FAITHFUL TO THE CONTEXT? THE PRESENTATION AND REPRESENTATION OF AMERICAN OBJECTS IN EUROPEAN COLLECTIONS[1]

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In an exhibition entitled *ART/artifact*, which could be seen in various US museums between 1988 and 1990, objects from Africa were displayed in a variety of museum settings and installation styles (Exhibition Catalogue New York 1988). Some were given an overtly aesthetic presentation as a sculptural group in a way that was familiar to those who visit collections of modern sculpture in museums of modern art. Others were given individual treatment, presented under plexiglass and sanctified by spotlights. For instance, by displaying a repoussé brass head made in the royal court of Abomey (Benin) lying on its side, it could be made to evoke works like Brancusi's *Sleeping Muse*. The elongated stalks of three ivory hatpins from Zaire could be regarded as an abstract sculpture or a graceful plant, though their original audience saw them as neither. A pointed bark cloth hat from Zaire could become an effective sculpture under the photographer's spotlights, arguably looking more interesting than when it was on someone's head. Other display rooms followed the style of presentation of the museum of natural history, in which objects were exhibited without highlights as representatives of a specific material culture, no distinction being made

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between ordinary objects and objects which might be seen as works of art. This natural historical style included the use of the diorama, intended to show various aspects of material culture, social interaction and environment simultaneously. Finally, objects were presented in a casual mixture of zoological and ethnographic curiosities in the style of a *Wunderkammer*. Like the natural historical setting, the latter style of presentation is "democratic", assuming that whatever is on display in such a room is of equal interest (Vogel 1991).

Such an exhibition draws attention to the effects that the style of presentation has on the perception of the objects in question by a North American viewing public. In setting museum practices in the foreground rather than the possible contexts of the objects within different African cultures, it stresses the multiplicity of possible 'readings' of those objects. The way in which the claims of different voices compete with one another in such a pluralist setting is a frank admission of the fact that exhibitions are fields in which different interpretations and assertions are contested, and in which different narratives strive to be heard. In the process, strange affinities may emerge between, say, the Renaissance chamber of curiosities, Mannerist modes of presentation, and postmodern kitsch (Olalquiaga 1998)[2].

The *ART/artifact* exhibition was not meant to be chronological or arranged in an ascending order of legitimacy. Each style of presentation had its advantages and disadvantages, erring now on the side of over-aestheticisation, now on the side of over-politicisation. Nevertheless, despite the fact that it was possible in the *fin de siècle* of the twentieth century to present such a variety of styles within the synchronic framework of an exhibition, it should not be forgotten that each has its own specific history and periodisation. The display of so-called 'primitive' art in an aesthetic setting, for example, emerged as a style of exhibition during the first decades of the twentieth century. The growth of interest in non-European art on the part of artists themselves coincided with the first experiments by a few progressive collectors and museum directors to arrange parts of their collections in a mixed way in order to demonstrate the parallels between

2. On the latter see C. Olalquiaga 1998. For the call to treat the (ethnographic) museum context as a context in its own right, see too Durrans 1988: 144-169, esp. 162.

(Expressionist) modern art and the sculptures of so-called 'primitive' peoples. For example, Karl Ernst Osthaus was already combining European and non-European art in the Folkwang Museum in 1912, where they provided Emil Nolde with a positive model for the aesthetic display of tribal artefacts (Lloyd 1991a, 1991b: 8-12). This approach was continued in the arrangement of the new premises in Essen in 1929, where paintings by Emil Nolde, African masks and figures of ancestors from the South Sea islands were put on display in the same room. As for the classic museum of natural history, based on the theory of evolution to provide a framework for a historical narrative, it was predominantly a nineteenth-century phenomenon. And as for the collection of curiosities, the *Art/artifact* exhibition included a reconstruction of the curiosity room in the Hampton Institute, Virginia of around 1905, but the *Wunderkammer* is, of course, a phenomenon which goes back to the Renaissance.

The synchronic presentation of a number of different historical styles serves to remind us that each (museum) context reflects the state of knowledge, predominant concerns and ideologies of a specific culture at a particular time, and that this is not a historical process marked by linearity. Hence curious parallels may arise between a late twentieth-century post-Modernist and a sixteenth-century pre-Modernist aesthetic (Mason 2000a, 2001a, 2001b). Every aspect of the use of space — lighting, use of display cabinets or not, juxtaposition of similar or dissimilar objects, the contents of the museum label itself (Baxandall 1991; Mason in press) — directs the viewer's gaze in a particular direction and toward a particular focus.

This may all seem too obvious to be worth reiterating, but it does suggest some ways in which researchers might like to enquire into two particular areas: the effects of the presentation of objects from a particular cultural area on the perception of the objects themselves; and the effects that this perception in turn might have on the image of the cultural area in question. To take the specific case of the Americas, these two questions can be formulated as follows: in what ways were *americana* presented to a non-American audience from the period of the first voyages of discovery; and what were the effects of these modes of presentation on early representations of America?

In considering the nineteenth century, for example, one would have to take into consideration the effects of such settings as Wild West shows; the presence of Amerindian artifacts in museums of natural history and in

ethnographic museums; public exhibitions of works of art depicting the Americas, such as the famous exhibition of Frederic Church's enormous canvas *The Heart of the Andes* in 1859; displays at the great world exhibitions; and so on. For the twentieth century, one would have to add such styles of presentation as the tourist market; the emergence of video films made on and/or by native Americans; the appearance of native Americas in national and international centres of jurisdiction where land and other claims are arbitrated; etc.

For the Renaissance period, it is possible to focus on a more restricted range of contexts. Few Europeans actually travelled to the New World in the sixteenth century, and even fewer returned to Europe to provide visual or textual information on what they had seen and experienced there. Moreover, from the first there were doubts about the very possibility of producing an adequate visual or textual representation of the New World (Mason 1990, chapter 1). The gap between the object and its representation was felt to be too wide.

