persons of “particular social importance”—some would say chiefs (Green

The features distinguishing inscribed Lapita come together to create a
discrete class of object which formed a specialised component within the
These inscribed vessels were distinct, set apart from lived objects. Yet they
also referenced the lived assemblage and all the increasingly dispersed Lapita
communities in myriad ways. They were both of, but not of, the established
cultural world of Lapita, c.3500 BP.

But why was this assertive new object introduced so suddenly and at this
particular conjuncture? After all, the ancestors of the Lapita people had been
on the move for sometime. Perhaps the spaces for change in the social order
created by the twin processes of migration and colonisation were accumulating. The ongoing movement of people was weakening established lived practice thereby opening up to negotiation routes to power and social status. It was a moment in which unprecedented claims to social position, employing innovative new practices for pressing those claims, could be launched with real hope of success. For example, as Bellwood (1996), Green (2002a) and Chiu (2005: 5, 25) suggest, younger siblings or junior lineage chiefs might see new opportunities to establish or reposition themselves in hierarchies of power and rank. Inscribed Lapita pots were launched into this breach, a Trojan horse seeking to exploit the social possibilities the moment might afford.

Could the inception of inscribed Lapita constitute an event? It certainly burst suddenly into archaeological view, and stands out as separate and distinct from the lived assemblage of objects. But do we know it to be an event “by the change that ensues in the existing order” (Sahlins 2000: 31)? Did inscribed Lapita make a difference? From the point of its inception inscribed Lapita unequivocally proclaimed itself an event in its own terms, it claimed to matter. But to what degree would that claim be substantiated?

LAPITA MOVES EAST

In as little as 300 years Lapita people and their inscribed pottery spread from the Mussau Islands to Western Polynesia (Spriggs 2007: 116), forming a chain of culturally linked communities stretching from the Bismarck Archipelago to Fiji and Tonga (Fig. 1). As people moved into Remote Oceania and established themselves in the Reef/Santa Cruz Islands, Vanuatu and New Caledonia, many, though not all, features of their inscribed pottery began to change. In contrast, the repertoire of lived objects, including plain pottery, continued comparatively unchanged.

The lived assemblage of non-ceramic artefacts remained remarkably stable throughout the period of Lapita colonisation and across its geographical distribution. It continued to include Tridacna shell and stone adzes, stone abraders, chert, obsidian, Tridacna, Trochus and Conus shell armbands, various shell rings, beads, pendants, disks, scrapers, and bone needles (Bedford 2006a, Bedford and Spriggs 2002, Green 2003, Sand 2001a, Summerhayes 2003, Szabo and Summerhayes 2002).

It would appear that non-ceramic artefacts in Vanuatu were generally not as susceptible to change as were ceramics, as they show continuity in form over much longer time periods…the most perceptible change… is a tendency over time to a restriction of variety and quantity, a feature also noted by Sand (2000:30) in the case of New Caledonia. (Bedford and Spriggs 2002: 149-50)
Some lived items, particularly obsidian and other stone materials, continued to be imported, sometimes over increasingly long distances, demonstrating their continuing importance and possible engagement as valuables. All pottery, however, both lived and inscribed, shifted to local production. Even in the Bismarck Archipelago where the early Lapita obsidian exchange network transformed into two smaller regional systems, the early pottery trade of the Mussau Islands quickly disappeared, replaced throughout the Bismarcks by local production without specialist centres (Summerhayes 2000: 235).

From the Reef/Santa Cruz Islands to New Caledonia lived pottery was still primarily made up of plain globular pot forms like those recovered from sites in the Bismarck Archipelago. However, as Galipaud (2006: 232-34) points out there is increasing variation in decorative finish, and precisely what non-dentate pottery counts as Lapita is a matter of debate. Incised, fingernail and shell impressions, and several other decorative techniques, features of most Lapita assemblages from their earliest appearance, become more common. These are, in general, comfortably accommodated with the lived assemblage and are not considered variants of the inscribed, dentate-stamped pots (Summerhayes 2007: 146).

However, there are exceptions. For example, some incised pots recovered in New Caledonia are clearly inscribed in the manner of dentate-stamped vessels (Sand 2000: 27) and form a new element in the inscribed repertoire. The paddle-impressed Podtanean wares of New Caledonia are commonly found in conjunction with both dentate-stamped and plain pottery, but they may also be the only pottery at a site, and are placed in the lived assemblage for several reasons. Unlike dentate stamping, paddle-impressed decoration is beaten into the surface of the pot as it is formed producing an all over decorative relief surface rather than a design. To produce a plain pot this design must be wiped off (Galipaud 2006: 234). Secondly, paddle-impressed wares include only thin-walled, well made, globular pots used as domestic cooking vessels, and finally, they continue to be produced long after inscribed Lapita has gone (Green 2003, Sand 1996a, 2000: 27, 2001b). All three features closely parallel the plain pottery and place paddle-impressed wares with the lived assemblage. In Vanuatu, a series of highly regionalised incised and applied wares spring up in several island groups, but they do not appear until after dentate-stamped pots have disappeared (Bedford 2006a, 2007), so I will not examine them here.

