

## “Men Like Us”

### *The Invention of Ethnopornography*

The subject of this chapter is the invention of the term “ethnopornography.” The term, in the form “Ethno-pornography,” was first used by Walter Roth as the title of the final chapter and of a plate of illustrations in his work *Ethnological Studies among the North-West-Central Queensland Aborigines* (1897).<sup>1</sup> Roth was a doctor in the Boulia area in colonial Australia when he collected the materials for the book, and was appointed as the Northern Protector of Aborigines in the state of Queensland in 1898, and as the Chief Protector in 1904.<sup>2</sup> Roth provided no explanation for his choice of the term in his work, and the topics covered in the final chapter of *Ethnological Studies* do not all fall within conventional understandings, then or now, of “pornography.” The topics covered in this chapter include initiation rites of men and women, marriage, betrothal, love charms, venery, pregnancy and labor, abortion, babyhood, menstruation, micturition and defecation, and, finally, foul language. Roth begins the chapter with a consideration of social rank, and ends the chapter (and the book) with the sentence, “I have no evidence as to any practice of masturbation or sodomy anywhere among the North-West-Central Queensland aboriginals.”<sup>3</sup>

However, Roth noted that he considered the final chapter to be “far from suitable for the general lay reader,” and added an apology for its inclusion in the book’s preface: “The subject matter, however, being essential to a scientific account of these aboriginals, I have decided upon its publication, at the same time placing it at the very last, in the hope that those who do not wish to peruse its pages need not unwittingly find themselves doing so.”<sup>4</sup> Moreover, an “Author’s Note” opens the final chapter: “The following chapter is not suitable for perusal by the general lay reader.”<sup>5</sup> Roth’s sense of the chapter’s “unsuitability” in this way was echoed by his contemporaries. The Queensland Government Printer, for example, sent a memo to the Under Secretary of the Home Department, Sir Horace Tozer, asking, “You are doubtless aware that the last chapter—ch: xiii and the last plate (pl. xxlv)[—]deal with indelicate subjects, is it likely they may be in violation of the Indecent Advertisements Acts, and, if they are, is the author’s note, at the head of the chapter, a sufficient protection?”<sup>6</sup> Roth later commented on the Government Printer’s caution to his fellow anthropologist Baldwin Spencer,

The government originally intended omitting the last chapter with accompanying plate, and publishing it separately for special distribution to certain people only; mainly for the purpose of drawing public attention to the present condition of certain of the aborigines in view of the legislation proposed [the *Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act 1897*<sup>7</sup>] to be enforced. The ordinary reading public had in a sense to be protected by being told that such and such a chapter was obscene, and that they could please themselves if they chose to read it. And after all, scientific and interesting as these particulars are to men like us, they are certainly not so to the general lay reader.<sup>8</sup>

Roth’s choice of the term “ethno-pornography,” in other words, was to act both as a warning to “the ordinary reading public” or “the general lay reader,” and as a password to “men like us,” who would understand the work in terms of scientific inquiry and practices.

In order to understand fully the invention of the term “ethnopornography,” I think it is crucial to explore its provenance in Roth’s conception of what scientific inquiry among the “savages” involves. Throughout this chapter, I use the term “savages” (and “natives”) as used by Roth and others, in part because to shy away from using it here would be misleading as to how such terms were then considered entirely consonant with

a scientific perspective in anthropological work. My explorations around ethnopornography concern what is the character of Roth's conception of (anthropological) science, and my argument is that his conception is one that incorporates a voyeuristic interest in "exotic" sexual practices and bodies. The scientific gaze in this context is a form of knowing that shadows the shattering sexual violence of colonialism. And the report of what that gaze saw, and the circulation of its representation among "men like us," and more widely, is complicit in the impact of colonialism. A scientific ethnopornography, then, is not merely a procedure for the collection of certain materials about the "natives"; it is also a practice of representation through which to make a spectacle of them. The circulated report of what the anthropological gaze saw is an exertion of mastery through which the "native" is subordinated, and it is on and through such reports that the character and solidarity of "men like us" is constituted.

This chapter first places Roth within the context of colonialist practices of display and spectacle involving Australian "natives." I argue that anthropological work in Roth's time was connected both empirically and conceptually with more popular "entertainment" such as traveling shows and circuses. This connection was exploited for mutual advantage by scientific men and showmen such as P. T. Barnum. In this complex of practices, the nakedness of "savages" was essential as a sign of authenticity, such that sexual violation of Aborigines, for example, was a necessary aspect of scientific study. Secondly, I explore more informal or impromptu sexual "performances," stage-managed by anthropologists themselves, in order to collect materials in and for the scientific study of "wild" Australians. These "performances" were often requested to provide evidence around the practice of subincision, and of its significance, a topic of much anthropological fascination in Walter Roth's time. I conclude by reflecting on my own position in regard to the troubling questions that this research raises for ethnography now.

### The "Greatest Show on Earth": Anthropology as Popular Pedagogy

In *Tristes Tropiques*, an account of his fieldwork, Claude Lévi-Strauss writes about European travelers who come face to face with what they believe to be wild or untouched territory. Lévi-Strauss cautions us that the

seemingly wildest or most virgin nature is rather a “battlefield” on which are inscribed the efforts and achievements of men, even though vegetation may have regrown in the battle’s aftermath, “re-emerging in a confusion which is all the more deceptive since it preserves, beneath a falsely innocent exterior, memories and patterns of past conflicts.”<sup>9</sup> This section is concerned not with vegetation but with what was plotted on the battlefield of colonial Australia in the late nineteenth century, that is, with how “wild Australia” was created and authenticated.