There was an alternative for those who could not travel to the New World and who had insufficient faith in the veracity of representations. This was to bring America to Europe. If representations were not to be trusted, direct presentations might be seen to derive increased veracity from their visible and tangible connection with the New World. Fragmentary though they inevitably were, such partial glimpses of America, their legitimacy shored up by the presence of eye-witnesses who had been there to collect them, might be reassembled to form a recreation of the American continent by the potentially misleading totalisation from part to whole which is generally known as synecdoche[3]. Each of them functioned as *pars pro toto*. Freed of the representational constraint of having to stand for something else, they could simply be themselves: not representations of America, but presentations of the new continent, piece by piece.

3. On the application of rhetorical figures like synecdoche and metonym to museum presentations, see Bann 1994; 85-92. In this context, the opposite of the synecdoche is the metonym as that which breaks up a totality into discontinuous fragments; on the use of these terms see de Man 1983: 275.

A collector of *americana*: André Thevet

Some idea of the circumstances in which *americana* were collected, brought to Europe, and disseminated among certain sectors of the European public can be gauged from consideration of André Thevet (1516-92), cosmographer to the last of the Valois French kings[4]. Thevet accompanied Nicolas Durand de Villegagnon on his voyage to Brazil in 1555 and spent exactly ten weeks (15 November 1555 to 31 January 1556) on American soil — or rather, above it, since he was soon taken ill and spent most of his time there in a hammock (Lestringant 1991a: 89). Despite the limitations imposed by the brevity of his stay and by his illness, Thevet wrote a book on *Les Singularitez de la France Antarctique*, first published at the end of 1557, which assured him of a place as an authority on the New World. Born of relatively humble origins, like Bernard Palissy, Ambroise Paré, Conrad Gessner and many other writers of his day, Thevet used his authority as an eye-witness to pit his version against the combined strength of the learned tradition. The fact that he had actually visited America gave him, as *homme nouveau* and representative of a *savoir prolétaire*, a weapon with which to contest the sacrosanct position of the humanist scholars of the time (Lestringant 1991b: 34-35)[5].

Besides returning with the authority of an author, however, Thevet also brought back some actual objects. After describing the first Patagonians that Magellan had seen as dressed from head to foot in animal skins, he states that he himself had two of their cloaks made of the same animal skins and of an indescribable colour, though they were too large for him (Lestringant 1987a: 476). In the case of Thevet's two cloaks there is no way in which we can verify his statement, since he notes that his possession of them was already a thing of the past. In the case of the Patagonian arrows, made with the use of bones and stones instead of metal, Thevet claims to have recovered some of those fired into the vessel of the French and to have

4. As will be evident from the following paragraphs, it is no longer possible to mention the name of Thevet without citing from the meticulous work of Frank Lestringant.

5. On the relative freedom from a humanistic reverence for classical authority on the part of these travelers and writers, see Hoeniger 1985: 130-148.

taken them back to France with him (Lestringant 1987a: 482)[6]. Such objects could be used to win the favour of the monarch, like the maracas and various multi-coloured skins of birds brought from Brazil which reached Henri II through the intermediary of the royal geographer Nicolas de Nicolay — who was later to become a rival and personal enemy of Thevet (Thevet 1997: 209; Lestringant 1991a: 260) — or the Patagonian bow and arrows which Thevet presented to "Anthoine Roy de Navarre". Thevet even appears to have offered the English king Edward VI a moonstone and his services (Lestringant 1991a: 81; 1990: 213). Besides *ethnographica*, Thevet also displayed an interest — in fact, a livelier one in the verdict of Schnapper 1988: 108 — in natural curiosities. For instance, he was fascinated by the Brazilian toucan, and brought back with him both a specimen of the bird itself and an item of headgear made from toucan plumage which he presented to the king (Thevet 1997: 186)[7].

Thevet's activities as a collector certainly preceded his Brazilian expedition, for during his trip to Egypt in the winter of 1551 he was given an ebony vase from India, purchased on the shore of the Red Sea, which was credited with the power to counteract the effect of poison (Lestringant 1991a: 24). His oriental journey also furnished him with a serpent's tongue or *glossopetra* from Malta[8], which he sent to Conrad Gessner and which earned him a mention in Book IV of the latter's *Historiae Animalium* (text and woodcut illustration in Thevet 1985: 208; Lestringant 1991a: 67). As Thevet was aware, the way to a wider audience lay in the publication of representations of *exotica*. The fossilized shark's tooth which he sent to Gessner reached a much wider audience through its inclusion in Gessner's natural history than the artefact itself could ever have done within the extremely limited confines of Thevet's *cabinet de curiosités*.

6. Another example of this form of passive collection is provided by William Dampier, the English captain from the late seventeenth century, who was able to supply John Woodward with a stone which had been hurled aboard his ship by South Sea islanders.

7. Ambroise Paré (1971: 128-130) mentions a toucan presented to Charles IX by a gentleman from the Provence, which he unsuccessfully attempted to embalm. Paré had more success with a bird of paradise, which he proudly displayed in his own collection.

8. There was a lively export in these objects — in fact, neolithic spear points — from Malta: see the discussion in Céard (ed.) 1986: 127-130.

Besides the evidence relating to these and other exotic objects — a crocodile hide, rhinoceros horn, the feet of a mummy, Egyptian idols — which can be culled from Thevet's voluminous texts (Lestringant 1987a: 480), attempts have also been made to connect some of the ethnographic objects now located in European museums with the name of Thevet. For instance, it has been tentatively suggested that a Tupinamba club now in the collection of the Musée de l'Homme in Paris might be the one given Thevet by Quoniambec — the Brazilian "half-giant" described by Thevet in his *Singularitez* — and might therefore derive from Thevet's collection of curiosities (Métraux 1932: 3-18 still followed by Vitart 1992: 116). However, attempts to attribute certain surviving artefacts to the collecting activities of Thevet can best be seen as illustrations of a general principle of collecting: items connected with memorable persons have enhanced interest[9]. The chances of such one-to-one correspondences between items in collections today and items in sixteenth-century collections are slight, for it has been estimated that, of the thousands of American artefacts carried to Europe before the eighteenth century, fewer than 300 have survived to the present day (Feest 1993)[10]. The artefact in question does not bear any indication that it ever belonged to Thevet (Lestringant 1990: 140 n. 30), and there are a number of similar Brazilian clubs in other European collections: in 1985 Feest recorded ten which had survived in modern museum collections (Feest 1985). The same applies to Métraux' suggestion that a Brazilian cloak of feathers in Paris might go back to the cloak which Thevet gave to Jean Bertrand (Thevet 1997: 115), the future cardinal of Sens, who in turn presented it to Henri II. Despite its resemblance to Thevet's account of such a cloak, there are no grounds for assuming it to be the same object[11].