Like Green (2003: 108), I see these plain vessels and the wider array of lived artefacts as the archaeologically recoverable component of the material culture that lies at the heart of Lapita societies. These are the objects that created continuity, that generated a common ground of shared practice, linking communities to their past and across ever widening distances. It is against
their solidity and stability that the dynamic, differentiating agency of inscribed Lapita is played out. It might even be said that the embedded stability of the lived assemblage enabled rapid innovation and change in other contexts.

Following its inception inscribed Lapita immediately began to change, rapidly and everywhere. Within 100 years cylinder and ring foot stands disappear in the Mussau Islands, replaced by flat-bottomed dishes, bowls and possibly covers or lids (Spriggs 2002: 53). Similar, though not identical, changes in vessel forms occur in West New Britain (Summerhayes 2000, 2007), Buka (Wickler 2001) and the Reef/Santa Cruz Islands (Parker 1981, Sheppard and Green 1991.) At the same time decorative motifs decline in number, simplify in form and include increasingly abstract derivatives of the earlier naturalistic face motifs (Chiu 2003: 173, Summerhayes 2000: 139). However, as Chiu (2007) in particular has recently demonstrated, the trajectory of inscribed Lapita was not one of straightforward simplification and decline. Despite this general trend there was dynamic innovation and considerable local variation in at least five components of the inscribed pottery including aspects of form, decoration and context of use.

Firstly, there was an explosion of new vessels forms. In the Reef/Santa Cruz Islands, Vanuatu and New Caledonia flat-bottomed dishes gradually replace bowls set on cylinder and ring foot stands and the focus of innovation and expansion shifts to carinated jars (Fig. 4). This trend is especially pronounced in New Caledonia where a wide variety of jars appear, including many with a specialised composite rim designed to accommodate a lid (Sand 2000, 2001b, Spriggs 2002: 53, 2007). Although this array of jars consists largely of simple variations in the overall size and relative proportions of a basic jar form, their extraordinary variety points to purposeful differentiation in the way inscribed jars were deployed in practice (Sand 2001b: 73). In early Lapita ceremonial practice, items for presentation were set apart by being elevated on inscribed cylinder or ring foot stands, but a few generations later in New Caledonia it seems comparable ceremonial presentations require an array of jar forms, possibly because each type of item presented or each person/group participating must now be distinguished by its own dedicated jar form.

Secondly, context of use began to change. In some sites, such as Arapus in Vanuatu, the spatial and functional separation of plain and inscribed pottery continues to be marked (Bedford and Clark 2001: 63), while in others such as Nenumbo, an early Reef Island site, detailed analysis of the spatial distribution of items recovered reveals a more complex pattern. Inscribed flat-bottomed dishes cluster in the northern section of the site while inscribed jars and pots are more common in the southern section. Plain pottery is distributed throughout the site (Sheppard and Green 1991). Chiu’s (2007: 255) recent analysis of the spatial distribution of face motifs at Nenumbo also reveals
a nuanced pattern of subtle variation, rather than strict demarcation, in the spatial discard of inscribed pots. This apparent softening of spatial separation in conjunction with diversification in vessel form, suggests a trend away from tightly controlled inscribed meaning in favour of more contextualised, lived meaning. Although the bodies of inscribed pots are still heavily and explicitly marked, their contextual engagement in social practice is diversifying, making their meaning more context dependant and therefore more like lived pottery.

Figure 4. Selection of inscribed Lapita vessels from New Caledonia (Sand 2000, 2001, 2007a) and Vanuatu (Bedford 2007, Bedford et al. 2006, Bedford and Spriggs 2007). Hatching indicates the parts of vessels that are usually decorated with dentate-stamped or incised designs. Drawn by Penny Copeland.
Changes in the way inscribed pots are engaged in social practice are also marked by their deployment in new contexts. In New Caledonia collections of carinated pots have been found purposely buried in pits. At the original Lapita site 13A, one pit feature contained 15 vessels including two very large, broken, but almost complete dentate-stamped carinated pots (Sand et al. 1998). These two pots appear to have been purposefully broken then buried on, and covered over, by the broken sherds from another 13 jars (Sand 2001b: 73). Interestingly, no sherds from flat-bottomed dishes were present, again suggesting increasing specificity in the social deployment of inscribed pots.

