

## Drawing It Out

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*The fieldwork sketches of Arthur Bernard Deacon, made in Vanuatu in 1926–27, give us insight into the early methodologies of social anthropology and into the role of images in anthropological ways of thinking. Here I develop a perspective on field sketches that explores them not only as visual mediations of the fieldworker's subjectivity, but also as genre pieces that indicate very particular forms of training in "how to see." I draw out the visual conventions, ways of thinking and seeing, that underscore the different strategies that Deacon used in his drawing. [A. B. Deacon, drawing, Malakula, Vanuatu, visual culture]*

### Introduction

Archives have an uncanny capability to make the private public, showing the researcher things not necessarily intended to be seen by a broad audience. Sketches, especially in field notebooks, are similarly private, seeming to present us with a picture of the ethnographic encounter that may be hard to find in an image set within a polished monograph. By making such hidden documents visible we may recuperate lost stories of personal experience and alternative histories of ideas. Yet how seriously should we take images that do not become canonical, mainstream, exhibited, reproduced, and printed in thinking about the history of our discipline? What can we make of sketching—informal, often unpolished, often quick drawings, frequently made in front of their subject—in our understanding of how anthropologists “see” the world during fieldwork? This essay looks at the role that sketching played for a keen anthropology student working in the South Pacific in the 1920s, and asks what his example might teach us about the process of becoming an anthropologist and about the importance of drawing to this course of practice. Tim Ingold has commented on the potential of drawing “to reconnect observation and description with moments of improvisatory practice” (2011:2). Here I explore the provisional nature of sketching as an embodied exploration of the subject position of the anthropologist-in-making. The images I present here instantiate a disciplinary engagement using visual idioms gleaned from the background of the anthropolo-

gist as well as his interlocutors in the field. Sketching is not just an immediate, relatively unmediated documentary practice but is both a medium of visual orthodoxy and a cultural practice inflected with multiple visual genres—an embodied dialogue with multiple knowledge and aesthetic systems.

While anthropology's relationship to drawing has changed over time, translating between images and words has always been a key part of our methodology. During fieldwork, ethnographers have to continually process what they “see” and translate their experience into documentary media of many kinds, from written notes, to audiovisual recordings, sketches, tables, surveys, diaries, and so on. This “raw” material is then reprocessed into a more formal presentation that, in general, has long devalued the visual. The notebooks and other archival materials of Arthur Bernard Deacon (1903–27) give us insight into the role that sketching played for a young student conducting his first research at a time when long-term and immersive fieldwork was still an emergent methodology. For Deacon, drawing was part of a wider palette of methods that anthropologists had been working on since the emergence of the fieldwork paradigm in the late 19th century. However, unlike photography, object collecting, interviews, and the making of genealogies, drawing was not fully developed as a specific methodology for ethnology. Deacon, like most anthropologists even today, had to rely on preexisting skills and knowledge of other traditions of botanical, archaeological, and travel illustration. This relative inattention to drawing as a precise method or

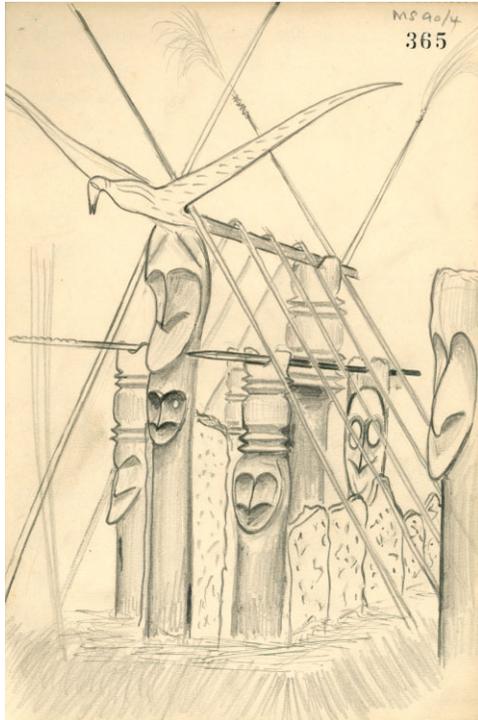


FIGURE 1. Drawing of Nimangki shrine, S W Bay, Malakula, by A. B. Deacon, in small fieldwork notebook. MS 90/4/D365.

skill within anthropology provides an interesting counter-narrative for fieldwork and dominant paradigms of visual representation (Figure 1).

This sketch, in one of Deacon's notebooks, presents what might at first glance be considered to be a typical ethnographic drawing. The drawing shows several standing stones and carvings within the framework of a small open house. The artifacts shown are part of a ritual ceremony known locally as *Nimangki* in the area that Deacon worked, South West Bay, Malakula, part of the New Hebrides, known as Vanuatu in the present day.<sup>1</sup> The artist-ethnographer seems to be positioned in such a way as to perceive every aspect of this tableau. The carved faces of the figures are each fully visible despite the relative angles of the posts upon which they are carved. This play with perspective undermines the naturalism of the sketch. This drawing shows us what things looked like to Deacon, visually establishing the authority of the ethnographer's perspective as a form of realist "I-Witnessing" (Geertz 1988: chapter 4). Further

exploration of Deacon's visual archive shows that this sketch is but one of a series of drawn visual strategies through which we may begin to understand the complex "period eye" of the anthropologist (Baxandall [1972]1988; Geertz 1976). Deacon's sketches teach us not only about what he was seeing, and perhaps thinking, but also about how he was trained to see and think, both by his teachers in Cambridge and by his Malakulan interlocutors.

### Understanding Sketching in Anthropology

From the outset, the discipline of anthropology was defined by the experimental movement of methods devised within scientific laboratories into the field of human interaction and experience (Schaffer 1994). The 1898 Torres Strait Expedition was a seminal moment for the institutionalization of British anthropology and anthropological training (see Herle and Rouse 1988). By the turn of the 20th century, colonials, missionaries, and traders were encouraged by training manuals, such as *Notes and Queries on Anthropology*, published by the British Association for the Advancement of Science and the Royal Anthropological Institute, to systematically gather diverse evidence in the field as part of the comparative "science of mankind" (Urry 1972). As scientific fieldwork turned its methods toward the comparative study of human culture and society, an insistent sense that all method must be subservient to the immersive life experience of "being there" also began to grow. As we shall see, this emergent tension is palpable in Deacon's written field notes and drawings.

Anthropological empiricism generally rests in tension with discussions about reflexivity, subjectivity, and the competing worldviews of anthropologists and their interlocutors. At the same time, discussions of method are as much techniques for reproducing patterns of interest and engagement within the discipline of anthropology as they are for establishing empirical modes of inquiry. Discussions about cultural relativism may have, in the present day, morphed into conversations about perspective and ontology (see Viveiros de Castro 1998), but they continue to explore how the anthropological project of ethnography can mediate between cultural worlds. While these conversations tend to focus on writing, exemplified by the emergence of a

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new field of “ethnographic theory” exemplified by the journal *Hau* (<http://www.haujournal.org>), both film (Griffiths 2002; Grimshaw 2001; MacDougall 2006) and photography (Edwards 1992, 2001; Pinney 2011) have also been historicized as ethnographic methodologies with their own visual cues and codes for representing the fieldwork encounter. A vibrant literature that understands film and photography both as *method* and *form* for anthropology has emerged in which the subject position of the photographer is unpacked alongside that of the photographed or filmed (e.g., Banks and Morphy 1997; Castaing-Taylor 1994; Wright 2013). Far less critical attention has been paid to the production of other kinds of visual images by anthropologists despite the fact that, as Taussig notes, “drawing intervenes in the reckoning of reality in ways that writing and photography do not” (2011:13).