9. A well-known example is "Powhatan's Mantle", now in the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, which is unlikely to have been a garment at all and cannot be connected with Powhatan. See Feest's detailed discussion of this item (cat. no. 12) in MacGregor ed. 1983: 130-135. Similar mythology surrounds various objects associated with Montezuma, such as a feathered crown, feathered shield and block of emerald now in Vienna, a feathered cloak in Brussels, and an obsidian mirror in Paris (Anders and Kann 1996).

10. The same author notes: "The loss of objects in actual numbers is staggering. Of approximately one hundred items of Americana listed in Tradescant's 1656 catalogue, just over twenty have survived" (Feest 1995: 333).

11. Another sixteenth-century owner of a feathered cloak from Brazil was the physician Johannes Goropius Becanus, author of a history of the ancient world which argued that the

There is one exotic artefact, however, which is still extant and which certainly passed through Thevet's hands. This is the *Codex Mendoza*, a seventy-one page manuscript compiled around 1545 on the instruction of the Viceroy Antonio de Mendoza, and now in the Bodleian Library in Oxford. This codex came into Thevet's hands in the middle of the century and passed into Hakluyt's possession by 1587 at the latest (Mason 1997)[12]. It has even been suggested that Thevet drew on this codex for the portraits of Atahualpa, Montezuma and Paraousti Satouriona, "king of Florida", in his *Les Vrais Pourtraits et Vies des Hommes Illustres* of 1584 (Joppien 1978)[13].

The circumstances under which these various objects came into Thevet's possession are not always clear. Indeed, some of the *americana* may have been acquired when he had a sedentary occupation as royal cosmographer rather than directly in America. At any rate, we do know that he was on cordial terms with a number of French collectors, such as Michel de l'Hospital (Lestringant 1990: 56 n. 44). He was himself in charge of a chamber of curiosities, though he was extremely reluctant to admit visitors, with the exception of a few public figures like King Charles IX or the archbishop of Rouen (Lestringant 1987a: 480). In Thevet's case, then, the presentation of the objects in his collection could not have had a direct effect on many people. Indirectly, however, through the way in which Thevet himself could draw on his collection for the descriptions of objects that appear in written and published works[14], representations of objects from the collection did have an effect on a wider audience[15].

Dutch were the remnant of the antediluvian peoples. He claimed to have a feathered *palliolum* in his house (Goropius Becanus 1569, f. 1039).

12. Thevet's interest in the use of original sources for the history of America can also be seen from the example of his *Histoyre du Méchique*, a manuscript fragment which was probably intended to be inserted in his *Cosmographie universelle*. This *Histoyre* must go back to a Spanish original, perhaps accompanied by pictographic elements too (Duverger 1983: 35-36).

13. Joppien is followed by Lestringant (1990: 188 ff). Some reservations on Joppien's conclusions are expressed in Egmond and Mason 1997: 194-196 (see too Feest 1988: 33-38, esp. 35).

14. For an example — Brazilian bone-tipped arrows — see Lestringant 1990: 177.

15. Jean de Léry was less fortunate in bringing back curiosities from Brazil: during the famine which his crew suffered on the return journey, they ended up eating the monkeys and parrots

Presentation thus rapidly yields to representation. Yet the form of that representation itself may be determined at least partly by the form of presentation. It is therefore to the form of presentation of exotic artefacts in Renaissance collections of curiosities that we now turn.

Presentations of the exotic: the Renaissance collection of curiosities

The collection as such can be traced back for millennia (Pomian 1987: 14-19), but it is the sixteenth century in particular which witnesses the rise of the *Kunstkammern* or *Wunderkammern* in Northern and Southern Europe. Julius von Schlosser's classic study of them concentrated on the princely Austrian collections, especially that of Archduke Ferdinand in Schloss Ambras (Schlosser 1978. For an inventory see Scheicher et al. 1977). More recent studies have been devoted to collections in France (Pomian 1987; Schnapper 1988), Spain (Morán and Checa 1985; Exhibition Catalogue Madrid 2001), and the Northern Netherlands (Bergvelt and Kistemaker 1992; on Rembrandt's collection see Boogert 1999). The best modern international survey is undoubtedly still the collection of essays deriving from an international conference held at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford in 1983 (Impey and MacGregor 1985). As some of these authors suggest, the current upsurge of interest in the collection, as demonstrated, for instance, by the foundation of the *Journal of the History of Collections* in 1989, seems to be connected with a (post)modern focus on Mannerism and Surrealism. Some of the curious juxtapositions found in the collections — which have often earned them little more attention than a footnote or two in the academic literature[16] — now have a strangely familiar look about them.

The objects which belonged to these collections were of various kinds. Besides works of art proper (classical or classicising paintings and sculpture, ancient coins, gems and inscriptions), they could include natural

which had been destined for collectors at home, and had to make do with 'putting them into the cabinet of their memory' (*les mettant au cabinet de leur mémoire*); see Léry 1992: 213.

16. A case in point is the brief discussion among the hundreds of pages devoted to art treasures of the Reynst brothers in Logan 1979.

wonders such as eagle-stones, coral, fossils, petrified objects, mandrakes, barnacle geese, birds of paradise, flying fish, mermaids, chameleons, the bones of giants, canoes, armadillos, weapons, Egyptian mummies, the horns of unicorns, feather head-dresses, musical instruments, sharks' teeth — to name but a few.

Interest in wonders of this kind was nothing unusual in the sixteenth century. Dürer's enthusiastic reaction to the sight of the objects sent by Cortés from Mexico which were on display in the palace of Margaret of Austria in Brussels in 1520 has often been quoted:

> I saw the things which have been brought to the King from the new golden land: a sun all of gold a whole fathom broad, and a moon all of silver of the same size, also two rooms full of the armour of the people there, and all manner of wondrous weapons of theirs, harness and darts, wonderful shields, strange clothing, bedspreads, and all kinds of wonderful objects of various uses, much more beautiful to behold than prodigies. These things were all so precious that they have been valued at one hundred thousand gold florins. All the days of my life I have seen nothing that has gladdened my heart so much as these things, for I saw amongst them wonderful works of art, and I marvelled at the subtle *ingenia* of men in foreign lands. Indeed, I cannot express all that I thought there [Panofsky 1971: 209][17].