In Vanuatu inscribed pots were employed as burial goods and funerary vessels. At the Teouma site on Efate (Fig. 2), a large Lapita cemetery partially overlain by extensive midden deposits has been investigated (Bedford and Sand 2007, Bedford et al. 2007, Bedford, Spriggs and Regenvanu 2006). More than 25 individuals have been recovered, many in association with inscribed pots. In some interments bones were placed in a pot, in others pots were placed over the person buried, and sometimes pots were present as burial goods. Curiously no burial has its skull in articulation. Sometimes the skull is replaced by objects such as Conus shell rings, sometimes it is buried separately in or with pots, and in one unique example three skulls were placed on the chest of a single postcranial skeleton (Bedford et al. 2006: 822). The Teouma site demonstrates that Lapita burial rites were “an on-going, multi-layered process rather than a one-off event” (Bedford et al. 2006: 823) in which special attention was paid to a person’s head and inscribed pots and other potential valuables were ritually bound up in the practices constituting the complex burial procedures. Bedford (2007: 190) even suggests some vessels forms, notably cylinder stands, may have become specialised funerary vessels.

Thirdly, alongside changes in vessel form and context of use, there is local experimentation and innovation in the composition of clays used to make Lapita pottery leading to increasing variation in the quality of both manufacture and decoration (Chiu 2003). For example, the 15 pots buried together in a pit at Site 13A show considerable diversity in both decoration and mineralogical constituents yet there is no direct correlation between quality of manufacture and fineness of decoration (Chiu 2003: 160, Sand et al. 1998). Similarly, at Teouma some inscribed pots are finely made with very thin walls, but their decoration is coarsely applied and expanded while other thick walled, robust vessels have very finely applied, tightly structured, dentate-stamped designs (Bedford et al. 2007). Evidently the pot is still a canvas to display the inscribed decoration, not the other way round.

Fourthly, new elements are added to the decorative repertoire. One jar from Teouma has extremely rare modelled birds around its rim while another has
two groups of three vertical applied lugs, and in New Caledonia vertical clay bands or nubbins are sometimes used to divide the central design into blocs (Bedford and Spriggs 2007, Sand 2007a: 268). Inscribed pots recovered from Vao Island not only have lime infill but also red, white or grey painting on and over the dentate-stamped designs (Bedford 2006a, 2006b, 2007: 189, Bedford and Sand 2007). Incised, impressed and applied decoration, established elements in inscribed designs from the inception of Lapita, become more common on inscribed vessels in some areas, particularly in New Caledonia where they are used in conjunction with dentate stamping and later disappear alongside it (Sand 2001b: 72). In rare examples incising is used to render most, even all, of a pot’s design (Sand 2000: 26, 2007a: 280).

Different decoration techniques were both combined to produce either the same motifs that were originally solely produced with dentate-stamping, and to produce new motifs that mark local innovation. This phenomenon indicates that the image of a motif is much more important than the technique employed to produce it, and that the importance of dentate-stamping decreased over time. (Chiu 2003: 174)

Vessels bearing face motifs are something of an exception as everywhere face motifs are executed in dentate-stamping—few incised face motifs are currently known (Chiu 2005). In addition face motifs are restricted to selected vessel forms. In the early Mussau sites double face motifs occur on cylinder stands and ring foot bowls, while single face motifs are predominantly found on the slightly later flat-bottomed dishes. “No face motif has ever been found on smaller bowls or on globular carinated pots in the Far West” (Chiu 2007: 243), but, by contrast, in New Caledonia face motifs are primarily found on carinated jars (Chiu 2005). As Chiu (2005) suggests, vessels bearing face motifs may have become a marked category within the already marked repertoire of inscribed vessels.

Fifth and finally, the composition of the inscribed designs are subject to change. Processes of both elaboration and standardisation are evident. The growing number of whole pots available for analysis has facilitated a shift in analytical focus away from the inventory of design motifs employed to the rules underlying the composition of inscribed designs (Chiu 2005, 2007, Chiu and Sand 2005, Sand 2007a). Over 150 whole inscribed pots from New Caledonia have now been reconstructed. Detailed analysis of their decorative designs reveals a surprisingly limited inventory of central motifs (Chiu 2003: 173, Sand 2000). Sand’s (2007a: 270) close analysis of “tens of thousands of decorated sherds” from the central band that forms the main decoration on carinated jar forms in New Caledonia, revealed only 14 basic design types:
9 geometric, 4 face and one incised. His preliminary comparisons with collections from the sites in the Bismarcks, Reef/Santa Cruz Islands, Vanuatu, Fiji and Tonga found that designs from all these regions also fitted the 14 New Caledonia types. A number of additional unique types tend to occur in each region but they are represented by only a few rare sherds; almost all sherds fit the main 14 types. Sand (2007a: 284) concludes that:

The construction of a typology for the central band of Lapita pots discovered in New Caledonia has allowed the identification of a definitive restricted range of main motifs. Although variations are present in all categories identified, the overall small number of distinct motifs in the collections is testimony that Lapita potters did not print freely-inspired patterns on the clay surface of their carinated pots, flat bottomed dishes, pedestals stands and lids.