Despite our increasing awareness of the fact that many anthropologists do indeed sketch and draw (famous sketchers include A. C. Haddon, Alfred Gell, Rudi Colloredo-Mansfeld, and Michael Taussig, and no doubt the practice is extremely widespread), little attention has been paid to the stylistic conventions and materiality of these images, or to the role that the very specificity of sketches and sketching (rather than simply the fact of their existence) plays in the formulation of anthropological knowledge. I focus here on sketches as a particular subset of drawing because our ability to deconstruct visual images into bigger cultural frameworks seems to end at the sketch—a form of drawing understood to be so immediate as to present us with a snapshot of both subjective and objective reality. Such perceived indexicality of sketching might be argued to present an “image” of sketching as quasi-photographic. We are only just starting to see sketches as we see other forms of artistic production, as stylized representational forms that mediate the real in different ways from that of photography, and that initiate conversations and dialogical modes of engagement with others both during and after their making.

The dominant approach to understanding drawing within anthropology focuses on drawing as a visual strategy and form of embodied practice in which “the line” becomes an ontology for the production of anthropological knowledge (Ingold 2007, 2010, 2012). Whether it be Ingold’s development of a “graphic anthropology” in which “the drawn line can unfold in a way that responds to its immediate spatial and temporal milieu” (2011:239) or Taussig’s assertion that sketching is a form of homeopathic (and surrealist) magic, “the magic of like affecting like” (2011:106), contemporary celebrations of ethnographic drawing as a technique of both anthropological documentation and understanding

rarely unpack the visual styles and strategies that structure these images or locate them in the comparative context of other drawings, either of the time or within the discipline. In an exceptional study, Rudi Colloredo-Mansfeld (2011) explores the resonance of his own drawings alongside a group of Tigua artists, comparing their understandings of stylistic convention, perspective, and perception by working through the medium of drawing itself. Colloredo-Mansfeld and others (e.g., Hendrickson 2008) use drawing as what Ballard (2013) terms a “dialogic” practice—a way to engage visually with others in the field.

Here I focus not only on careful drawings, designed perhaps to be shown to others, or even made with others, but also on more intimate sketches, hidden away within fieldwork notebooks, many of which have rarely been seen until now. Hendrickson (2008) describes the ways in which her sketchbooks formed part of the “visual processes of coming-to-know” during her own fieldwork (2008:120), and uses the technique of collage, of both sketches and media images, as a way to generate understanding and knowledge of tourism and media in the Yucatan. Here I develop the idea that sketching is a form of (visual) thinking and an embodied and situated practice that reflects cultural norms about being situated, looking, as well as stylistic and representational conventions. In my discussion of Deacon’s sketching, I unpack these visual images as part of complex cultures of looking, which bring together the image worlds of anthropologists and ni-Vanuatu. In providing an account drawn from the early days of anthropology I provide a depth to descriptions of sketching that locate them within fieldwork encounters that are always presented as contemporary, but, as far as I can tell, never locate sketching as part of a broader history of drawing within fieldwork. This essay domesticates the work of Bernard Smith, humbly adding to his magisterial account of *European Vision and the South Pacific* (1985) the marks of a young anthropologist working quietly in 1920s New Hebrides.

### Arthur Bernard Deacon

Born to British parents in Nicolaev, Southern Russia in 1903, where his father worked for a shipping firm, Deacon was sent to Nottingham High School at the age of 13, leaving his parents in Russia. He was deeply unhappy to be separated from them, but performed well at school, winning a scholarship to Trinity College Cambridge where he read Natural Sciences, French, and Russian. He wanted to apply for the Civil Service but was too young to sit the exam after graduation, and

following the suggestion of Cambridge anthropologists W. E. Armstrong and A. C. Haddon sat for the Anthropology Tripos, passing with a first-class mark in 1925. Haddon suggested that he work toward a Ph.D. and that he undertake fieldwork in the New Hebrides. W. H. R. Rivers, who along with Haddon was one of the founders of anthropology at Cambridge, and his student John Layard had both worked on the island of Malakula, where they had focused on a megalithic ritual culture that extended through the island throughout the Western Pacific. Rivers had died in 1922, and Layard had not yet written up his fieldwork from 1914 to 1915 due to illness and a subsequent breakdown (see Geismar and Herle 2010: chapter 1). There was a strong sense of work to be done to consolidate knowledge about this ritual complex that comprised the raising of standing stones and carvings, and in a shared ancestor deity called Tamat or Ambat. Following on from Rivers' interests in cultural diffusion, the Cambridge School at the time was interested in the migration of culture, in the form of language, ritual, song, music, and mythology, and in broad questions of similarity and difference, cultural stability, and change over historical time (Urry 1985). Deacon's generation of students, the first for which long-term fieldwork was fully institutionalized, was charged with filling in the local details within the sweeping brushstrokes of regional interest that Rivers and Haddon had already established in the South West Pacific. Deacon was to connect to Layard's work in the northern part of Malakula (Layard 1942) and to follow

up on Layard's preliminary observations of a megalithic culture in South West Bay, Malakula (Layard 1928).

With only the most rudimentary historical information about the New Hebrides and only one year of studying anthropology, Deacon set out for Malakula in December 1925. He traveled to Cape Town, then to Sydney and Melbourne, where he met Radcliffe Brown. He also met several missionaries who had worked in the New Hebrides. He proceeded via Norfolk Island to the capital of the New Hebrides, Port Vila, where he worked with men in the prison there from various islands and took notes for what would be published as "Notes on Some Islands of the New Hebrides" (Deacon and Wedgwood 1929). As soon as he could, he took a ship to South West Bay. During the 14 months that he spent in the New Hebrides, he was based in South West Bay and his main contacts with non-indigenous people were two missionaries, Mr. and Mrs. Boyd, and two traders: Ewan Corlette, the British District Agent who lived at Bushman's Bay, an extremely literate man who was to give Deacon much conversation and advice in the field, and a French trader, Mr. Dillenseger (Figure 2). During fieldwork, Deacon spent most of his time at S. W. Bay with shorter trips to North Malakula, Lambumbu in the North West, and a six-week trip to Ambrym, where he "discovered" a six-class marriage system that was to cause much anthropological excitement (see Deacon 1927; Rio 2002).