The armed battles and conflicts on colonial Australian territory have been well analyzed by historians in the last thirty years or so, being the subject of considerable controversy. Striking examples of the clearance of territory through killing and massacre in Roth’s northwestern Queensland are the efforts of Frederic Urquhart.<sup>10</sup> In March 1884, Urquhart left the Gregory River in Queensland, where he had been in charge of the Native Police, in order to restore law and order in Cloncurry, after white settlers had complained that Aborigines in the area placed (white) men and women in fear of their lives.<sup>11</sup> After James White Powell, a partner of the settler Alexander Kennedy, was attacked in the Calton Hills, Urquhart accompanied Kennedy on a mission of revenge. Urquhart celebrated his massacre of the Kalkadoon (Kalkatungu) by writing a poem titled “Powell’s Revenge,” the finale to which announced that the field was now clear.<sup>12</sup> Hudson Fysh pictured Urquhart on patrol in the aftermath of the massacre, seated at a campfire, “with nothing but naked savages and the wild and lonely bush around, reading the latest poetical work of a recent copy of the Spectator. This was the proof of the man, and it is so of every man; Urquhart chose to conquer environment and look ahead to progressive steps to come, not to sink to the level of inferior surroundings as so very many others did in the solitude of early pioneering life.”<sup>13</sup>

This plaintive “solitude” of the Australian landscape was created by the very murderous clearances Urquhart initiated, creating a “wild and lonely bush around” that was haunted only by spectral figures of “naked savages.” The landscape was enduringly marked as wild by the circulation of such representations through the publication of poetry, prose, and sketches. Those “savages” who survived the clearances could find a place in colonial representations as memories of what once was, and as mementos of conquest.

The life and efforts of Archibald Meston are illustrative of such a representational dynamic. A contemporary of Roth, like Urquhart, Meston was at various times a property manager, member of Parliament,

newspaper editor, and the head of a government expedition to far north Queensland.<sup>14</sup> He was appointed the Southern Protector of Aborigines in 1898 (when Roth was the Northern Protector), and became Chief Protector on Roth's resignation from the position. A particular interest of Meston was the arrangement of "displays" of indigenous life, in the form of tableaux vivants of Aborigines titled "Wild Queensland" or "Wild Australia." These exhibitions were accompanied by a lecture and commentary from Meston.<sup>15</sup>

A typical event at the Brisbane Theatre Royal in 1892, for example, involved Meston lecturing on the tribes of Australia, "a subject he has made peculiarly his own," as a local newspaper reported.<sup>16</sup> The report of the event noted that for several evenings the theater "was literally packed with audiences who not only listened with pleasure to the remarks of the lecturer but also gained more knowledge of the customs of the native races than they could have done through reading the works of the many writers who have essayed the task of describing the ways and customs of a fast disappearing people."<sup>17</sup> An expanded version of Meston's lecture at the Brisbane Opera House around the same time was illustrated by the curtain rising on a performance of "a typical wild Australian scene, of which the kangaroo, the emu, gunyahs, and aboriginals formed a part," played out against a panorama of north Queensland mountain ranges (where Meston had done his "fieldwork"). All was accomplished with an apparently meticulous fidelity to savage life, in line with Meston's insistence that he had no use for domesticated or "tame" Aborigines. The newspaper report on the event noted,

Several of the men [onstage] have lately been brought into contact with civilisation for the first time, and they enter into the corroborees, combats, &c., with a zest which could not have been displayed had the troupe been composed of "tame" blacks such as those with whom the dwellers of Brisbane and the cities and townships of the colony are familiar. The highest point of realism is attained; and the audience witness on the stage scenes which have in the past only been looked on by explorers who have penetrated far into the interior in these later days, or by old settlers who in the early portion of the colony's history had the unpleasant privilege to look upon a tribal fight, a war corroboree, or it may be some mysterious rite practised by the tribes.<sup>18</sup>

The troupe of theatrical warriors, in war paint, performed a war dance "accompanied with their weird and savage cries," after which they squatted

in front of the gunyah and rubbed sticks together to make fire. This “entertainment” was followed by a Werrmugga (cockatoo) corroboree, performed by warriors with weapons, then by another “realistic combat with shields and nullas.” The item earned calls for an encore from the audience, but the “artistes” appeared not to know the convention of encores. Meston then introduced to the audience three of the troupe: the chief of the Prince of Wales Island tribe, his wife, and a little boy, who performed a Rengwinna (iguana) corroboree and woomera spear throwing.<sup>19</sup> The second part of the program went along roughly similar lines, wrapped up by a series of tableaux vivants “illustrative of the massacre of a bushman [settler], the tracking of the [Aboriginal] murderer, and the doom which overtakes him and the members of his tribe, as also civilisation’s results in the case of aborigines.”<sup>20</sup>

The reenactment on stage of their own disappearance by its victims produced the look of “authenticity” to the audience, allowing the spectators to consume in safety that “unpleasant privilege” of looking upon wildness, and allowing them the pleasure of seeing the conquest of wildness by men like themselves. What enabled this privilege to be attained in the theater was the guidance of Meston as impresario, who produced and “voiced” the action on stage, and could subdue the “weird and savage cries” of the wild warriors in his interpretative commentary. Meston made a spectacle of the Aborigines at the same time as putting his “knowledge” of Aborigines and of Aboriginal life on display. Indeed, it is tempting to see the lecture not so much as interpretative of the tableaux but rather as itself the “main game,” for which the “artistes” were so many illustrations.