The implication is that some persons or groups managed to successfully establish and perpetuate the social claims they exercised through inscribed Lapita designs, pots and practices, and these designs become the commonly iterated normative standard against which new claims would be tested. Other claims did not succeed and the inscribed designs which championed their cause died at the point of launch.

Chiu’s (2005, 2007) fine grained analysis of the face motifs from three Reef/Santa Cruz sites and Site 13A in New Caledonia found a similar pattern of structured variation. She defines five slightly different types of face motif to those used by Spriggs and Sand: a triangular face type that includes Spriggs’ double faces, a closely related headdress type, a complex and a simplified long-nose, and a long-nose variation with alternating faces. For each type there is a core structural element such as the triangular face, or the eye/nose combination in the simplified long-nose that is held constant while the rest of the motif is allowed to vary in a myriad of interchangeable ways (Chiu 2007: 253). Different face motifs predominate at each of the four sites: RF6 has only 5 sherds, all of Triangular and Headdress types; RF2 has 82 sherds of Triangular and Long-nose types; and SZ8 has 15 sherds including Triangular, Headdress and Long-nose types. In contrast, the 267 sherds from Site 13A are 88 percent Simplified Long-nose and they include at least 23 variants of this motif type. These variants are in part created by combining or integrating motifs elements from other designs to form new composite designs incorporating elements of two or more already established designs (Chiu 2005: 19-20).

A conventional “how” and “when” understanding of this evidence would read from it peoples’ movement across the Oceanic landscape—their patterns of dispersal over time and space. While acknowledging that “factors of time and space may serve as a starting point” Chiu (2007: 257) is more concerned
to understand peoples’ social motives and strategies. She argues the unvarying motif structure forms a bridge to the past, signifying unity or political strength, while the variation and diversity within each design results from two forces: one expressing social differentiation and the other integration. Chiu (2007: 258) goes on to suggest that people might make “a conscious selection of a particular group of face motifs, in an effort to express particular group identity” or they might choose to recombine elements into a new design in order to signal their connection to some groups and differentiation from others. I agree with Chiu’s interpretive direction; inscribed Lapita pots do not passively reflect, represent or signify people or groups; they discursively establish and constitute persons and groups as meaningful social entities. Inscribed Lapita is an agent in the social apparatus by which people and groups are brought into being, a constitutive performative practice not simply a sign, symbol or representation (Chiu 2007: 259).

As our knowledge builds, the contrast between the stability of the lived assemblage and the dynamic innovation of the inscribed assemblage becomes ever more striking and we see the repetition of this contrast at ever finer grained levels of analysis. From the big picture of stable, lived objects versus changing inscribed objects, down to the fine detail of variation within face motifs, the same pattern of diversity within a tightly regulated structure is apparent. At each level there is tension between, and counterbalancing of, innovation against convention, social differentiation against social integration.

As inscribed Lapita expanded beyond the small repertoire of vessels and heavily over-determined motifs characteristic of early Lapita recurring patterns of change are evident. There is a widening range of vessel forms and decorative elements, but at the same time there is increasing specificity in the way inscribed pots are deployed in practice: certain contexts of use seem to demand particular vessel forms while face motifs are confined to specific vessels and production techniques. Some inscribed pots acquire newly privileged positions, increasingly marked out within the already marked, inscribed assemblage, and they perhaps take on the social roles previously reserved for inscribed Lapita more generally. Pulling in the opposite direction, inscribed Lapita as a general category of object is increasingly opened to more contextually fluid meanings. It becomes less separate, less set apart—more lived. At the same time, lived pottery is beginning to differentiate more, hinting at possible new social roles (Galipaud 2006).

To what extent does the spread of inscribed Lapita constitute an event? Was it in “contrast to the going order of things” (Sahlins 2000: 301); did it disrupt the existing order, and if so, what flowed from that rupture? Did the impact of inscribed Lapita compare, for example, with the social upheaval which ensued when a few Hawaiian commoner women took the radical step
of stopping to dine with their European lovers (Sahlins 1985)? The limited but provocative archaeological evidence for change in the wider assemblage of lived objects does not suggest social rupture on a scale indicative of any event. On the contrary, it suggests inscribed pottery had surprisingly little impact on the wider social order.

But perhaps this is what we might expect. In the face of ongoing migration and colonisation, change is an ever-present, inescapable facet of life and what we see in the stability of the lived assemblage is a societal anchor generating a continuity that enables change without social collapse. In contrast, the inscribed assemblage shows us some of the social machinations directing, exploiting and engaging the possibilities for change opened by colonisation. From the Bismarck Archipelago to New Caledonia inscribed Lapita was a key agent in a social order which promoted and valorised colonisation. It was a dynamic, evolving agent helping to compel the task of colonisation and in this respect its impact was dramatic. Viewed in these terms inscribed Lapita did have a profound impact on the society that produced it and it is unequivocally an event in Pacific history.