During his fieldwork, he frequently sent notes and photographs to both Haddon and Radcliffe Brown for safekeeping, provoking much excitement in Cambridge

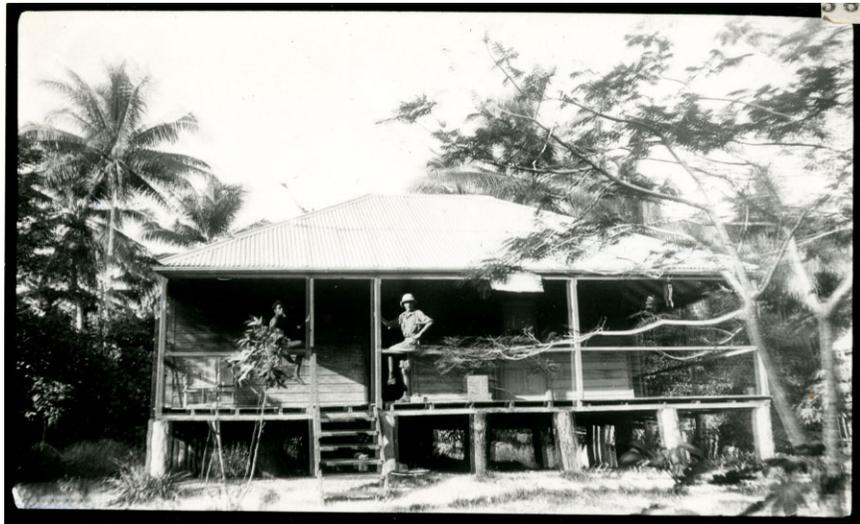


FIGURE 2. "Copy of a snapshot of Deacon taken by Mr Plowman a planter in Malekula about a week before the death of the former in 1927. The original is in possession of Deacon's mother. Photograph given to Mr G.B. Milner in Samoa by Mr Plowman, 27/04/1956." RAI photo archive 3805.

and Sydney, and many admiring letters flew back and forth across the ocean. While still in the field, he was offered a lectureship by Radcliffe Brown at Sydney University. However, in 1927, while packing up to leave for Australia, Deacon contracted Blackwater fever and died a few days later, nursed by Mrs. Boyd. He was buried on the island. Since then, locals have professed to see his ghost wandering through the dancing grounds, and some posit that his death was caused by powerful spirits who had been inflamed by the fact that he had trespassed to take photographs in a sacred space (Clifford 1997; Geismar 2006).

Upon Deacon's death, his personal effects were sent to his parents, but because of his sponsorship by Cambridge his photographs, field notes, artifacts, and other specimens became the property of the Cambridge University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology. Some of his field notes and many of his letters to Haddon and Armstrong are now in the Cambridge University Library. This material includes an extensive and charming correspondence with his Cambridge girlfriend, Margaret Gardiner (who later published extracts of the letters in a book called *Footsteps on Malekula*), and with his supervisors in which he discusses in detail his experiences and feelings during fieldwork. The objects he collected (54) and the original photographs he took on his small Kodak vest pocket camera (71) are held in the Cambridge Museum (with copy prints in numerous other archives in London, Oxford, and Vanuatu).

Despite their sadness at losing their best and brightest, the home team in Cambridge rapidly set about establishing Deacon's legacy. A fund was established in his name, and Haddon commissioned a fellow student, Camilla Wedgwood, to work with Deacon's field notes and edit them into a volume, which was published in 1934 under a title suitable for the salvage anthropology of its time: *Malekula: A Vanishing People in the New Hebrides*. Haddon and Wedgwood also edited a lengthy article for the *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* (Deacon and Wedgwood 1934). After finishing her editorial work Wedgwood deposited all of Deacon's fieldwork notebooks, close to 50 different volumes of all shapes and sizes, and the other materials she had been working with, alongside her own research notes, in the archives of the Royal Anthropological Institute in London.<sup>2</sup>

Deacon used small notebooks to record the local language in words and stories. He used lined notebooks to take down oral histories and to transcribe ritual music, and plain sketchpads to both take notes and to draw. He also produced a number of loose-leaf drawings and paintings, primarily of ritual objects, alongside an extensive number of sheets documenting family trees,

making use of the genealogical method originally developed by Rivers. In 2012, the RAI Deacon collection was awarded status of documentary heritage by UNESCO's Memory of the World program.<sup>3</sup>

## Beyond Text

Writing is so unreal, so terribly unreal, lending the illusion of movement to quiet and stillness, and holding back desire and vision and the cool, clear welling up of things.<sup>4</sup>

Notwithstanding the tragedy of his early death, Deacon's archive allows us to explore the process of research and writing, and the entanglements of image and text as methods of knowing and studying, and it is critical to this understanding to understand how this archive has been remediated many times by many different interlocutors. *Malekula: A Vanishing People in the New Hebrides* is a strange text: a combination of Deacon's field notes and personal letters to his advisors, with the occasional editorial footnotes by Wedgwood. It is written in the present tense about a culture that Deacon obviously felt was already in the past. He commented with exasperation in a letter to Haddon that "everyone has been led away by the glitter of civilization—rifles, gin, rum, watches, electric torches, condensed milk, tinned meat (both consumed in considerable quantities); the price of cotton, the doings of traders, these are becoming more and more the principle interests of the natives."<sup>5</sup> Deacon's work has to be understood in the light of the "salvage" agenda of his time. Traditional cultures were perceived to be declining irreparably and it was the self-defined task of this generation of anthropologists to inscribe traditions before they disappeared entirely.

The book, as a hefty encyclopedia of customary life in Malakula, was deconstructed almost from the get-go. Fellow Cambridge anthropologist John Layard, who had worked in Malakula ten years earlier and had lent his field notes to Deacon for him to take into the field, was horrified to discover, upon receiving the proofs to review, that Wedgwood had unwittingly incorporated his notes into Deacon's and quoted him without attribution. He threatened Routledge with legal action unless they allowed him to insert errata into the text with his own preface, and the pages of the first edition are interspersed with inserted annotations and criticisms (see Geismar 2006:539).<sup>6</sup>

These exchanges underscore the intense uncertainty that surrounded the translation of Deacon's field notes into an authoritative ethnography. Deacon had left for

Malakula in 1926 filled with youthful energy, but soon became disillusioned and overwhelmed. The paradigm of “salvage anthropology,” of preserving and collecting that which was rapidly being lost, provided a meta-narrative for his fieldwork experience. The local culture, as he perceived it, was in decline due to the influence of missionaries and the interests of Western traders. Whole language groups were dying from introduced diseases. The area where he lived was infested with malarial mosquitoes. Deacon was profoundly ambivalent about anthropology during his fieldwork, Wedgwood was ambivalent during her editing, and Layard was an ambivalent reader. In light of this lack of confidence, perhaps it is more productive to look at these texts as extensions of an exploratory practice, perhaps even as sketches themselves. No coincidence that this is very much a moment in which some anthropologists were starting to detach themselves from the natural sciences to construct the interpretive paradigms of the social sciences. In one of his letters to Margaret Gardiner, Deacon commented:

It is so different in physics and chemistry—there you have a vast structure of really beautiful theory, experimentally verified in enormous numbers of ways, and as undoubtedly true, I suppose, as anything of the kind one can think of—so research has a great theoretical searchlight, there is coherence and direction. Here (in ethnology) it is all a mess—I suspect most ethnologists are bad historians, or bad psychologists, or bad romanticists. [cited in Gardiner 1984:44–45]

By moving away from Deacon’s published work and looking at the rest of his archive, specifically his drawings, we may reconstruct not only some of the traditional lifeways of Malakulans but also the thought process of the budding anthropologist who is using fieldwork as both tool of empiricism and a form of reflexive critique that precipitated a “crisis of recognition in the human sciences” (Marcus and Fischer 1986:7). Indeed, we might think of the salvage paradigm as a representational crisis *avant la lettre*.