It is worth noting that Dürer provides only a summary description of the Aztec artefacts, and that he fails to illustrate any of them (in contrast to his illustrations of objects of natural history). In other words, he shares Thevet's appreciation of natural history above ethnography (Dacos 1969). Some of the appeal of these artefacts can be gauged from the fact that Dürer's most cherished possessions at the time were a large tortoise-shell, a buckler made of fish skin, a long pipe, a long shield, a shark's fin and two little vases containing citronate and capers (Panofsky 1971: 207; Massing 1991a: 115-119).

Many such objects had already decorated the interiors of churches in the Middle Ages (Schlosser 1978: 11-27; Lugli 1983: 12ff). Curiosities such as whale ribs came to adorn the façades of secular public buildings as well, such as town halls (Egmond and Mason 1997: 31). There is evidence for an

17. See also Honour 1975: 28 and Greenblatt 1990: 179.

interest in curiosities on the part of private collectors too toward the end of the Middle Ages. Schlosser (1978: 29-41) had already stressed the importance of collectors like Jean Duc de Berry (1340-1416) in France. A similar collection was that possessed in Spain by Cardinal Mendoza at the end of the fifteenth century, which consisted of coins, antiquities and *naturalia*, and a *cédula* of Juan II from 1428 bears witness to a similar interest in exotic objects, which were usually kept in *cámaras del tesoro* (Morán and Checa 1985: 31-32). It is in the sixteenth century, however, that the phenomenon of the private collection of curiosities really emerges, whether they were stored in cabinets (like the objects in Thevet's collection) or put on display for a (select) public. Schlosser (1978: 201) posited the existence of a geographical distinction between the aristocratic collections of bizarre objects in Northern Europe, on the one hand, and the scholarly collection of antiquities and objects for scientific purposes by the humanists of Southern Europe, on the other. This distinction can no longer be regarded as valid, for there are many exceptions to such a geographical classification, and the same applies to the distinction he posits between aristocratic and humanist collections[18].

Most recent studies have concentrated on the sociological aspects of the collections and their audience, revealing that the status of the collectors themselves could indeed range from monarchs and aristocrats to humanist scholars, but that it could also extend to doctors and apothecaries — many of the objects in their collections, such as the horn of a unicorn or the shell of an armadillo, were believed to have medicinal properties — or even to the humble sixteenth-century Dutch beachcomber Adriaen Coenen (Egmond and Mason 1993, 1996). Similarly, the status of the visitors whom they admitted and the extent of the collection as a display of wealth have also been carefully documented. Though there have been detailed case studies of individual collections, however, Lugli's study (1983) is one of the few publications to have paid much attention to the nature of the collection as such, the principles — or lack of them — by which it was arranged, and in particular to the role of *americana* within such collections.

18. For example, Logan 1979: p. 99, n. 44 cites three cases of "North European style" collections in Italy.

First, the effects should be noted of the removal of artefacts from cultural areas which were completely foreign to the cultural embedding of the collection itself. Though referring to a later period, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's comments on the Mannerist fondness for fragment and quotation seem appropriate here as well:

> Like the ruin, the ethnographic fragment is informed by a poetics of detachment. Detachment refers not only to the physical act of producing fragments, but also to the detached attitude that makes the fragmentation and its appreciation possible.... A history of the poetics of the fragment is yet to be written, for fragments are not simply a necessity of which we make a virtue, a vicissitude of history, or a response to limitations on our ability to bring the world indoors. We make fragments [Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1991: 388].

Many collectors had to make do with fragments: the tooth of a shark, the saw of a saw-fish, the horn of a unicorn, the penis of a whale. As for making a virtue of necessity, they could combine different fragments from different creatures to come up with a new, composite creation. This is the origin of the so-called Jenny Haniver, in which the dried bodies of skates and rays in particular were combined to produce dragon-like curios (Jones 1990: 85-86). The sixteenth-century Dutch beachcomber Adriaen Coenen was an old hand at the construction of these monsters, which hung in many a home of a well-to-do compatriot (Egmond and Mason 1996: 109). Though in the sixteenth century Rondelet was sceptical and Aldrovandi was aware of how these monsters were made, they still could form the object of dispute as late as the nineteenth century, as shown by the controversy surrounding Barnum's exhibition of the Feejee Mermaid in Charleston, South Carolina in 1843 (Greenberg 1990; Ritvo 1997: 178-182).

Detachment implied a loss of cultural meaning for the object in question, but this loss was compensated by an emphasis on the material nature of the object itself. Hence catalogues of collections lay great stress on the materials from which the objects are made, which sometimes served as a principle of classification, as in the Plinian systems on which the arrangement of the collection of Archduke Ferdinand II at Schloss Ambras was based (Scheicher 1985). The use of precious metals or of natural materials of an unusual kind, such as ostrich eggs, coral, horns, bones and coconuts were worth recording. Particularly striking were those objects which combined natural with artificial materials, such as bezoars mounted

in gold or silver settings, or nautilus shells mounted on silver standards to be used as goblets. One of the best illustrations of such composite creations are the pictures which were executed on the polished surfaces of strongly veined stones, in which the veins formed part of the composition. Such "images made by chance" were often collected in *Kunst-* and *Wunderkammern* in the first half of the seventeenth century (Janson 1961: 254-266).

Besides raising issues of the boundary between what is natural and what is artificial, attempts at the classification of many of the objects in the collections called into question the divisions between different realms of nature. The stone with an animal bone growing inside it owned by the Count of Benavente, don Rodrigo Alonso Pimentel, bordered on the line separating the animal from the mineral (Morán and Checa 1985: 26). Petrified plants and animals, including fossils[19], seemed to partake of both the animal or vegetable and the mineral world. These links in the Chain of Being could even extend to the human world, as can be seen from the case of the petrified child acquired by Frederick III of Denmark in 1654 (Schnapper 1988: 18). Coral, which featured prominently in many collections, was variously classified as animal, vegetable or mineral. As for the eagle-stone, folklore associated it with eagle nests, thereby linking the animal and mineral worlds again. The mandrake seemed to be both human and vegetable, while the Tartary lamb and the barnacle goose[20] straddled the boundary between plants and animals. Shells were also difficult to classify, since the claim that some of them were decorated with the letters of some alphabet (Hebrew, Greek, etc.) raised the question of whether they were to be classified as natural or artificial.