Meston’s lecture in turn acted as the guarantor of the authenticity of the warriors he had mustered. Meston was a keen detective of authenticity, and seems to have been very concerned to educate his audiences as to the difference between his “real” Aborigines and the rest. In his efforts, he was assisted by Mr. B. Purcell, whom Meston persuaded to join him in expanding the “Wild Australia” entertainment, with a view to taking the troupe on a long world tour to England, the United States, and other colonies. For this project, Purcell was allocated the task of amassing “specimens of a doomed race”: “Mr. Purcell was dispatched to the uttermost parts of the colony to get together representatives of different tribes, and he has been very fortunate in collecting some of the finest specimens of a doomed race that could be secured for the purposes of illustrating an ethnological lecture.” Meston explained to his theater audiences that some Aborigines had visited England

in the past, but they had been semi-civilized blacks from urban areas, and therefore in his view had conveyed an erroneous impression of Aborigines and their life to English audiences. In contrast, Meston explained that the thirty-two “specimens” that “he had succeeded in collecting were such as were seen by the pioneers of Australia a hundred years ago.”<sup>21</sup>

Meston’s exhibitions of Aboriginal life that toured Australian towns echoed in miniature the great traveling spectaculars of P. T. Barnum and other showmen in the United States and Europe. In August 1882, for example, Barnum had written to hundreds of American consulates and agencies around the world to ask for their help in collecting human “specimens.” Barnum noted that he had long harbored the idea of “forming a collection, in pairs or otherwise[,] of all the uncivilized races in existence [*sic*],” his aim being “to exhibit to the American public, not only *human beings of different races*, but also where practicable, those who possess extraordinary peculiarities such as giants, dwarfs, singular disfigurements of the person, dexterity in the use of weapons, dancing, singing, juggling, unusual feats of strength or agility etc.”<sup>22</sup>

One of those who answered Barnum’s call to contribute exhibits in an “Ethnological Congress of Savage Tribes” was Robert A. Cunningham, who periodically visited Australia as manager or agent for ventriloquists and circus companies. Cunningham “captured” a collection of “specimens” from north Queensland in 1883, and exhibited them in the role of boomerang-throwing cannibals in Barnum’s “Greatest Show on Earth.”<sup>23</sup> When the circus season of 1883 wound up, Cunningham’s collection toured dime museums with other “specimens” from Barnum’s “Ethnological Congress,” before he took them as an ethnological exhibition for a grand tour of Europe.

The story of Cunningham’s “specimens” is told in Roslyn Poignant’s wrenching *Professional Savages: Captive Lives and Western Spectacle*. One of the most striking things in Poignant’s account is how closely (professional) anthropologists worked with showmen like Barnum, in something like an entertainment-ethnological complex. A crucial interest of the showmen in such a relationship lay in having their exhibits scientifically “authenticated.” In most of the European cities visited by Cunningham, for instance, the members of the troupe were taken to be examined by anthropologists, with a view to Cunningham’s obtaining a testimonial or certificate of authenticity for them. For example, members of Cunningham’s troupe were examined in Paris in November 1885 by the anthropologist Paul Topinard,

who provided Cunningham with a testimonial that the Aborigines in the troupe were authentic, while also noting that they were dying fast so that it was prudent to take the opportunity to see them straightaway.<sup>24</sup>

The gaining of such a scientific imprimatur of authentic wildness usually involved requiring the human “specimens” to take off their clothes in front of the anthropologist, who by the late nineteenth century was almost always accompanied by a photographer. In part, of course, the reason for this requirement is simple: wearing fancy European clothes would not support a claim of being “wild” or “untamed.” The report to the Société d’anthropologie de Bruxelles of the Belgian anthropologists Emile Houzé and Victor Jacques on their “minute study” of Cunningham’s boomerang throwers noted the resistance of the troupe to their request: “[W]e had asked them to remove as much as possible of their rags; but our savages, who had already admired themselves in their dress, in the photographs executed in London, didn’t intend at all to allow themselves be photographed again without posing with all their finery.”<sup>25</sup> Again, when Houzé and Jacques attempted to use their instruments and measuring devices on the “savage” bodies, the Aborigines only reluctantly allowed themselves to be touched, and consented to be photographed on condition that only their upper garments were removed.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, the anthropologists claimed that “one of them” had, undetected, briefly observed the external genitals of one woman.<sup>27</sup> Such examinations accrued to the benefit of the anthropologists as much as to the showmen. It should go without saying that the Aborigines subjected to these practices received no benefit from them, and the accounts of the examinations frequently register their resistance to such practices, as in this account by Houzé and Jacques. They were rarely “untouched.”