In a volume edited by W. H. R. Rivers entitled *Essays on the Depopulation of Melanesia* (1922b), missionaries, traders, and ethnologists discussed contemporary theories of population decline in the region and concluded that the rapid decline of Melanesian peoples was a result of the negative effects of colonialism, missionaries, and trade that had brought disease, alcohol, and detrimental innovations in clothing, housing, and feeding, resulting in a profound shift in the psychological state of native peoples and a “loss of

interest in life” (Rivers 1922a:97). The paradoxical role of the anthropologist was, therefore, to document and record what was disappearing. Preserving, while at the same time facilitating the disappearance of the documentary record:

Even if it were decided utterly to destroy the old religion there is no way in which these difficulties can be met so successfully as by a study of the old religion and of the mental attitude upon which the old religious practices rested, for this attitude must inevitably influence the reception of the new religion. If, on the other hand, it be decided to preserve such elements of the old religion as are not in conflict with the new, this study is even more essential. How can it be possible to decide whether a native practice shall be preserved unless the nature of the practice is thoroughly understood and its relations with other aspects of the native culture realised? . . . Whatever the policy adopted towards the indigenous religion, it is of the utmost importance that this religion shall be understood and that, even if no concerted effort to study native religions is made, attempts in this direction made by individual missionaries shall be encouraged. [Rivers 1922a:112]

Deacon was well aware of this mission and directly experienced its paradoxes. For instance, he was charged by Haddon to collect skulls for the Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, which he did, even as he was lamenting the disappearance of entire villages, clans, and even language groups. This precipitous decline generated not just collections of objects, but the entire anthropological project of the time. Deacon made exemplary use of the genealogical method developed by Rivers in Cambridge to record extensive family trees and histories of families and lineages that were, he felt, coming to an end. He wrote to Haddon: “nothing has happened since I have been here except funerals . . . everything has gone, or is going, in the New Hebrides. I’m just getting what I can before it goes altogether.”<sup>7</sup> The immediacy, indeterminacy, hesitancy, and even hidden nature of sketching were suited perfectly to this uncertain time.

### Sketching Bodies, Embodied Sketching

With a keen artistic eye, visual practice was evidently important to Deacon during his fieldwork and it was one of the ways in which he explored the methods and ideas he had been trained to use at Cambridge. Within

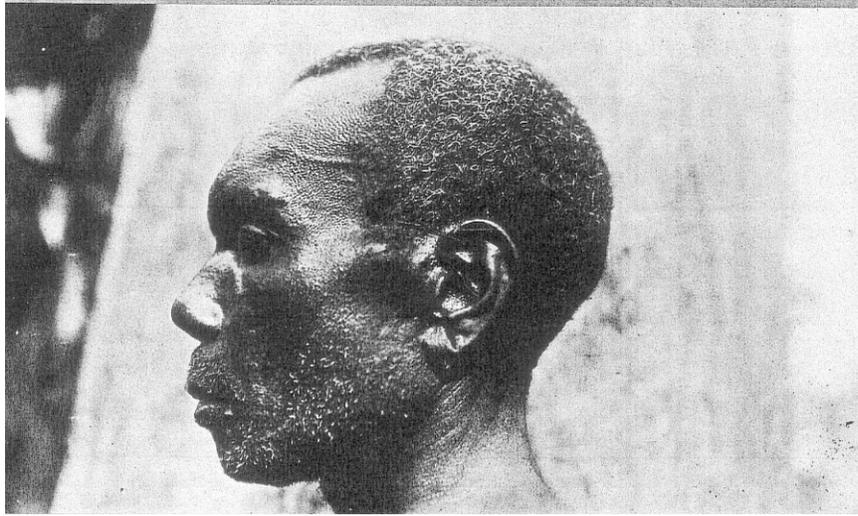


FIGURE 3. "The last survivor of the Melpmes clan, Telvu-Suaga Kabat Wuk. Side View of Head." Photo by Deacon, reproduced in Deacon (1934: plate II.3).

his notebooks Deacon made use of sketching in a number of different ways. He used drawing in the field as a schematic, as a form of annotation, and as a form of place-making. This is an interesting correlate to his photographic practices. He took only 71 photographs and used drawing much more as a visual aid than photography. For instance, it is pretty clear from their absence, despite the strength of the genre at the time and his collecting of skulls for the museum, that Deacon was unmoved by the genre of anthropometric photography as a tool of racial classification. Rather, even this anthropometric style of photography was co-opted to express Deacon's ambivalence and loneliness as he contemplated the project of salvage anthropology.

This is palpable within (Figure 3) in which, while conforming to the conventions of the anthropometric gaze, Deacon also resists this frame, captioning the photo as "The Last Survivor of the Melpmes Clan, Telvu-Suaga Kabat Wuk. Side View of Head." The intentionality of physical anthropological documentation is here partially subverted by a more dominant narrative of cultural decline and also by a personal interaction in which this man is presented as a named individual rather than just a racial exemplar. Despite the affordances of photography as a tool of racial documentation par excellence, Deacon activated this genre to make a very different point. It is telling that both his field notes and published writings contain very little written discussion of, or emphasis on, physical anthropology.

Given this disinterest in, even subversion of, the physical anthropology project, I was surprised to dis-

cover in one of Deacon's notebooks (MS90/2/B) a number of sketches that express interest in very particular issues within physical anthropology, showing that Deacon was thinking and engaging quite clearly with Darwinian theory and its application to theories of evolution (even at the time when this was being rejected in Cambridge), and that he was not completely disengaged with visual methods that allowed anthropologists to focus their gaze intimately upon the bodies of their interlocutors (Figure 4). Page after page in this particular notebook are covered with disembodied sketches of ears. The close attention to these ears suggests a different kind of intimacy to that of the more formal photograph of Telvu-Suaga Kabat Wuk, in which Deacon must have been sitting close to people, with their permission to scrutinize their faces, casually drawing as they talked. As in the anthropometric photograph of Telvu-Suaga Kabat Wuk, the owners of the ears are also named. This easy intimacy sits alongside Deacon's interest in drawing the specific shape of certain ears tracking the presence of an "overfolded helix and an antihelix," the other terms he uses to annotate his drawings.

The sketches indicate a particular understanding of drawing as a vehicle of intimate and detailed connection with scientific theory. Darwin's opening pages of *Descent of Man* (1871), his treatise on the evolutionary origins of human beings, sexual selection, and human race, used as an example "one little peculiarity in the external ear," a little projection from the inwardly folded margin of helix. Darwin considered this to be "a vestige of formerly pointed ears" and an indicator of the

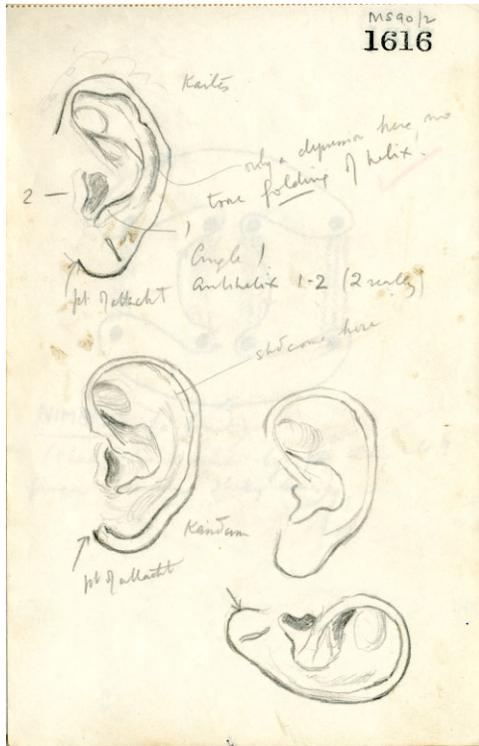


FIGURE 4. Annotated drawings of ears, indicating both the names of the individuals, with notes about the physical characteristics of their ears. Annotations: rainbow+mbat imeet; (top ear) slight widening; Masenrean; antihelix = in level to helix; pt of attachment; (middle ear) distinct overfold; no overfold; slight depression; pt att. Antihelix depressed below level of helix. Angle 1; (bottom ear) MILMILIAG Albino at Venian, man and his mother albinos. LOKON MS 90/2/1632.

relationship of human beings to monkeys. Following Darwin, the (over)folded helix was considered by anthropologists to be an evolutionary throwback, and they were interested in discovering this among so-called “primitive” peoples.