The special attraction of these objects was based on the principle of contiguity. Because they had been contiguous to a highly charged exotic

19. A consensus on the origin of fossils, and with it a more or less clear dividing line between the organic and the inorganic, did not emerge until around 1700 (Thackray 1994: 123-135).

20. On the Tartary lamb see Kappler 1980: 135-6. One of the papers contributed by Hans Sloane to the *Philosophical Transactions* was a demonstration that "The Tartarian Lamb, *Agnus Scythicus*, or *Barmometz*, heretofore imposed on the credulous as a kind of Zoophyte, or vegetating Animal" was in fact the lower part of the root of a fern (Beer 1953: 100). The *locus classicus* for the study of the barnacle goose is Heron-Allen 1928; see too Egmond and Mason 1995: 25-43.

setting, these objects re-established a tangible contact with a distant reality as parts of a larger whole. To illustrate this principle from American objects in the possession of Montaigne (1962: 206), the bamboo sticks used to beat out a rhythm on the ground during dances evoke the "savage dance" which was such a popular subject in depictions of the early contact between Europe and the non-European world (Joppien and Smith 1988: 35); while the Brazilian clubs evoke the man-to-man combat illustrated in the woodcuts accompanying Thevet's account of the French Antarctic (Lentringant 1990: 142).

Exotic artefacts could thus serve to evoke an exotic culture by virtue of the principle of *pars pro toto*. There were certain practical limitations imposed on the choice of objects for this purpose. Featherwork, for instance, was not very durable, so that most of the items of featherwork which reached Europe from America perished before gaining entry to a *Wunderkammer* (Feest 1985). The choice of fauna was dependent on the techniques of preservation, so that it was easier to introduce the armadillo to European cabinets because of the relatively uncomplicated techniques required to preserve it. Many other animals in the collections were not preserved intact, however. Only fragments of them could be kept, which had the function of Mannerist quotations (Olmi 1985).

Not just items of material culture, but human beings too were put on display. Most of them soon perished, but objects belonging to them and/or portraits of them entered the collections of curiosities. For instance, in 1576 Martin Frobisher managed to kidnap an Eskimo by enticing him close to his boat by tinkling small bells and then pulling him and his kayak aboard. Within a fortnight of arriving in England the Eskimo was dead. The kayak and one of the portraits passed into the collection of curiosities owned by John Tradescant, where both artefacts and representations were presented to visitors (Sturtevant and Quinn 1987; Egmond and Mason 2000). Going back at least to the sixteenth century, this practice of kidnapping and displaying so-called exotic peoples did not die out in the nineteenth century (Mason 1998, 2002).

In view of the ability of the artefact to evoke something bigger, a typically Mannerist play of the gigantic and the miniature came to form a regular feature of the *Kunstkammern*. Some collections contained series of items ranging from the very large to the very small, such as the collection of shells in Abraham Ortelius' *musée* in Antwerp, which ranged from a

tortoise shell the size of a large dining table to a shell no larger than the eye of a needle (Büttner 1998). Characteristic of this is the interest attaching to giants and dwarfs, such as the playing cards for giants and dwarfs in Schloss Ambras and the portrait of a giant and dwarf there (Scheicher 1985; Lugli 1983: 113), or even the presentation of live giants and dwarfs in one of the centres in Amsterdam to which exotica gravitated in the late seventeenth century, the *Blauw Jan* tavern and its menagerie (Hamell 1987; Mason 1996). The same interest in degrees of scale is witnessed by the infinite fitting of polygons into polygons of ever decreasing size as practiced by wood-turners at the lathe, as well as examples from the natural world of an egg within an egg, or the even more extreme cases in which an ostrich egg is used as the material in which to sculpt an ostrich, a rhinoceros horn is given the shape of a rhinoceros, or a whale is carved on a piece of whalebone (Osterwold and Pollig 1987 catalogue items 1.8, 1.14). The "tautological" nature of these objects (Lugli 1983: 16) lies in the project of representing a rhinoceros by ... a rhinoceros. An even more complex example is the coconut beaker (now in the Bayerisches Nationalmuseum in Munich) inscribed "PERNAMBUCA" and decorated with a view of Mauritsstad and Recife (Boogart and Duparc 1979: 214; Fritz 1983, ill. 109b), thought to have been the work of a Dutch goldsmith whom Johan Maurits took with him to the Dutch colony in Brazil. In this case the colony there is condensed in a representation on a coconut, while the coconut itself is assumed to bear a relation of contiguity with Brazil; a representation of Brazil is carved on ... a piece of Brazil[21].

Not only did the individual objects in a collection evoke more than what they were themselves (by a process of synecdoche), conjuring up an elusive whole of which they were all parts. The collection itself could be organised according to a symbolic scheme which indicated its place within a wider setting. Not all collections were of this kind; indeed, Schlosser (1978: 124)

21. For other coconut beakers from Brazil see Fritz 1983, ill. 110a ("Tapuya"); Whitehead and Boeseman 1989: 68-9; Schütte 1997, items 199-205. It is not certain that all of these coconut beakers are the work of native Brazilians: the existence of coconut beakers carved with scenes from European mythology (see the ones from the Cospi collection discussed in Laurencich-Minelli 1992: 146-148), as well as the presence of talented European carvers like Jacob Jensen Nordman in Brazil in the 1630s, suggest that at least some of them may have been carved by European craftsmen. Fritz 1983: 72-80 provides a list of references to coconut beakers and other coconut creations in collections right up to Goethe.