A similar encounter of Cunningham’s troupe came during their exhibition at Castan’s Panoptikum in Berlin in 1884, when they were examined by Professor Rudolf Virchow, a physician by training, who, with Adolf Bastian, had in 1869 founded the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Anthropologie, Ethnologie und Urgeschichte (German Society for Anthropology, Ethnology, and Prehistory).<sup>28</sup> When Virchow asked the women to undress, they refused to do so, although they did take off their clothes for the photographer.<sup>29</sup> That some Europeans seem also to have voiced complaints against exotic exhibitions as prurient curiosity is suggested by Virchow’s defense of the practice of exhibiting exotic specimens in presenting his “results.” He noted, “The persistence of members of the public who make daily pil-

grimage to see the Australians is a visible sign of appreciation. It proves that those who condemn exhibitions are not right when they state that these only serve curiosity. It surely will further the understanding of nature and history of the people and will become the duty of science to have more understanding and for deeper questions to be asked concerning the Australian Aborigines in order to inform a wider public.”<sup>30</sup> That is, Virchow’s response here was that the exhibition of human specimens was not simply vulgar entertainment but a popular pedagogy—a pedagogy that served to link scientific inquiry with the pleasure of the public in a relationship of mutual benefit.

From the side of the showmen also, Barnum’s advertising for the “Ethnological Congress” stressed the seriousness of his own aspirations to scientific significance: “The public can form no adequate idea of the enormous costs and difficulties involved; or the dangers braved, the privations endured, the obstacles overcome, the disappointments sustained, and the disheartening losses incurred, in collecting this greatest and best of *Object Teaching Schools* from the desert-environed wilds of Africa, the remote and pathless jungles of Asia, the dreadful and unexplored solitudes of Australia, the interior of Brazil and Central America, and the mysterious islands of the southern seas.”<sup>31</sup> Barnum conceived his exhibitions as not primarily a pleasure palace, in other words, but a teaching school. The pedagogy here consisted in part in stripping the natives, to make them more “real,” the semblance of which would in turn render a higher scientific or intellectual pleasure to the pupils.

The exhibitions organized by Barnum and those by Cunningham, like Meston’s “ethnological lectures,” usually included a running commentary by a “non-savage.” That commentary emphasized the authenticity of those in the exhibition, often with aspersions on the dubious wildness of competing groups of “savages.” Stephen Orgel has emphasized in his discussion of the Elizabethan masque that the identity of characters on stage is rarely self-evident, and that, for instance, allegories must step forward in introducing themselves as, for example, “I am a Spring . . .”<sup>32</sup> But unlike Spring, the Aborigines of the traveling exhibitions could not announce themselves in words understood by their audience, could not speak of their lives, without compromising their wildness. Their status as “wild” permitted them to make “weird and savage cries.” Their nakedness was a fundamental token of wildness, permitting both to the anthropologist and to the general lay “reader” a voyeuristic pleasure in the bodies of exotic others, a pleasure

validated by the stamp of scientific curiosity. Aborigines were known as (authentic) Aborigines in and by their nakedness. Their nakedness spoke for them. At the same time as abusing their bodies, the brutality of colonial sexual violation maimed their voices, such that the story they told in their spectacle was in a very radical sense not “their own.”

### Walter Roth and Anthropological *Brüderschaft*

I have sketched here only an outline of the complex of scientific and popular practices of violation that produced at once the pleasure of knowledge and the pleasure of spectacle. The complex of practices included more informal performances than those of Barnum and Meston, however. In Queensland, and in other parts of Australia, white men had been staging impromptu educational soirées of their own throughout the nineteenth century. One of these stagings led to the resignation of Walter Roth as Protector of Aborigines in 1905.<sup>33</sup> In 1900 or 1901, Roth arranged for an Indigenous couple to have sex with each other, on the understanding that he would photograph their act (the photographs were not published). When questions about these photographs were first raised in the Queensland parliament in 1904, Roth responded in his defense that the photographs were identical to figure 433, a sketch in *Ethnological Studies among the North-West-Central Queensland Aborigines*.<sup>34</sup> Similar sketches, and in some cases photographs, can be found throughout ethnological and anthropological literature of the time.

Roth understood himself to be involved in scientific activity in taking the photographs at issue. He claimed to have commissioned the photographs to support his conjecture that the genital cutting (subincision or introcision) of Aboriginal men was intended as mimicry of the vulva, rather than for prophylactic purposes, as many of his contemporaries had hypothesized. In reply to a request for an explanation from his friend the Bishop of Carpentaria, Roth wrote, “The description and illustration of the posture assumed in the sexual act was of the highest anthropological interest in that it in large measure defended my thesis that the mutilation known as Sturt’s terrible rite, or sub-incision (by Professor Stirling) or intro-cision (by myself) did *not* act as had hitherto been supposed as a preventive to procreation.”<sup>35</sup> The purpose of Roth’s photographs was to provide evidence that insemination by an introcized man was possible. Roth concluded to White, “The photograph was taken for purely scientific purposes only and

is one of a series (defecation, micturition, tree climbing, sitting, standing) of natural postures which every anthropologist makes inquiry about, with a view to ascertaining the connections (if any) between the highest apes and the lowest types of man.”<sup>36</sup>

Roth noted that when *Ethnological Studies* was published, he had received written and verbal communications doubting the physical possibility of such a “posture” of copulation as he insisted was used by Aborigines. In the meantime, Roth said, he had found the same posture everywhere: “I thereupon informed my scientific friends of the very interesting corollary that the sexual mutilation now met with [in certain parts of Australia] was probably traditionally practised throughout the entire Continent.”<sup>37</sup> That is, for Roth, the incidence of the “posture” in certain areas was a sign that the subincision of men had originally been practiced there despite its contemporary absence. According to Roth, an opportunity for scientific vindication of his hypothesis came in 1900 or 1901, when an aged married couple on a rural station “agreed to posture for me,” in exchange for money, tobacco and flour. Roth concluded of his conduct in this matter, “I have been guilty of no conduct unworthy of a gentleman and a man of honour.”