In a 1907 article, entitled “The Head of an Aboriginal Australian,” D. J. Cunningham, professor of anatomy at Edinburgh University, observed that “the external ear is distinctly human in all its elements and parts, although it also exhibits in a small degree certain anthropoid characters; further if we are to regard the human auricle as undergoing a process of retrograde development, the Australian ear has apparently proceeded along this path to a greater extent than the European ear” (1907:53). The article is illustrated with a photographic plate presenting a montage of ears, visually positing connections between monkeys and Aboriginal peoples (Figure 5). Putting aside our own distaste for these kinds of comparative illustrative prac-

tices (and their scientific questionability), Deacon may have been thinking through these arguments by sketching the ears of those in his company in Malakula (there was certainly no admonition to pay particular attention to ears in *Notes and Queries*). Yet at the same time, these sketches are annotated with people’s first names and lie on pages interspersed with drawings of ritual artifacts and notes about magic, health, poison, and sickness, suggesting a more visceral engagement with Malakulan corporeality and a more intimate respect for the people to whom these ears were attached (Figure 6).

These ears indicate a transitional moment for anthropology as it shifts away from the natural sciences, moving

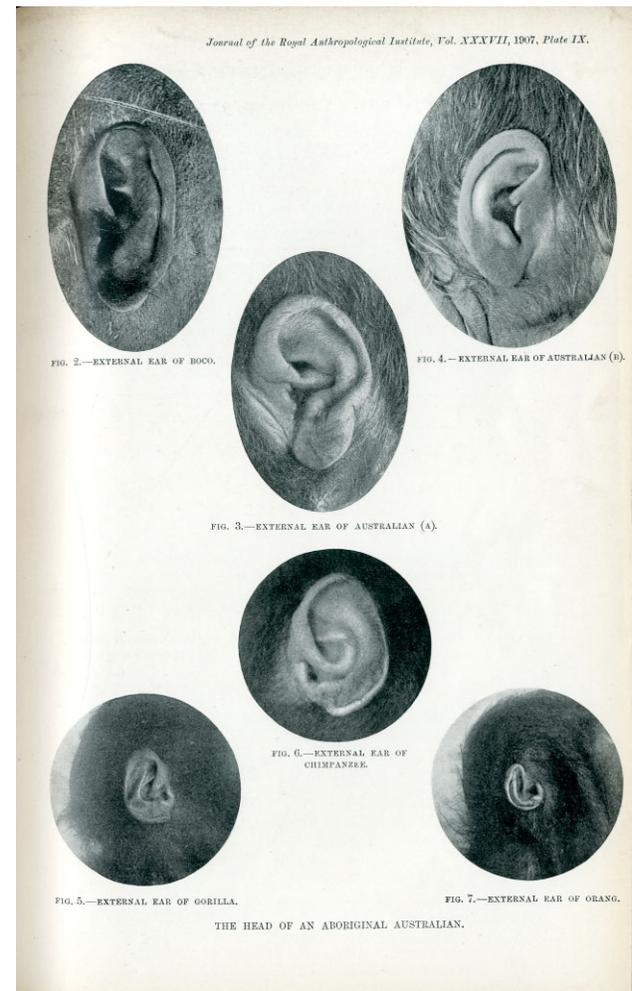


FIGURE 5. Plate from Cunningham’s article on “The Head of an Aboriginal Australia,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, 1907: Vol XXXVII, plate IX. Caption reads: “The head of an Aboriginal Australian. Fig. 2. External ear of Boco. Fig. 3. External ear of Australian (A); fig. 4. External ear of Australian (B). fig. 5. External ear of gorilla. Fig. 6. External ear of chimpanzee. Fig. 7. External ear of orang.”



FIGURE 6. Interspersed among the ears in, MS 90/2/1619. Deacon copied this image as a larger drawing with the caption "Temes Malau, [Malau = bush turkey] a mask of the Nalawan. The mask is just over 8 ft in height. It is extremely heavy and can only be worn for a few minutes."

from interests in evolution to interests in social psychology, diffusion, and sociology (Urry 1985). Ears are sketched, collected, but it is telling that there is no indication of Deacon's interest in ears in his field notes themselves, or in the texts that were eventually published. I interpret this as an instance where it seems to be impossible to translate from the archive into formal text. These sketches were not considered evidential or reliable as anthropological documentation but rather demonstrate Deacon's more speculative explorations of physical anthropology, ways of working through the key words of his disciplinary moment ("overfolded helix"). Deacon could observe, record, and draw the ears of his interlocu-

tors. But neither he nor Wedgwood could, or wanted to, translate that into more conclusive exegetical thinking, especially given the paradigm and politics of increased relativism and historicity that dominated the anthropology of the time. Despite drawing several people's ears several times over several pages of his notebook, there is an indeterminacy to these sketches. In many ways, they represent a visual dead end—they do not translate into other registers of knowledge or information; they cannot be translated or used as illustrations (Figure 7).

But despite this failure, there are ways in which other sketched images, for Deacon, played a role in the consolidation of academic and anthropologically disciplined knowledge—ways that sidestep the most literal expectations of how sketches like the ears may, or may not, be translated into anthropological theories, and that focus on how sketching, like photography, can be understood not just as a depiction of other bodies, but as an embodied way of knowing that contributes to a sense of scale or positioning during fieldwork. Alongside the exploration of scientific theory, Deacon used drawing as a determinedly material way into the culture he was studying. His drawings were not only within field notebooks, but also migrated into other media. For instance, among his papers are a series of images of the carved faces of slit gong drums, made by rubbing black crayon on packing paper recycled from his own parcels. Their presence in the archive provides a sense of scale to visual imagery that had been lost from fieldwork photography by this time (Deacon worked with a small vest pocket Kodak using standard negatives that provided a uniform scale and depth of field to all of his images) (Figure 8).

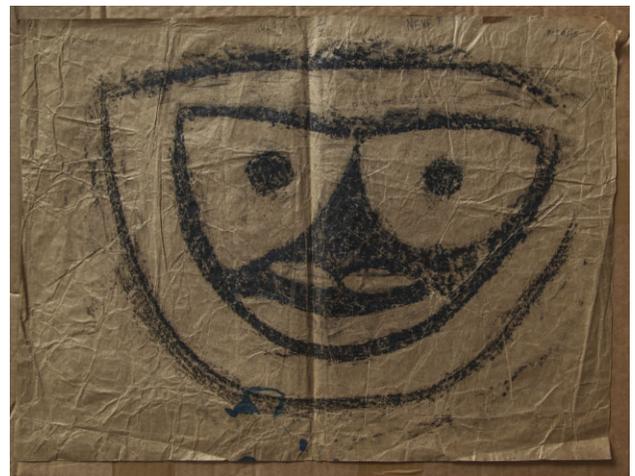


FIGURE 7. Rubbing of the carved face of a drum. "Nevet" crayon on packing paper. MS 95/7.