already drew attention to what he regarded as the Barnum-like qualities of Rudolph II's museum in Prague, and the general tendency seems to have been a disorderly presentation lacking much in the way of systematic structure (Schnapper 1988: 11). After all, the emphasis was on the selection of objects rather than on exhaustiveness, coinciding with a period in which science was more preoccupied with accidents than with laws (Ginzburg 1986: 158-209). The accumulation of exotic artefacts, an endless replication of the exotic Other, is a Tantalus-like attempt to encompass what cannot be encompassed. In this sense the *Wunderkammer* is the antithesis of the museum: the categorical will to knowledge of the latter is precisely what is absent in the former (Mullaney 1983: 40-43). It is sometimes difficult to assess the extent to which a symbolic ordering can be detected because of the nature of our sources. For instance, the printed catalogue of the collection of Lodovico Settala in Milan written by Lorenzo Legati displays a taste for the bizarre, while Settala's own manuscript notes contain condemnations of the more superstitious errors; moreover, neither of these sources is in harmony with Fiori's engraving of the Settala collection, which should be seen a stylised arrangement rather than a realistic description (Aimi et al. 1985: 24-28). Nevertheless, there are a few cases of private collections which do appear to have had some kind of symbolic arrangement, such as the *studiolo* of Francesco I de' Medici (Lugli 1983: 45; Olmi 1985), or the arrangement of the Mauritshuis in The Hague as a *domus cosmographica* (Lunsingh Scheurleer 1979). The Dutch, it has been suggested, were particularly prone to giving their collections a moralising impulse, although the anatomical museum of Giovanni Faber Linceo in Rome seems to have had a similarly morally edifying function (Lunsingh Scheurleer 1979, 1985; Baldriga 1998). Considerations of an aesthetic and classificatory kind seem to have affected the arrangement of Antonio Giganti's collection in Bologna, where the *theatrum naturae* was characterised by the principles of alternation and symmetry (Laurencich-Minelli 1985). Sometimes a *studiolo* could have a special iconographical programme, such as the decoration of Leonello d'Este's *studiolo* in Ferrara with a cosmic mythology of Apollo and the Muses, or that of Piero de' Medici's *studiolo* with astrological signs, hours of the day, etc. (Lugli 1983:

45)[22]. In Spain, the *studiolo* of the Duke of Calabria in Valencia betrays the same influence of Italian humanism (Morán and Checa 1985: 45), whereas the collection of Carlos V in Yuste reveals a signal lack of organization as a microcosm (Morán and Checa 1985: 55-61).

It is in line with the symbolic potential of the collection as a whole that the individual objects could have their own symbolic value too. The public display of whale bones antedates their importance as economic products of the whaling industry; the whale bones, elephant's tusk and crocodile which Münzer saw in Guadalupe in the late fifteenth century, for instance, were examples of what is marvellous, curious and extraordinary, which could have an apotropaic function (Lugli 1983: 12; Morán and Checa 1985: 24ff). The unicorn in particular was associated with a rich mythology, which lent added lustre to the presence of a unicorn's horn in a collection[23]. Giants' teeth or giants' bones also carried heavy symbolic connotations in relation to theories of the flood and human origins. In the case of America, the suggestion that such relics might simply be elephant bones or tusks could be ruled out because of the absence of elephants in the New World.

The collection underwent changes over time, and we should be wary of projecting data from the (better documented) seventeenth-century collections on to those of the previous century. One change is the tendency for inscriptions on stone to supplant coins as a source of information on antiquity, which can already be traced in the seventeenth century and which gets under way in the second half of the eighteenth (Pomian 1987: 118; Schnapper 1988: 164-165). Another indication of a change in taste can be seen in the reorganisation of the Habsburg art gallery in Vienna in the eighteenth century: while the original Schwarze Cabinet contained coral, a shell and the horn of a unicorn, the plans for a reorganisation of the picture gallery in the Stallburg in the last decades of the century envisaged a renovation of the *Schwarze Cabinet* and a relegation of the curiosities to a different location (Meijers 1995: 21, 63). Nevertheless, although the

22. On the importance of astrology in the architecture and public life of the Medici and their contemporaries, see too Rossi 1991.

23. In 1492 the horn of a unicorn belonging to Lorenzo il Magnifico was sold for 6,000 florins, as against 30 florins for a painting by Van Eyck (Schnapper 1988: 9). The unicorn hanging from the ceiling of the Dresden *Kunstkammer* was rated as the costliest item in the collection (Syndram 1999).

Encyclopédie may be regarded as having brought the encyclopaedic collection to its end (Lugli 1983: 118), there was no linear development from the chamber of curiosities to the picture gallery. For Spain, this can be demonstrated from the existence of a collection both of paintings and of curiosities by Juan Hurtado de Mendoza, who died in 1624 (Morán and Checa 1985: 184), or in the (rejected) plan presented to Felipe II by Juan Páez de Castro for a room to contain scientific and natural objects as well as a portrait gallery with Cortés, Columbus and Magellan "with the discovery and objects of the New World" (Morán and Checa 1985: 95-97). The persistence of the *Wunderkammer* in the nineteenth-century encyclopaedic sciences or its conversion to a large-scale mass event in the World Exhibitions would go beyond the confines of present discussion; suffice it to recall that the curiosity room from the Hampton Institute with which we began dates from around 1905.

Presentations of America

This brief outline of the *Kunstkammern* and *Wunderkammern* of Northern and Southern Europe must suffice to introduce the physical and cultural setting within which artefacts from America were introduced and presented to a European public. It is the constraints of this mode of presentation which come to affect European attitudes toward the artefacts themselves and — more importantly — toward the New World itself.

A list of Mexican and South American artefacts in European *Wunderkammer* published in 1985 gives some idea of the selection of objects which could be chosen to represent America in the collections. Besides a limited number of items of featherwork, there are shields, masks, inlaid skulls, knife handles, mirrors, stone figurines and pendants, spear-throwers, pottery, codices, belts, necklaces, wooden bowls, bows, clubs, axes, musical instruments, combs, hammocks, pipes and ceremonial batons (Feest 1985, 1990, 1992). Schlosser's references to *americana* are confined to the featherwork shield and headdresses now in the Vienna Ethnological Museum, which are all recorded in the 1596 inventory of Schloss Ambras (Schlosser 1978; Vandenbroeck 1992), and to the presence of weapons of ' Indian' origin in the sixteenth cabinet of Ferdinand's collection (Schlosser

1978: 108-109). However, there was a lively interest in *americana* in the Iberian peninsula soon after Columbus's landing, as can be seen from their inclusion among the gold jewels and other items sent by Isabel to Maria of Portugal in 1504 (Morán and Checa 1985: 34). In Spain, Charles V's collection in Simancas included:

> una caja de oro y plata con una pareja de indios portadores de una alabarda, una caña de oro "de la muestra del trigo de las yndias", dos zapatos de las indias del Perú, una corona de algodón verde con plumas coloradas, un pabellón de la India, collares, plumas multicolores, piedras preciosas, joyas de la india y una rúbrica de "espadas de las yndias", en la que se incluyen una enorme cantidad de piedras verdes engastadas en oro [Morán and Checa 1985: 51].