The scandal around Roth’s photographs of “the peculiar method of copulation” adopted by Aborigines was related to the very core of his scientific speculations as an anthropologist, designed to uphold his conjectures about intocision in the Bouliá area—and in turn, about ritual and customs across the Australian continent. However, I am skeptical that a straightforward scientific curiosity about all facets of Aboriginal life can explain the significance of Roth’s conduct. Roth’s anthropological curiosity can be better analyzed if placed in the context of other informal practices of constructing Aboriginal subjects as sexual spectacle (and as related to the formal practices sketched above in this chapter).

The ubiquity of such practices of spectacle was remarked upon in the 1920s by the anthropologist Herbert Basedow,<sup>38</sup> who was, like Roth, one of the more sympathetic observers of Aboriginal life and mourners of its destruction. In *Knights of the Boomerang*, Basedow lamented that “no other will have a chance of seeing again what I have here described,” given the “harvest of sorrow, disease and death” that brought the decay and demoralisation of Aboriginal life, mores and religion.<sup>39</sup> For Basedow, one disturbing part of this decay was the practice of showing Aborigines as spectacle, a practice in which anthropologists themselves were complicit: “It is an open secret that natives living near certain railways are bribed, and even forced, to show themselves at stations for the fulfilment of the promise set forth in

tour-programmes that tourists will see wild blacks along the route. Modern scientific investigators, too, as method of study, send agents in advance to 'round up' as many of the nomadic subjects as possible at a convenient depôt for the purpose of facilitating the work of a dozen or more experts who overhaul them *en masse*.<sup>40</sup> Basedow exempted himself from such criticisms: he was a scientific investigator, as indicated, for example, by his declaration of authorship in his work: "by Herbert Basedow M.A., M.D., Ph.D., B.Sc." He held the office of Chief Medical Officer and Protector of Aborigines in the Northern Territory, and later Special Aborigines Commissioner, but he saw his role differently, as an "avowed chief, magician and tribal father."<sup>41</sup>

In spite of his scruples about the conduct of other anthropologists, Basedow was, like Roth, fascinated by the sexual and erotic life of Aborigines, in particular by circumcision and initiation ceremonies. In "Subincision and Kindred Rites of the Australian Aboriginal" (1927),<sup>42</sup> Basedow discussed the theory that subincision was adopted as a Malthusian measure, noting, like Roth, that its ineffectiveness could be demonstrated by observation of Aboriginal sexual practices: "Admitting this is an established fact, which can be verified any day among the tribes still living, it becomes a matter of scientific importance to know whether the aboriginal adopts a regular and peculiar method of conception." It was in the context of this question that Basedow noted the more informal practices of sexual voyeurism and exploitation among "men of low moral character" in colonial Australia:

Observations upon this subject are scarce, and some of the earlier accounts are misleading. I do not mean to dispute the accuracy of early investigation, but it is a well-known fact that men of low moral character used to make a habit of giving quantities of rum, gin, and other spirituous liquors to the natives who would then, in a semi-intoxicated condition, be persuaded or forced to perform in a way which may have satisfied the lustful humour of the white villain, but was opposed entirely to the sense of decency and modesty of a primitive people. But an inspiration emanating from the mind of a drunken white man, under conditions such as these[,] could never be admitted scientifically as a custom of the colored man, even though the latter had to carry it into effect practically.<sup>43</sup>

I have puzzled over whether Basedow means here that white men were persuading or forcing Aboriginal women to have sex with them in certain positions. But I think the phrase "the colored man, even though the latter

had to carry it into effect practically” leaves little doubt that what Basedow has in view here is not the prostitution of Aboriginal women by white men, although this was certainly also a widespread practice. Rather, he is referring to white men taking the position of voyeur of a staged spectacle of Aborigines having sexual intercourse with each other.

After reading this passage, I looked for evidence of this “well-known fact” about “men of low moral character” in memoirs of Australian bushmen and other sources. For example, the *wunderkammer* work *Woman: An Historical Gynaecological and Anthropological Compendium*, in a section titled “Position in Coitus” in the chapter “Woman in the Sexual Act,” sets out the sexual positions adopted in different parts of Australia, and continues, “[Nicholas] Miklucho-Maclay collected more exact information, for the aborigines were not shy of undertaking copulation before onlookers in broad daylight if they were promised a glass of gin. They adopt one of the squatting positions depicted by Miklucho-Maclay.”<sup>44</sup> The account then describes the position in more detail,<sup>45</sup> before noting a form of curiosity taken by white men in the Australian bush:

A. Morton, a reliable young man, further reported as eye-witness, that, one evening, finding himself near a camp of aborigines, it occurred to him to ask a native who begged him for a glass of gin, to perform the sexual act. The native went off willingly to call a woman, who appeared at once. Without any sign of embarrassment, with only the thought of earning his glass of gin quickly, the man went near the woman, whereupon the couple assumed the above-mentioned position. . . . *In consequence of what had been told him by other experienced white people*, Morton’s attention was drawn to the woman after the coitus. He noticed then that after the man had got up and reached for the glass of gin the woman also rose, stood with legs apart, and with a sinuous movement of the middle part of her body she threw, by a jerk towards the front, a bubble of whitish slimy substance (sperm?) on the ground, after which she went away. This way of getting rid of the sperm, which is indicated by a word in the native dialect, is, according to the statements of white settlers in North Australia, usually employed by native women after coitus, with the intentions of having no further consequences from being with a white man.<sup>46</sup>

The side-comment on Morton’s familiarity with accounts of “other experienced white people” points to the wider occurrence of this and similar practices.