FIGURE 8. Full-length rubbing of Nimangki figure. MS 95/9/.

Instead, these rubbings provide us with a sense of the “real” size of the drum face and by extension a sense of Deacon’s physical engagement with the drum through the process of transferring an image from wood with wax crayon onto paper. The reverse of the paper gives us another tangible impression of Deacon’s presence in the field—these images are made with recycled packing paper torn from a parcel sent through trade routes to the ethnographer—and his desire to make use of these precious pieces of paper, to save these careful traces of home, is almost palpable. Here sketching becomes a multilayered form of collecting—a literal transference of the face of the drum onto packing paper, a domestic moment of consolidation for the homesick anthropologist (Figure 9).

### Sketching Place and Space

For Ingold, “the practice of drawing has little or nothing to do with the projection of images and everything to do

with wayfaring—with breaking a path through a terrain and leaving a trace, at one in the imagination and on the ground, in a manner very similar to what happens as one walks along in a world of earth and sky” (2011:178). Deacon also used sketching as a way to locate himself, not just more abstractly in space or in relation to the cultural objects surrounding him, but also within a specific environment. In another notebook are a number of drawings that seem to have been made from the vantage point of the water as he tracks the coastline of Malakula in a dugout canoe or whaler boat. Pages and pages go by as Deacon traverses the coastline, sketching and annotating as he went (Figure 10).<sup>8</sup>

Being in the archipelago of Vanuatu is an experience that continually balances being on land with being on sea. A visual sense of the land, as seen from the sea, is vital not only to finding one’s way, but also to understanding how to be and who to connect to. Points, headlands, and bluffs are often the boundary markers of clan territories, and significant markers to delineate access to coastline, reefs, and beaches. A view *from* the sea is often the only way in which this visual sense of coastline can be apprehended. The dense foliage of lush tropical forest necessitates a heightened awareness of place markers. Only from the sea can these rocky outcrops, the relative topology of hills and mountains, and bays and inlets be fully perceived and understood to form a specific cartography. For local people, each headland signifies a boundary marker between areas owned by kin groups. Being in a coastal landscape, from the interior, requires a sense of placement that often refers back to the experience of moving between places by canoe. People’s connections to land are traced as moving up and down from the sea into the hills. Deacon’s own awareness of the genealogies and family trees

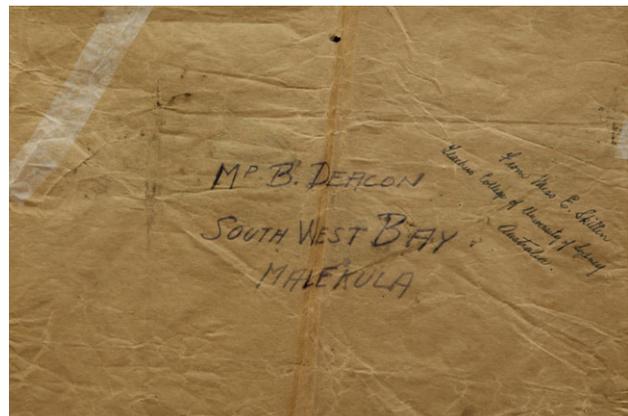


FIGURE 9. Detail of reverse showing Deacon’s name and address. MS 95/9/.

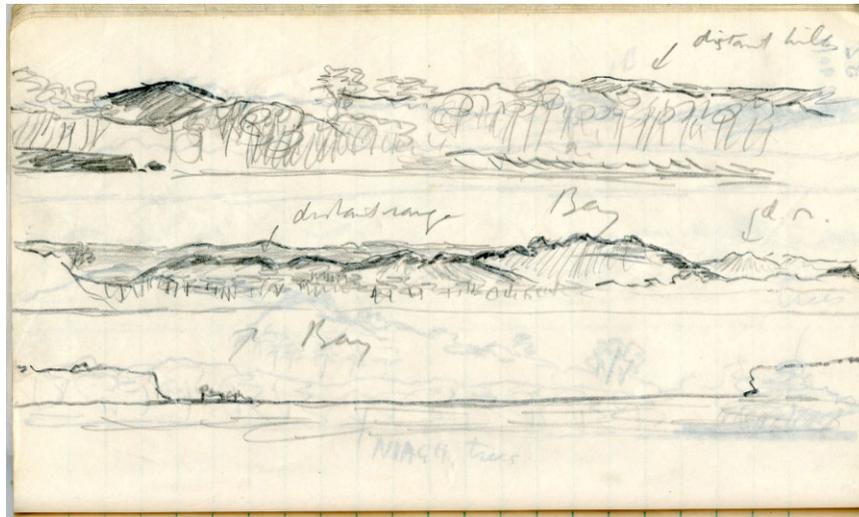


FIGURE 10. Sketches of the Malakulan coastline, “[upper level]: distant hills; [middle level]: distant range; bay; d.n.; [lower level]: bay” interspersed in a notebook with notes on kinship terms, naming, and genealogies MS 90/7/H33A.

he was collecting would have necessitated an understanding of how places were marked out and recognized locally. Sketching here is a way of generating a cross-referenced understanding of place-making and a way of understanding and locating knowledge within specific places.

At the same time, these images are more than just immersive conduits transferring Deacon’s experience onto paper or reflecting his growing understanding of local technologies of place-making. Just as Deacon was thinking through the theories of physical anthropology he had become familiar with in Cambridge, he must have also been influenced by the pictorial conventions of landscape within the genre of illustration that date back to the work of the artists who accompanied Captain Cook on his Pacific voyages and that also establish a certain kind of cartographic perspective within the so-called “Age of the World Picture” (Heidegger 1977). In another sketchpad are a number of drawings also made from the vantage point of the water as he tracks the coastline of Malakula and which are annotated accordingly. In his famous analysis of the artistic traditions and legacies of Cook’s voyages, Bernard Smith (1950, 1985) unpacks the picaresque conventions that lay underneath the “documentation” of Pacific landscapes by artists such as Sydney Parkinson and William Hodges. While Parkinson’s images reflect the cartographic and documentary imperative of Captain Cook’s voyages of discovery, Smith notes that Hodges in particular was adept at combining the docu-

mentary with the picturesque “without sacrificing the requirements of either” (1950:73) (Figure 11).