LIVED POTTERY IN FIJI AND WESTERN POLYNESIA

By the time people reached Fiji and West Polynesia the social impetus of inscribed Lapita was nearly spent. It only features in the early archaeology of some parts of the region and shows “a striking and near immediate divergence from the development identified in the Western Lapita Provence” (Sand 2007b: 220). In places it survived for only one or two generations and within 200 years at the most it was gone from the entire region (Sand 2007b: 217). In the Lapita literature this disappearance is commonly described as a loss, as if it dropped out of a collective Lapita pocket. But given the highly dynamic social life of inscribed Lapita in the islands to the west, its disappearance can only be understood as deliberate discard. Whatever the social roles inscribed Lapita once performed they either lost their pertinence, their power to make a difference, or they were transferred to other less archaeologically visible media (Best 2002: 50, Chiu 2003: 161). People chose to stop making inscribed Lapita pottery because it no longer mattered.

In contrast, the Lapita lived assemblage continued to be a stable presence. In Tonga for example, over 2000 non-ceramic objects have been recovered from Lapita sites and they are largely “indistinguishable from those recovered from western and far western sites” (Burley et al. 2001: 102). Smith’s wider analysis of non-ceramic artefacts from across West Polynesia reached a similar conclusion although she does identify changes in adze types and a decline in the range of shell ornaments in sites containing only plain pottery (Smith
2002: 162-65). Unlike these non-ceramic items lived pottery immediately began to differentiate, taking on new life and gaining in social influence.

Dentate-stamped and incised pottery occurs in a surprisingly large number of sites (see Figures 2 and 5), but it comprises over one percent of the assemblage in only five Fijian sites: Natunuku, Yanuca, Naigani, Bourewa and Lakeba (Best 1981, 2002; Clark and Murray 2006; Nunn et al. 2004: 140) and several Tongan sites (Burley et al. 2001, Burley, Nelson and Shutler 1999, Burley, Storey and Witt 2002). With the exception of Lakeba these Fijian sites are argued to have been settled first c.2900 BP, with other parts of the region progressively colonised over the following 100 to 200 years (Burley et al. 1999, Clark and Anderson 2001, Sand 2007b). Several sites including Votua in Fiji and sites on Niuatoputapu contain around one percent decorated pottery, but most other Lapita sites contain only a few decorated sherds.

Despite its limited distribution and short duration there is considerable evidence for local innovation and differentiation indicating inscribed Lapita was, if rather briefly, a dynamic social agent. Flat-bottomed dishes are important at Natunuku, Yanuca and in Tongatapu but not other sites, and a new globular bodied jar with an appliqué band below the rim appears at Natanuku and Yanuca. Carinated jars and bowls dominate the inscribed pottery from

Figure 5. Locations of key Lapita sites in Fiji, and the main West Polynesian island groups. Drawn by Penny Copeland.
other sites (Best 1984, Burley et al. 2002: 216-17, Clark and Anderson 2001). The use of “three dimensional short or long bands and nubbins, mainly on carinated pots” increases (Sand 2007b: 218) and there is considerable use of incised motifs (Burley et al. 2002: 218, Clark and Anderson 2001: 83), particularly at Naigani where Best (1981, 2002: 43-44) argues even stylised face motifs are sometimes incised.

There is a general trend towards simplified or exploded motifs covering ever smaller areas of the pot. Stamp tooth size increases, stamped impressions are more widely spaced and lime infill becomes rare (Burley et al. 2002). A range of central frieze or “complex” designs occur at Naigani, Natunuku, Yanuca and possibly the newly located site of Bourewa (Best 2002, Nunn et al. 2004, Sand 2007a), and they turn up in small numbers at other Fijian and Tongan sites. But on most sherds “the central frieze is no longer present, and the supplementary bands have become the focal point of the decorative system. Accordingly the bands are widened and motif size expanded in relative proportion” giving them their typical open or exploded appearance (Burley et al. 2002: 219).

Even so, there is still innovation, and both complex and simplified motifs can occur together as at Naigani (Best 2002: 44). Again, as happens further west, it is not a straightforward trajectory of steady decline, and closer analysis of inscribed designs reveals a familiar pattern of constrained innovation within broader continuity. Clark and Murray (2006) have used a frequency rank approach to examine design use in three areas settled during the period 3050-2650 cal BP: West Fiji, Tonga and East Fiji. For each of these areas motifs were ranked according to the frequency of their occurrence. Results show a clear decline over time in the range of motifs employed and in the degree of innovation (Table 1). This general trend conforms to that expected in unbiased transmission, a situation where the more common a motif is to start with the more likely it is to be selected again, so common motifs tend to remain common and new motifs struggle to establish a foothold.