Basedow also makes reference to the “reliable young” informant “A. Morton” in another discussion of subincision in which he sets out a similarly detailed description of an act of sexual intercourse and its aftermath, quoting (in German) the passage from *Woman: An Historical Gynaecological and Anthropological Compendium* (1935), and adding a reference to the work of Anderson Stuart, a professor of physiology at the University of Sydney.<sup>47</sup> Piecing together these various references enables an identification of the informant as Alexander Morton, who visited Port Darwin in 1878 as a curator’s assistant for the Australian Museum in Sydney, and later became, inter alia, an eminent museum director in Tasmania and general secretary of the Australasian Association of Science.<sup>48</sup> Morton’s reports of “experienced white people” and his own “eye-witness” account seem to have initially circulated in a report by Nicholas Miklucho-Maclay.<sup>49</sup>

Basedow, however, expressed doubt as to the existence of such a “knack” by Aboriginal women as was noted in these reports to be a conclusion of their sexual intercourse with white men:

I remember discussing this point some years ago with my friend the late F. J. Gillen, who declared that he had never heard of the custom, and was inclined to doubt that it existed, at any rate so far as the tribes he was familiar with were concerned. I have not recorded it from any part of Australia; and indeed, in view of what has already been said about the aboriginal’s idea of conception, one would not expect to find so cute a knack in vogue among these simple people. Experienced prostitutes in other parts of the world are said to have developed this method to some degree of perfection.<sup>50</sup>

The reference to the “cute . . . knack” of “experienced prostitutes in other parts of the world” here is telling, suggesting that the anthropologist in pursuit of sexual knowledge was more than a scientific (disinterested) observer. And indeed, Basedow himself participated in most of the practices about which he had scruples.

In the opening chapter of *Knights of the Boomerang*, titled “Tales out of School,” Basedow noted that most of the tribes with whom he had dealings, under normal and unrestrained conditions, moved about in a state of utter, and apparently unconscious, nudity: “At any time, the sexes may be seen to mix with absolute frankness and walk about *en déshabille* without attracting the slightest attention or giving the least offence to anyone among themselves. On the other hand, in accordance with a firmly established and generally accepted decorum among all classes, all persons, particularly

females, endeavour to avoid exposing themselves unduly.”<sup>51</sup> Basedow also documented the mayhem that ensued when he attempted to take explicit photographs, and recounted an incident in which “it so happened that for scientific purposes it was necessary for me to photograph a semi-civilised lubra of the Daly River district in an attitude that under other conditions would have been considered most unbecoming.” Basedow wrote that although the woman “submitted to the ordeal, she later complained to the district magistrate that Basedow ’been take ’em wrong picture longa me,” and asked for him to be officially reported.<sup>52</sup> Another incident involved an Aboriginal man, Tommy, of whom Basedow said, “He was dressed in European garments; but the pathological trouble I wished to show demanded that he should pose for my camera in the nude. He acquiesced with apparent complacency.” Tommy then took out his anger at the incident by battering his wife.<sup>53</sup>

The clearest examples of Basedow’s implication in practices such as that noted by Alexander Morton, however, is given where Basedow sets out the process by which a young Aboriginal man (“Romeo”) courted a woman: “I watched the woman from the seclusion of my camp—in the interest of science playing the objectionable rôle of Peeping Tom. She walked towards the man as he reappeared to resume his seat on the ground. With a demonstrative movement she took her place beside him. The man remained stolidly indifferent; but the woman seemed excited. Although they were some distance away, I could, with the aid of my glasses, perceive that her fingers and toes were moving spasmodically; and I believe her eyes were closed.”<sup>54</sup> Basedow’s account of the fascination of white men with the bodies and sexual conduct of Aboriginal men and women conveys his own implication in the practices by which this fascination led them to force or otherwise coerce Aborigines to perform sexual acts for science-entertainment. My argument is that ethnologists and anthropologists such as Walter Roth and others were complicit in this form of sexual violation, even though they sought to distinguish the scientific “glasses” of the work of “men like us” from the prurient voyeurism of the “ordinary reading public.”

## Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored the provenance of the term “ethnopornography” in a complex of practices of collection and representation, in which distinctions between science and entertainment, and between scientific

and ordinary people, were blurred. These practices are forms of sexual violation, and our recognition of this fact is sharpened by our knowledge of the resistance to them that was registered even in the writings that served to contain the gestures of refusal, as in the report of the encounter of Cunningham's troupe with the Belgian anthropologists Houzé and Jacques. For the white men involved, both such formal and informal encounters turned on the freedom of entitlement. The refusal of the "natives" to play the subordinate part, the part of unfreedom, in such staged spectacles, was contained as a form of resistance to the progress of scientific understanding, that is, as itself a violation of "the duty of science to have more understanding and for deeper questions to be asked." Even such resistance by the "savages" to "science," as is occasionally glimpsed in the writings of anthropologists themselves, forms part of the way in which the "wildness" of the subjects was constructed as a spectacle of entertainment and as an object teaching school by and for "men like us."