The “faithful pictorial record” was thus suffused with enlightenment idealism and romanticism about the tropical climes of the Pacific and its peoples. Sketches and drawings were just as mediated by the “cultural eye” of the artist as finished paintings and engravings made later on, back in the British Isles (see Geertz 1976). Smith’s work was important in unpacking the “visual culture” of the early Pacific voyaging and understanding the ways in which discursive, political, and cultural narratives were embodied within the artistic production of the nascent genre of “documentary.” His work anticipates a second wave of analysis that seeks to embed these voyages within Pacific perspectives (Denning 1980; Salmond 2003; Thomas 1997). I think it is fairly clear that just as Deacon was thinking through the theories of physical anthropology he had become familiar with in Cambridge, he was also influenced by an internalized understanding that sketching or drawing in the field was itself a visual convention that had become a part of anthropology as much as it was a part of the fieldworker’s personal experience. It is striking, considering how we usually think about sketching (as a spontaneous, immediate version of the direct experience of the artist in his or her environment), how generic and conventional Deacon’s drawings in fact are: Despite the fact that they were so embedded in the immediacy of a fieldwork experience so remote from the author’s own place and history, they are *also* genre works, the set

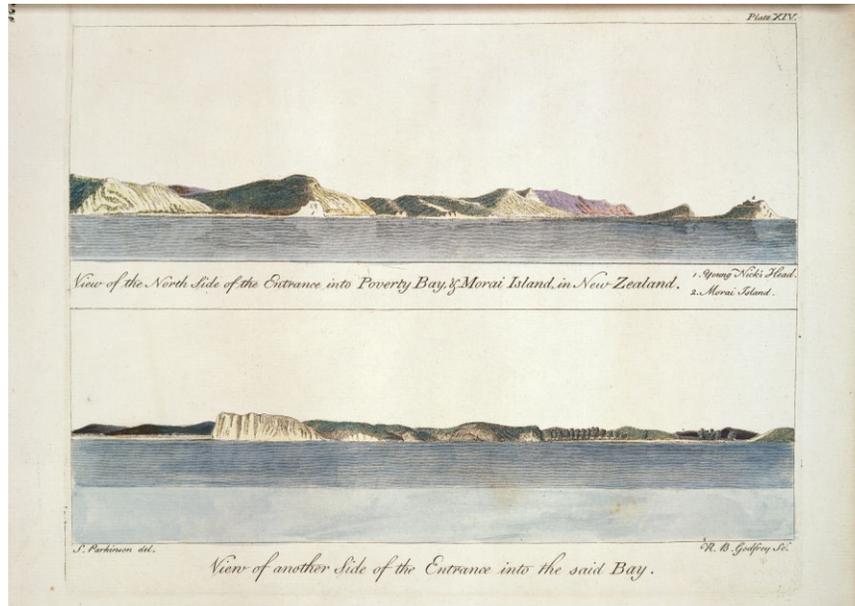


FIGURE 11. A view of the north side of the entrance into Poverty Bay and Morai Island in New Zealand. 1. Young Nick's Head. 2. Morai Island. View of another side of the entrance into the said bay. Plate XIV. [London, 1784]. Parkinson, Sydney, 1745–1771: A journal of a voyage to the South Seas, in his Majesty's ship, "The Endeavour." Faithfully transcribed from the papers of the late Sydney Parkinson. London; printed for Charles Dilly, in the Poultry, and James Phillips, in the George-Yard, 1784. Ref: PUBL-0037-14. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. <http://natlib.govt.nz/records/22725530>. Reproduced with permission.

pieces of a diligent anthropologist recording in an appropriately "anthropological" manner.

### Sand Drawing Sketches

There is, however, one exception within the corpus of Deacon's visual practice, and this group of sketches and drawings brings together all of the other genres described here (Figure 12). One of Deacon's most important contributions to anthropology was his extensive documentation of the sand drawings of the islands of North Central New Hebrides (now Vanuatu), most especially from the islands of Malakula, Ambrym, and Ambae (see Huffman 1996). Sand drawings are perhaps the ultimate form of sketching—complex designs are marked out momentarily in sand or dirt, disappearing almost as soon as they are finished. Like field sketches, they instantiate the process of knowing-through-drawing, rather than simply producing a fixed object of contemplation. Deacon was clearly entranced with these geometric forms that he viewed as visual exemplars of the cultural diffusion across the South West Pacific he had been trained to document. From

his letters, he made it clear that he considered this documentation to be his most "original" contribution. He recorded 118 different designs, noting the mythic significance of the drawings, and the role they play in allowing access to the world of the dead and of the ancestral spirits. Many drawings are connected to the imagery of secret societies, while others are representations of birds, animals, fishes, and plants. The embodied knowledge or visual thinking needed to complete these transient drawings requires a sophisticated memory work that begins in childhood with the easiest designs and progresses into the more esoteric drawings that can only be acquired by men through a process of ritual initiation. Deacon's own process of visual inscription literally traced a life history of sand drawing, from its most ephemeral moments, through the scientific lens of documentary standardization, to create enduring templates for future images. This shift, from indeterminacy to the predetermined, mirrored Deacon's own visual pathway through anthropology. Just as sand drawing was a form of knowing on Malakula, it also became the model for a new kind of anthropological inscription that was located on the ground, in the field (Figure 13).

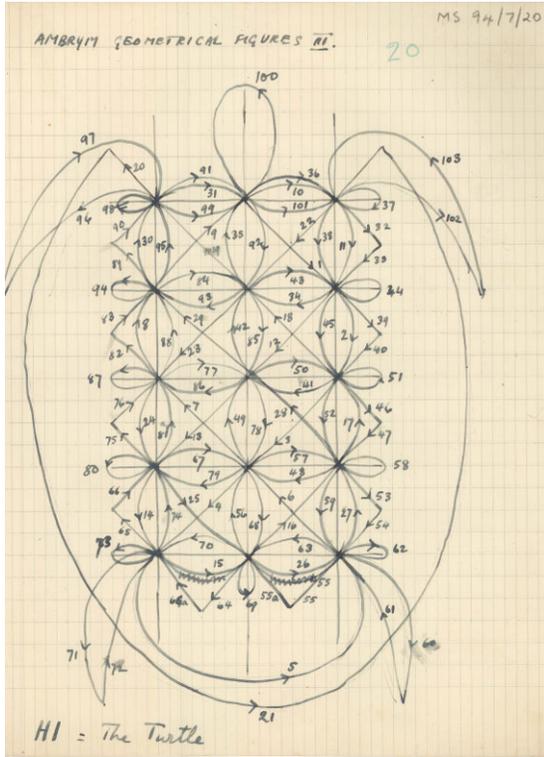


FIGURE 12. Schematized sand drawing showing Ambrym geometrical figure named "The Turtle" MS 94/7/20.

Deacon noted that in the process of creating a sand drawing, "the finger never truly traverses the same route twice" (1934:133). His own documentation initiated an exploratory process of schematization and standardiza-

tion of these designs that unlike any of his other sketches took seriously an alternative visual tradition and rendered it legible (in turn developing a systematic formalism that would not have been necessary to transmit knowledge of how to do these drawings in North Central Vanuatu). For ni-Vanuatu, sand drawings were learned via intergenerational transfers of knowledge, through embodied observation and practice. Deacon's drawings created a visual collection that in the present day is used as a how-to manual, even within Vanuatu (Figure 14).

Deacon's schematization of sand drawings may be seen, continuing his role as an exemplary student, to be a visual correlate of a broad interest in cultural patterning that had developed at Cambridge, particularly under the influence of Rivers (1914). In this context, sand drawing was more than just a charming visual tradition, and it was more than an indigenous visual culture; in the context of anthropological interest it was, and is, a visual aesthetic of patterning that could be magnified, like a fractal, into a broader picture of interconnection. Sand drawing embodies the very definition of diffusion itself as it was imagined in Cambridge in the 1920s: its transient nature necessitating the transferal of cultural knowledge between minds, mediated only by the temporary manifestation of images. I have argued elsewhere (Geismar 2013: chapter 1) that sand drawing may also be seen as an indigenous theorization of connectivity and cultural entanglement, and it was certainly the recognition of the systematic yet transient nature of this cultural practice that inspired Deacon, and others, to link these images to other models of cultural transmission, such as kinship (see Rio 2005; Taylor 2005).