Table 1. Pattern of design frequency in Lapita sites in Fiji and Tonga—from Clark and Murray 2006.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Date of first settlement (Sand 2007a:228)</th>
<th>No. of designs</th>
<th>% motifs shared across all three areas (n=19)</th>
<th>% designs unique to sites in this area</th>
<th>% unique designs to rank above 20th</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>West Fiji</td>
<td>1000-950 BC</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>52-70%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tonga</td>
<td>950-900 BC</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>39-59%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Fiji</td>
<td>950-850 BC</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>16-19%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Motifs shared across all three areas, and high frequency designs from all three areas, are dominated by older, common motifs found everywhere from the Bismarcks to Tonga over the full period of inscribed Lapita. This pattern is especially striking for East Fiji where the “characteristic long tail of the decay curve at the end of the design system’s life indicates copying of a small number of designs with limited innovation, consistent with a stylistic system whose social significance has waned” (Clark and Murray 2006: 113). Or as Chiu (2005) would put it, people are discarding motifs of differentiation first and retaining established motifs of integration for longer. These are, however, general trends illustrating the cumulative effects of numerous people making choices over an extended period. They do not predict what will happen to any specific motif because every design selection is a choice made by interested actors with specific social agendas. Many motifs frequencies do not fit the pattern—some novel motifs bounce up the rank listings while some old established favourites drop out of favour. Within the broader pattern there is plenty of evidence for social strategising which runs counter to the prevailing trend—for people choosing to affiliate in unexpected ways or to distance themselves from those who employ the dominant motif forms.

The fortunes of lived pottery were very different from those of inscribed wares. The most extensive and best documented assemblage of lived Lapita pottery comes from Level 1 at the Sigatoka sand dunes, dated to around 2500 BP (Burley and Dickinson 2004: 17). Apart from four carinated bowls with a simple band of dentate stamping, all vessels are plain or have simple impressed or incised markings on or near the rim (Fig. 6). This places the assemblage right at the final moment of inscribed Lapita production at Sigatoka (Birks 1973: 27, Sand 2007b: 219). Unusually good preservation has resulted in the recovery of semi-complete vessels and a total 212 vessels have been reconstructed (Birks 1973, Burley 2003, Burley and Dickinson 2004). They include 106 globular pots and jars in a wide variety of forms different from but comparable in variety to the inscribed carinated jar forms of New Caledonia (see Figs 4 and 6). There are also 63 bowls in various sizes and forms including 5 with carinations, 12 restricted orifice pots of which some have handles, and 2 pot covers. In addition, there are 13 ceramics discs up to 5 cm in diameter and 16 pot stands of several types (Birks 1973: 162-63, Burley 2003). We see in this assemblage a definitive move away from inscribed pottery and a concomitant expansion in the array of lived vessels. The specificity of vessel form evident in the inscribed pottery of New Caledonia, Vanuatu and the Reef/Santa Cruz group is here evident in the lived assemblage. The great variety of jar and bowl forms suggests the same specificity of practice, while the pot stands indicate a continuing emphasis on the elevation of items for presentation. However, the vehicle for these
practices has moved to the lived assemblage. The discs indicate continuing innovation and point to the emergence of possible lived pottery valuables.

In Level 1 at Sigatoka the earlier domination of decoration over vessel form is gone and the inscribed content of the decoration is no longer paramount. Meaning has shifted from the specific composition of an inscribed message, to the presence or absence of inscription, and eventually as Kaeppler (1973) noted some 35 years ago, comes to reside simply in the vessel itself—in short, inscribed becomes lived. The social role once reserved for inscribed Lapita vessels is

Figure 6. Selection of vessels recovered from Level 1 at Sigatoka. Drawn by Penny Copeland from figures in Birks 1973 and Burley 2003.
absorbed into the lives of lived vessels, and contextual valuables. This historical repositioning of meaning has parallels with the geographical differentiation in tattooing identified ethnographically in Polynesia (Gell 1993).

This extraordinary variety of lived pottery seen in Level 1 at Sigatoka is not found everywhere, and its diversity occurs at a time when pottery has almost disappeared in much of West Polynesia. The basic suite of lived pottery vessels found in early Lapita sites in Fiji and West Polynesia is very similar to that of the earliest Lapita sites in the Mussau Islands (Fig. 7) but their occurrence is highly variable. Some early sites contain both lived and inscribed pottery and sometimes, as at Sigatoka and Lakeba, they are spatially separated (Best 1984, Marshall et al. 2000). But early, exclusively lived pottery assemblages contemporary with sites containing inscribed Lapita also occur (Smith 2002: 20), suggesting the lived assemblage almost immediately came to take on new social roles, some of which may previously have been the domain of inscribed pots.

Figure 7. The Fiji/West Polynesia generalised Lapita pottery shopping basket. Hatching indicates the parts of vessels commonly decorated with dentate-stamped or incised designs. Drawn by Penny Copeland.
There is a well recognised and much reproduced generalised suite of Eastern Lapita vessels (Fig. 7), but as Smith (2002) has demonstrated it is a purely theoretical construct—it is not found in this form at any particular time or place. From the moment people reached Fiji, lived ceramic assemblages begin to diversify (Burley and Clark 2003, Smith 2002: 135). Every site assemblage is subtly different from all others. The settlers of each island or island group made a selection from the basic suite and commonly, though not always, they stayed with that range until pottery production disappeared from the locality. To highlight these variations I have illustrated how each island group made its own personal selection from the generalised suite of vessels (Figs 8 and 9).