A final note. In writing this chapter, I have reflected on the question of what my own position could be in relation to the practices about which I have written. I have tried in some cases not to rehearse in my own account what the anthropologist saw and represented. For example, I have tried to avoid reciting the detail in which sexual acts are described (or depicted) by those labouring under the "duty of science." Although I can to an extent "disown" some practices as masculine and therefore not mine, I know only too well how white women were complicit in, and benefited from, practices of masculinity and of domination and violation on the colonial frontier. I know only too well how the disciplines of the humanities are built on their history, and on the "science" of our predecessors. There remains mourning, for lives violated and disappeared. It is not, however, enough.

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## Notes

- 1 W. E. Roth, *Ethnological Studies among the North-West-Central Queensland Aborigines* (Brisbane, Aus.: Edmund Gregory, 1897).
- 2 The *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (ADB) provides outlines of the life of the major figures in this chapter. For Roth, see Barrie Reynolds, "Roth, Walter Edmund (1861–1933)," ADB, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/roth-walter-edmund-8280>. See also John Whitehall, "Dr WE Roth: Flawed Force of the Frontier," *Journal of Australian Studies* 26, no. 75 (2002): 59–69. A recent collection of studies on

- Roth is Russell McDougall and Iain Davidson, eds., *The Roth Family, Anthropology, and Colonial Administration* (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press / Institute of Archaeology, University College London, 2008).
- 3 Roth, *Ethnological Studies*, 184.
  - 4 Roth, *Ethnological Studies*, v–vi.
  - 5 Roth, *Ethnological Studies*, 169.
  - 6 Memo from Government Printing Office to Undersecretary of the Home Department, October 13, 1897, and reply by Sir Horace Tozer, October 16, 1897, Queensland State Archives (QSA) A/58550.
  - 7 Available at Museum of Australian Democracy, “Anno Sexagesimo Primo: Victoriae Regiae, No. [17],” accessed April 7, 2019, [http://www.foundingdocs.gov.au/resources/transcripts/qld5\\_doc\\_1897.pdf](http://www.foundingdocs.gov.au/resources/transcripts/qld5_doc_1897.pdf). See also Regina Ganter and Ros Kidd, “The Powers of Protectors: Conflicts Surrounding Queensland’s 1897 Aboriginal Legislation,” *Australian Historical Studies* 25 (1993): 536–54; and William Thorpe, “Archibald Meston and Aboriginal Legislation in Colonial Queensland,” *Historical Studies* 21 (1984): 52–67.
  - 8 Roth to Baldwin Spencer, letter dated January 19, 1898, quoted in John Mulvaney, “From Oxford to the Bush: WE Roth, WB Spencer and Australian Anthropology,” in McDougall and Davidson, *Roth Family*, 113.
  - 9 Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, trans. John Weightman and Doreen Weightman (1955; repr., London: Penguin Books, 1976), 117.
  - 10 See W. Ross Johnston, “Urquhart, Frederic Charles (1858–1935),” *ADB*, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/urquhart-frederic-charles-8901>; Hudson Fysh, “Kennedy, Alexander (1837–1936),” *ADB*, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/kennedy-alexander-3942>; and J. Percival, “Fysh, Sir Wilmot Hudson (1895–1974),” *ADB*, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/fysh-sir-wilmot-hudson-6263>. A more comprehensive picture of Urquhart is set out in Helen Pringle, “Reading the Spectator with Frederic Urquhart,” unpublished paper.
  - 11 W. H. Fysh, *Taming the North* (1933), 2nd ed. (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1950), 142.
  - 12 Fysh, *Taming the North*, 147.
  - 13 Fysh, *Taming the North*, 150–51.
  - 14 See S. E. Stephens, “Meston, Archibald (1851–1924),” *ADB*, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/meston-archibald-4191>. Other useful studies include Faith Walker, “The Reinvention of the ‘Noble Savage’: Archibald Meston and ‘Wild Australia,’” *Bulletin (Olive Pink Society)* 9, no. 1–2 (1997): 130–38; Cheryl Taylor, “Constructing Aboriginality: Archibald Meston’s Literary Journalism, 1870–1924,” *Journal of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature* 2 (2003): 121–39; and Judith McKay and Paul Memmott, “Staged Savagery: Archibald Meston and His Indigenous Exhibits,” *Aboriginal History* 40 (2016): 181–203.
  - 15 A fuller picture of Meston’s activities is provided in Helen Pringle, “An Illustrated Ethnological Lecture: Archibald Meston’s ‘Wild Australia,’” unpublished paper.
  - 16 “The Opera House: Wild Australia,” *The Queenslander*, December 10, 1892, 1149–1150.