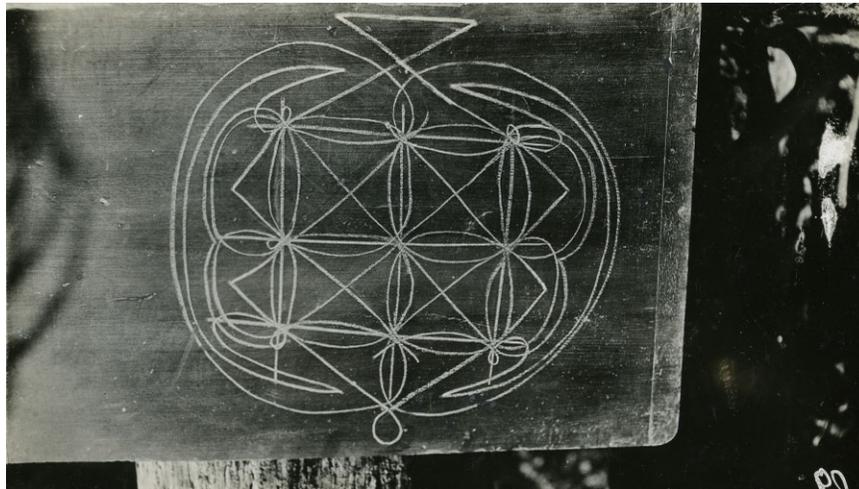


FIGURE 13. A geometric design (drawing of a fish "nimbumbuk") on a blackboard at Seniang, photographed by Deacon RAI 3864.



FIGURE 14. John Teungkon drawing a sand drawing, Craig Cove, Ambrym, 1999. Photograph by Stephen Zagala. Reproduced with permission.

Deacon photographed, sketched, and carefully drew the drawings, and he asked local people to draw them in chalk on blackboards that he then photographed (see Geismar 2006:537–548). The migration of sand drawing across these different media exemplifies how these images make meaning through movement: the drawings visually instantiate key cultural narratives, some of them puzzles that must be solved using the sand drawing (as in the case of the drawing of which half a drawing is presented by the spirits to the deceased after death and which must be completed in order to enter the afterlife within the fiery volcano on Ambrym). At the same time, the fragility of sand drawings, the ways in which they needed to be made and remade, also spoke to both the entangled imperative to both document and salvage. Sand drawing itself, as an indigenous form of hesitant but meaningful inscription, was therefore extremely significant to Deacon, not only as an illustration of culture of Malakula, but as a mode of recording and representing.

## Conclusion

Anthropologists are increasingly interested in drawing as part of the material and representational complex that underpins the ethnographic encounter, yet there are few accounts that subject these drawings to visual analysis, or locate them within the history of the discipline as an emergent genre of visual anthropology. As a very particular kind of drawing, field sketches are generally understood within a realist register as mediators between the “real” world and the curious subjec-

tivity of the anthropologist. Taussig describes sketching as “modernist literature that crosses over into the science of social investigation and serves as a means of witness” (2011:1). Here sketching as a process of witnessing seems self-evident: we assume it to be an immediate, informal mechanism, creating relatively unmediated connections between the artist, his or her place, and paper (sketching as response). In fact, following these theoretical frames, it would seem that sketching has an even greater indexicality than photography. Field sketches can only emerge directly from the experience of being there, and unlike photography there is no intervening technical apparatus. But in fact, as the examples discussed here demonstrate, sketching is a visual culture like any other, packed with convention, style, and embodying a multiplicity of cultural perspectives.

Taken together, what then can we make of the very different kinds of images that Deacon produced during his short year of fieldwork? Each of these different kinds of drawing demonstrates an enthusiastic and serious preoccupation with trying to link the experience of being in Malakula with conversations in Cambridge in the early 1920s. Due to his early death, Deacon’s published corpus of writing reflects the process and partiality of his fieldwork experience. Few other anthropologists at this time have had their personal correspondence, and their notebooks, incorporated into the final form of their published monographs—primarily because they were generally around, as writers, to translate their research into authoritative texts. The power of Malinowski’s late published diaries lies in their *disconnection* from his other scholarly writings, yet Deacon’s

sketches cannot be read simply as the personal externalizations of a very subjective field experience. Rather they are also mediations and reflections of prevailing anthropological ideas, and as the case of the sand drawing sketches shows they are syncretic of both European and Malakulan visual traditions.

We need to locate field sketches within the same zone of critical inquiry that pays attention to the specific materiality and historicity of other kinds of visual practice, such as film and photography, within anthropology. Anthropologists' sketches are generally handled as the most unmediated, and immediate, of fieldwork documents. In fact, they are often remarkably conventional. The lack of training and methods in anthropological drawing compared with those that have emerged for film and photography (and not including the training of archaeologists or ethnobotanists) in fact produces a visual orthodoxy that may refer to canonical visual traditions, earlier art lessons at school, the reading of other books, the practice of photography, and so on. By unpacking some of the visual conventions and forms within Deacon's sketchpads, I have emphasized a more general need to expand our approaches to drawing in fieldwork and become more critically engaged with the actual nature (rather than the simple existence) of drawing as a tool during fieldwork. Fieldwork drawings allow us to understand the emergent quality of anthropological knowledge, and the ways in which fieldwork methodologies not only mediate between the subjectivity of the researcher and the lived experience of those around them, but also bring the academy into the fieldwork encounter in ways both conventional and exploratory.

## Acknowledgments

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The island was known as "Malekula" during the time of Deacon's fieldwork, and most contemporary texts refer to it as such. When Vanuatu achieved independence from British and French governance in 1980, the name "Malakula" was established as based more accurately on indigenous pronunciation. In this article, I use what is today considered the correct orthography unless quoting directly from historical sources.

- <sup>2</sup> This biographical account has been edited and expanded from a biography of Deacon I wrote for the database of the Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology in 2003 as part of a photographic research project funded by the Getty Foundation under the direction of senior curator Anita Herle.
- <sup>3</sup> <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/flagship-project-activities/memory-of-the-world/register/full-list-of-registered-heritage/registered-heritage-page-1/arthur-bernard-deacon-1903-27-collection-ms-90-98/>.
- <sup>4</sup> Deacon writing to Gardiner, on board the SS *Ormonde* sailing to Malakula, August 25, 1925 (Gardiner 1984:15).
- <sup>5</sup> Quoted in Haddon's preface (1934:xxi).
- <sup>6</sup> Haddon threw Wedgwood under the bus, writing apologetically to Layard: "I had no idea that Camilla had played such pranks with your printed statements. I told her to quote Deacon as much as possible and now find she has paraphrased most of it, moreover, she has done the same to you. Evidently she has not even the rudiments of editorial honesty." Letter from Haddon to Layard, March 26, 1934, Haddon Collection, Deacon papers, 160012, Cambridge University Library Manuscripts Collection.
- <sup>7</sup> Letter to Haddon, January 25, 1927, Ambrym, Haddon Collection, Deacon Papers, envelope 16001, Cambridge University Library Manuscripts Collection.
- <sup>8</sup> I was not surprised to picture Deacon sketching from inside a canoe. Indeed, for the frontispiece of my coauthored book on John Layard, we used an image he had taken with his bulky box camera from inside a small dugout canoe (Geismar and Herle 2010:3). On Malakula and the small islands that surround it, canoes are engines of movement across and around space and place; they are stable bridges between water and land.

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