All Fijian sites have plain globular pots although the range of these vessels is exceptionally large at Sigatoka and surprisingly restricted at Naigani. All but Natunuku have a range of large bowls (Best 1981, 1984, 2002; Burley and Clark 2003; Clark and Anderson 2001). The retention of bowls, a vessel more characteristic of inscribed wares, suggests that for a time at least ceramic bowls may have been considered lived valuables in much of Fiji. Only Sigatoka and Lakeba have a restricted mouth water jar. Within a few hundred years this range of lived vessels thins markedly as bowls and water jars disappear leaving only globular pots. At Sigatoka, again the exception, there is the brief appearance of large, rough trays thought to have been specialised salt evaporation vessels (Birks 1973). As inscribed vessels disappear, both paddle-impressed and incised pots increase. These are considered lived wares because as in New Caledonia they include only thin-walled, well made, globular pots and the decoration forms a relief surface rather than a design. At least some of these lived pots became valuables. For example, at Sigatoka in the large Level 2 cemetery excavated by Best (1989) lived paddle-impressed pottery was used in burial contexts in much the same way as inscribed Lapita was used earlier at Teouma in Vanuatu.

Tonga has a large number of sites containing inscribed Lapita (Fig. 2). Even so inscribed Lapita disappears throughout Tonga by c.2650 BP leaving a lived pottery assemblage dominated by globular pots (Burley et al. 2002, Dye 1996). Most sites also include small numbers of bowls and it is possible these were lived valuables, although more detailed contextual data would be needed to positively establish this. Restricted neck water jars continue to be made in Ha‘apai but not in Tongatapu (Fig. 9).

In Niuatoputapu, the initial range of ten vessels rapidly thins out. Inscribed and carinated forms are discarded leaving only globular pots, a water jar and possibly a few small cups or bowls. Interestingly, this small range of vessels which derive exclusively from the lived Lapita assemblage persist until around 1000 BP, potentially one of the longest sequences of pottery production in West Polynesia (Kirch 1988, Smith 2002: 56).
Figure 8. The lived pottery assemblages from five sites in Fiji.

Figure 9. (facing page) The lived pottery assemblages from six West Polynesian locations.

Shading indicates vessels retained from the generalised Lapita pottery shopping basket shown in Figure 7. Darker shading indicates vessels both retained and potentially valuables. Drawings by Penny Copeland.
Mulifanua is the only site in Sāmoa with dentate-stamped pottery, and then only a few sherds. Plain pots are abundant and widespread but consist entirely of bowls made in both thick and thin wares (Clark and Michlovic 1996, Green 2002b, Green and Davidson 1974, Kirch and Hunt 1993, Smith 2002). Given the unusually restricted focus on bowls, a vessel common among inscribed wares, it is possible that in Sāmoa all pottery was considered a lived valuable. There is little change over time and pottery production seems to have ceased sometime during the first millennium AD, although it may have continued on Tutu‘ila for longer (Clark and Michlovic 1996).

On ‘Uvea lived pottery is found in quantity in all habitable parts of the island. It comes in a wide range of vessel forms and unusually includes complex, carinated forms in fairly consistent abundance until the end of the ceramic sequence, probably during the mid first millennium AD (Sand 1996b: 109). The range of vessels and the retention of carinated forms suggest some initially inscribed vessels became plain lived valuables. Interestingly there is no indication of declining quality as pottery dies out (Sand 1996b: 113). On Futuna there is a small range of globular pots, one carinated, at least five bowls of which two are carinated and an unusually large number of water jars (Sand 2007b: 233). Several of these vessels derive from inscribed Lapita again suggesting transference from inscribed to lived valuables. These vessels also disappear sometime during the first millennium AD (Sand 1990).

The people of Fiji and West Polynesia selected from both the inscribed and lived Lapita repertoires, each group retaining a unique range and investing these vessels with new meanings and social values. Some kept only a few vessels from the lived range while others drew vessels from the inscribed range into the lived repertoire. In many places lived pots were probably prized as valuables. As each group made their choices no two assemblages turned out quite the same, and the social contexts for engagement of pots varied across different island groups. The distinctive feature of Lapita in the Fiji/West Polynesia region was a strongly expressed preference for lived pottery and valuables over inscribed pottery.