- 17 "Opera House," 1149.
- 18 "Opera House," 1149.
- 19 "Opera House," 1150.
- 20 "Opera House," 1150.
- 21 "Opera House," 1149. Meston added that they were all Queenslanders, and hence would serve to advertise Queensland for settlement throughout "the civilised world," a point that was reported to be enthusiastically applauded by the audience.
- 22 P. T. Barnum, letter dated August 9, 1882, in Permanent Administrative Files, Smithsonian Institution Archives, reproduced in Roslyn Poignant, *Professional Savages: Captive Lives and Western Spectacle* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), 58.
- 23 See "Queensland Blacks for Barnum's Museum," *The Queenslander*, March 3, 1883, 348.
- 24 Poignant, *Professional Savages*, 164–67.
- 25 Emile Houzé and Victor Jacques, "Communication de MM. Houzé et Jacques sur les Australiens du Nord," *Bulletin de la Société d'Anthropologie de Bruxelles* 3 (1884): 53–155, quoted in Poignant, *Professional Savages*, 16.
- 26 Poignant, *Professional Savages*, 126–27.
- 27 Poignant, *Professional Savages*, 197.
- 28 Robert Proctor, "From *Anthropologie* to *Rassenkunde* in the German Anthropological Tradition," in *Bones, Bodies, Behavior: Essays on Biological Anthropology*, ed. George W. Stocking Jr., History of Anthropology vol. 5 (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), 140–42.
- 29 Poignant, *Professional Savages*, 131–32.
- 30 Rudolf Virchow, "Australier von Queensland," *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* 16 (1884), 417, quoted in Poignant, *Professional Savages*, 133.
- 31 Barnum's Advance Courier, 1884, cited in Poignant, *Professional Savages*, 66; emphasis mine.
- 32 Stephen Orgel, *The Jonsonian Masque* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981).
- 33 Roth faced a litany of complaints, and there is no doubt that some of these complaints were well-founded, as, for example, his disposition of the artifacts he had collected in his official capacity; see "Revelations Regarding Roth—The Ethnological Specimens Sold to Sydney Museum—Complete Official List—Giving Dates and Localities," *Truth Sunday*, April 15, 1906, 9, <http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/198983693/>. A fuller account of this incident and its background is given in Helen Pringle, "Walter Roth and Ethno-Pornography," in McDougall and Davidson, *Roth Family*.
- 34 On questions raised, see "Question to Home Secretary re 'Photographing of Gins,'" *Queensland Parliamentary Debates (QPD)* xc (1902), 904; see also question of William Hamilton, October 28, 1902, *QPD*, xc, 958. On the defense, see William Hamilton to Minister for Lands, June 13, 1904, *QPD*, xcii (1904), 578–89. This was

- a book that, moreover, Roth had sent to the Prince of Wales. See also Vincent Lesina, *QPD*, November 24, 1905, 1810.
- 35 Walter Roth to Bishop White, June 19, 1904, QSA A/58850, tabled in *QPD*, XCII, July 13, 1904, 585. Bishop White wrote to Roth on June 3, 1904, and he telegraphed that he was satisfied with Roth's explanation in a letter of July 8, 1904.
- 36 Roth to White, June 19, 1904.
- 37 Roth to White, June 19, 1904.
- 38 See Ian Harmstorf, "Basedow, Herbert (1881–1933)," *ADB*, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/basedow-herbert-5151>; and, more broadly, Heidi Zogbaum, *Changing Skin Colour in Australia: Herbert Basedow and the Black Caucasian* (Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2010).
- 39 Herbert Basedow, *Knights of the Boomerang: Episodes from a Life Spent among the Native Tribes of Australia* (1935) (Victoria Park, Aus.: Hesperian Press, 2004), xiii, xi.
- 40 Basedow, *Knights of the Boomerang*, xi.
- 41 Basedow, *Knights of the Boomerang*, xii.
- 42 Herbert Basedow, "Subincision and Kindred Rites of the Australian Aboriginal," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 57 (January–June 1927): 123–56, reprinted as "The Strange Erotic Ritual of Australian Aborigines," in *Venus Oceanica: Anthropological Studies in the Sex Life of the South Sea Natives*, ed. R. Burton, privately printed for subscribers (New York: Oceanica Research Press, 1935).
- 43 Basedow, "Subincision," 151.
- 44 See R. W. de M. Maclay, "Mikluho-Maklai, Nicholai Nicholaievich (1846–1888)," *ADB*, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/mikluho-maklai-nicholai-nicholaievich-4198>; and Elsie May Webster, *The Moon Man: A Biography of Nikolai Miklouho-Maclay* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984). Note that the spelling of his surname differs depending on context.
- 45 Hermann Heinrich Ploss, Max Bartels, and Paul Bartels, *Woman: An Historical Gynaecological and Anthropological Compendium*, ed. Eric John Dingwall, 3 vols. (London: William Heinemann, 1935), 2:61–62. The reference is unclear, but it seems to be "Verh. Berl. Ges. F. Anthropol., etc., 1880, 12, 88": 3:499.
- 46 Ploss, Bartels, and Bartels, *Woman*, 2:63; emphasis mine.
- 47 Basedow, "Subincision," 154. The reference to Stuart is to T. P. Anderson Stuart, "The 'Mika' or 'Kulpi' Operation of the Australian Aborigines," *Journal and Proceedings of the Royal Society of New South Wales* 30 (1896): 122.
- 48 Morton acted as a collector for the museum; the human remains he collected at that time were returned to the Larrakia community in 2002: see Vu Tuan Nguyen, *Case Study: Larrakia 1996/2002*, updated November 20, 2018, Australian Museum, <http://australianmuseum.net.au/Case-Study-Larrakia-1996-2002>. On Morton's life and career more generally, see Peter Mercer, "Morton, Alexander (1854–1907)," *ADB*, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/morton-alexander-7666>.

- 49 Nicholas Miklucho-Maclay, report “Über die Mika-Operation in Central-Australien,”  
“Sitzung vom 17. April 1880,” *Verhandl. Berliner Gesellschaft für Anthropologie* 12  
(1880): 83–124.
- 50 Basedow, “Subincision,” 154.
- 51 Basedow, *Knights of the Boomerang*, 1–2.
- 52 Basedow, *Knights of the Boomerang*, 2.
- 53 Basedow, *Knights of the Boomerang*, 2.
- 54 Basedow, *Knights of the Boomerang*, 7.