Amerindian themes appeared in Spanish tapestries and jewellery; Philip II, whose collection in El Escorial included an American armadillo, commissioned a work on the natural history of America from Francisco Hernández[24]; and Nicolás Monardes, who had a botanical garden and collection of curiosities in Seville, drew on the objects at his disposal in writing a number of works on the medicinal properties of American flora (Morán and Checa 1985: 149)[25].

In France, Cartier brought back weapons, clothing and Indians to François I in the 1530s, and Jean Moquet, apothecary to Henri IV, crossed the Atlantic on several occasions to collect plants and rarities for the *cabinet de singularitez* at the Tuileries. North American canoes were a feature of many collections in France and elsewhere, and writers of the time like Ambroise Paré or Pierre Belon bear witness to the taste of the sixteenth-century French monarchs for collections of exotic animals and plants (Schnapper 1988: 180-181). After the dispersal of Thevet's cabinet, however, the French royal collections entered a period of decline; French monarchs of the seventeenth century displayed little interest in *exotica;* and

24. Francisco Hernández (1514-78) was sent to Mexico by Philip II in 1570 to investigate the natural resources. During his years in Mexico he was responsible for the making of some 1,200 pictures, but they were all destroyed in the Escorial library fire of 1671. On the reception history of Hernández's work in northern Europe, see López Piñero and Pardo Tomás 1994, 1996.

25. For instance, his illustration of an armadillo was based on the armadillo in the museum of Argote de Molina (Morán and Checa 1985: 129-138).

it is difficult to trace *americana* (or *africana*, for that matter) in French collections before the middle of the eighteenth century. Besides the royal collections, mention should be made of *americana* in the collections of the nobility. In Montaigne's castle, for example, one could see: "the form of their beds, their ropes, their swords and the wooden armbands with which they cover their wrists in combat, and the large canes, open at one end, which they use to beat out the rhythm of their dances" (Montaigne 1962: 206).

As in the case of Thevet, Montaigne's collection of American artefacts may be presumed to have had less of an effect in the castle of Saint-Michel than through its dissemination in his essay *Des Cannibales* (1580), from which the above citation is taken.

In England, where the development of collections lagged behind that of continental Europe, the main North American material found its way to the collections of the Royal Society and the private collections of Ralph Thoresby (1658-1725)[26] and the Tradescants. Though there is no evidence that John Tradescant the elder ever visited the New World, his son appears to have made three visits, in 1637, 1642 and 1654 (Allen 1964: 162)[27]. The catalogue of the *Musaeum Tradescantianum* contains many entries of American treasures, sent or brought back to the Tradescant home, aptly named the Ark, in South Lambeth, although it is not certain exactly which items were introduced as a result of the voyages and which derived from third parties[28]. Besides numerous botanical items, the catalogue includes the beaks and feathers of various Brazilian birds, some whole Virginian bitterns and humming birds, specimens of the sloth, Virginian wild cat, and various armadillos, various Brazilian fish, insects and reptiles, "the Indian lip-stone which they wear in the lip," "Indian morris-bells of shells and fruits," "Indian musicall instruments," "Indian Idol made of Feathers, in the

26. For the documentary value of Thoresby's diary on the collections of his day, see Brears 1989.

27. Some of the details of Allen's biography are challenged in Leith-Ross 1984: 101 ff.

28. For example, Leith-Ross draws attention to a plant, believed to be an antidote to the bite of the Phalangium spider, which must have reached Bavaria in the sixteenth century, as the court artist Hoefnagel painted it along with a group of Mexican plants. As she notes: "It is unlikely to have been the only American plant to reach mainland Europe in the sixteenth century" (Leith-Ross 1984: 182).

shape of a Dog," "Indian fiddle," "Instruments which the Indians sound at Sun-rising," "A Canow & Picture of an Indian with his Bow and Dart, taken 10 leagues at Sea," "A bundle of Tobacco," "Indian Conjurors rattle, wherewith he calls up Spirits," various weapons, Virginian coats made of feathers, bear or raccoon skins, Amazonian and other Indian "Crownes," shoes from Peru and Canada, "Black Indian girdles made of Wampam peck, the best sort," "Variety of Chains, made of the teeth of Serpents and wilde beasts, which the Indians weare," Indian utensils and furniture, an "Indian dish made of excellent red earth, with a Nest of Snakes in the bottome," tobacco pipes, and the "Knife wherewith Hudson was killed in the North-West passage, or Hudsons's Bay" (Allen 1964: 247-312). When the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford opened in 1683, a substantial part of the collection was that of the Tradescants (MacGregor 1983, 2001).

There was particularly intense rivalry among British collectors of *americana* at first because of the relatively small number of contributions available. The London-based collector John Woodward, whose collection of objects from all over the world was intended to prove the universality of the biblical flood, had a network to supply him with objects from abroad, including North America. For instance, in 1697 he received a large cargo from America which included shells, bones and teeth of fishes (Levine 1977: 98 n. 25). Woodward's great rival, both within the Royal Society and as a collector, was Sir Hans Sloane (Beer 1953; MacGregor 1994), whose *Voyage to the Islands of Madera, Barbados,... and Jamaica with the Natural History of the last of these Islands* was the first monograph on the natural history of an island in the New World[29]. Sloane always maintained an interest in expeditions across the Atlantic, and his enormous collection naturally included American Indian material. Among the extant items are a Mesoamerican painted gourd, a Central American ax, a Mesoamerican pot and penis sheath, a Mesoamerican (perhaps Toltec) stone head, and three Peruvian pottery vessels (King 1994). In addition, Sloane possessed drawings of Dutch Brazil by Frans Post, drawings of the plant and insect life of Surinam by Maria Sibylla Merian, and copies of John White's drawings not only of Virginian birds, beasts, and reptiles but also of

29. The first volume was published in 1707; the second appeared in 1725.

ethnographic scenes covering Brazilian and Inuit subjects, as well as Carolina Algonquians (Rowlands 1994).