The heart of Lapita in Fiji and West Polynesia, and of the Polynesian societies that grew from it, lay with the enduring, everyday lived objects and the lived valuables promoted from among their ranks. Inscribed pottery was quickly discarded or drawn into the lived assemblage. Lived pottery dominates all ceramic assemblages and continued to be produced throughout the region for at least 1000 years, and small amounts are still made in Fiji. The event here is not inscribed Lapita so much as the quiet revolution played out by enriching and invigorating the lived assemblage. Although much less archaeologically visible than earlier events played out through inscribed pottery, these lived changes speak more directly from the core of Lapita societies and perhaps set in motion a more profound reordering of society.

* * *
Roger Green has long argued that Lapita is not just about decorated pots, or even just about pots, but is a story about people, and to understand these people we need to give our attention to the full range of objects left to us. We need to consider not only changes in the presence or absence of objects, but also their relationships to each other and to the people who produced them. In drawing a distinction between lived and inscribed objects I have sought to focus attention on the agency of both Lapita objects themselves and the people who made, used and discarded them. The distinction drawn is between different forms of agency and different arenas for social action rather than objects *per se*, as objects are only one of many ways agency may be performed, enacted, made material. While inscribed objects employ boldly assertive messages to proclaim meaning and announce their actions, lived objects exercise their influence in more embedded, contextual ways. Even so, simply stating something, however assertively even in a material form, does not make it so. In all cases social claims made by objects, just like social claims by people, must be performatively enacted, experienced and iterated, in order to become established, and in this process their claims are risked, challenged and transformed.

I have tried to show how the inscribed/lived approach offers a way of understanding the ongoing dynamics of societal continuity and change. It focuses our attention on the ever shifting tension between continuity and change. My examination of this dynamic follows the Lapita people and their artefacts across the Pacific. As they moved, the balance of inscribed versus lived agency evidenced in archaeologically recoverable items repeatedly shifted. Early inscribed Lapita was highly assertive, but it also seems to have been restricted to a small range of objects which operated within a tightly constrained, spatially delineated field of ritual/ceremonial social practice and against a well established, highly stable assemblage of lived objects. By the time people reached Vanuatu and New Caledonia the relationship between inscribed and lived objects had shifted dramatically. Both became more differentiated but at the same time less distinct from each other. By the time people reached West Polynesia the agency of inscribed pottery and its performative arenas had been largely drawn into the lived assemblage and its arena of social action. This process was completed soon after.

Over the course of their three thousand year history the people who colonised the Pacific repeatedly created both lived and inscribed artefacts. In the final chapter of colonisation and the movement of people into the furthest corners of East Polynesia, new inscribed objects appeared beginning with the archaic East Polynesian artefacts (Furey 2004, Pearthree and Di Piazza 2003, Walter 1996, 2004), and continued in recent traditions such as tattooing (Gell 1993) and wood sculpture (Hooper 2007, Neich 2001). As Hooper (2007: 131) argues of A‘a, a remarkable wood sculpture from Rurutu in the Austral
Islands, such objects inspired, appalled, enchanted—certainly they could not easily be ignored. At the same time other equally powerful objects emerged, such as the godhouses and *to‘o* of Tahiti and the Tuamotus (Kaeppler 2007), but they did not announce themselves in the same way. Instead these lived objects were made again and again—unwrapped, performed, rewrapped in an ongoing cycle of performative iteration.

Inscription need not be restricted to the bodies of people, pots, or even portable artefacts in general. Nor is an inscribed message condemned to live and die with a specific artefact form. It could be argued that inscribed Lapita never disappeared, it kept transforming, moving across and between media—possibly even from pots to monuments (Rainbird 1999). Across the Pacific people today continue to decorate barkcloth, wooden objects, pottery and human bodies with designs which resonate back to Lapita (Best 2002: 72, Terrell and Schechter 2007). In addition, during the last 1000 years in Polynesia we see the emergence of landscapes inscribed with fortifications, monuments, *marae* and temples (Graves and Sweeney 1993). In New Zealand, one of the last corners in the Pacific to be colonised, the remarkable inscribed objects produced by early colonists soon gave way to frenzied inscription of the landscape as thousands of fortified *pā* sprang up and continued to do so until well after Cook and his men arrived in 1769. In the latter half of the 19th century the media of inscription shifted again. The inscribed bodies of landscapes, people and canoes—*pā*, tattoo and wood carving—were transformed into the inscribed ancestral bodies of the modern Māori meeting house and *marae* complex (Neich 1994, 2001; Sutton *et al.* 2001). East Polynesia seems always to have been a place of intense inscription.

The sometimes perplexed observations of Cook and his men initially drew my attention to the striking differences in the way material objects were employed to assert social position in East Polynesia compared to Nootka Sound. But just as inscription is not the whole story in Polynesia, not all meaning was exclusively lived in Nootka Sound, and the balance of inscribed versus lived changed. As European visitors began to visit regularly, inscribed objects became more prominent (Marshall 1993) and one hundred years on Nootka Sound could not have been more different (Marshall 2000a, 2000b). Cook and his men would no longer have struggled to recognise a chief or a chiefly residence.
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