A good picture of the role of *americana* in the collections in the Northern Netherlands can be gained from the account of the travels to Holland, Belgium, France and England by the German philosopher, theologian and jurist Christian Knorr von Rosenroth in 1663 (Fuchs and Breen 1916). Knorr von Rosenroth's account gives a detailed description (in Latin) of the contents of twelve collections in Amsterdam, where he saw the following *americana*: a sloth, a club "used by the Americans before they discovered iron," an American belt, various armadillos[30], American iguanas with and without beards, an American wind instrument made of bone, West Indian spiders, a parrot from Greenland, gum from Guyana, American cacao, American duck, American laurel, a Virginian autumn hyacinth, and a Peruvian balsam tree "with the scent of sweet Asia"[31]. America was also well represented in the earlier Dutch collection of Bernardus Paludanus (1550-1633) in Enkhuizen, enriched by objects brought back from the East by his fellow townsman Jan Huygen van Linschoten such as birds of paradise, Chinese chopsticks, paper made of palm leaves, and coconut beakers. Part of Paludanus's collection was purchased after his death by the Duke of Gottorp for his collection in Schleswig (Schepelern 1985). It is likely that a number of the American artefacts now in the ethnographic collection of the Nationalmuseet in Copenhagen derive from the collection of Paludanus, such as a leather and

30. An early example of how these objects could find their way into representations may be provided by the drawings of armadillos (*Tolypeutes conurus, Is. Geoffr.* and *Dasypus novemcinctus (L.)* included in an album assembled for Charles V from the work of different artists in the third quarter of the sixteenth century, if we can follow Boon in assuming that the drawings in question are based on mounted specimens (Boon 1978, cat. nos. 560 and 561; the illustrations are to be found in Schapelhouman 1987. This album, *LIBRO de diversos animales, aves, peces y reptiles, que el emperador Carlos V mandó dibujar a su pintor Lamberto Lombardo en Bruxelas ANO MDXLII*, containing the earliest naturalistic representations of animals in Northern Europe after Dürer and Hofmann, is in the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam. See also the discussion in Egmond and Mason 1993. For the suggestion that an animal clearly based on Dürer's rhinoceros is actually intended to be a depiction of an armadillo, see Mason 2000b.

31. The Peruvian balsam (*Myroxylon peruiferum*) was introduced to Europe as a febrifuge, but its medicinal properties fell into discredit. It should not be confused — though it often was — with true Peruvian bark or quinine (*Cinchona vera*) (Beer 1953: 27-28).

mother-of-pearl loin cloth (probably from the southeast of North America), a South American bone flute and a Brazilian club (Dam-Mikkelsen ad Lundbaek 1980: 20-36; Exhibition Catalogue Schleswig 1997, vol. II, item 206)[32]. Nor should the Dutch collections in Leiden be forgotten, where the exotic animals included a snake from Surinam with Arabic letters on its back (Schupbach 1985). In the Southern Netherlands, the collection of the cartographer and humanist Abraham Ortelius in Antwerp contained not only a large collection of ancient coins, prints and engravings (especially by Dürer), a library of books and maps, and scientific instruments, but also silver from South America.

Italy was a source of inspiration for many collectors in Northern Europe in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. The wealthy Reynst brothers in Amsterdam, whose collection of curiosities included an urn with the ashes of Aristotle (!), gemshorns, lamps, fishes, shells, Egyptian figurines and *petrefacta*, were also the proud possessors of the largest collection of Italian paintings, antiquities and *naturalia* in the Netherlands in the middle of the seventeenth century (probably purchased *en masse* from Andrea Vendramin in Venice; Logan 1979: 98). The presence of featherwork capes in Florence can be documented for as early as 1539, and the collections of Aldrovandi and Giganti in Bologna had their share of *americana* too, to which the Cospi collection (noted for the Codex Cospi) was added in 1657 (Feest 1985; Laurencich-Minelli 1982, 1985). Among naturalists in Mantua, we can single out the physician Marcello Donati, author of *De radice purgante quam mechioacan vocant*, who drew on his collection of American plants, and Giovanni Battista Cavallara, the physician to Torquato Tasso, whose *americana* included copal, various resins, fruits, beans, and mechioacan (Findlen 1994: 147-148).

Though this brief survey indicates that the geographical distribution of *americana* throughout the collections of Europe was by no means confined to certain countries, there were certain limitations to the display of the items, which in turn affected their mode of presentation. The most striking limitation is the fact that admittance to view such a collection was, by and large, the privilege of the wealthy or the noble, though the introduction of

32. A letter by Paludanus to Ortelius in 1595 suggesting an exchange of curiosities was accompanied by an American dart or arrowhead (*telum*) (Tracy 1980: 36).

an admission fee in certain cases lowered the threshold to those who could afford to pay, irrespective of rank or class. Though there is sufficient documentation to substantiate this picture, it can perhaps best be illustrated from an episode in Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders* in which, after marrying a *nouveau riche*, Moll and her new spouse "have a mind to look like Quality for a Week" and decide to visit Oxford in a coach and six, pretending to be nobility. Their stay includes talks with the Fellows of the colleges, and they also visit the rarities there, which is presumably a reference to the collection in the Ashmolean Museum. Despite the fictionality of the episode (Defoe could have visited the museum, which opened in 1683, but such a visit was an anachronism in the case of Moll Flanders), it hints at the connection between being seen viewing a collection of curiosities and the hope that this would enhance one's status. Von Uffenbach, on the other hand, who visited the Ashmolean Museum in 1710, recorded his shock at the admission of "all sorts of country-folk" to the museum, as well as to the Bodleian Library (Franchini et al. 1979: 45-62).

The system of social manners affected not only the choice of the public admitted, but also the mode of presentation of the artefacts in which that public might be expected to take an interest. In the case of Montaigne's collection of *brasiliana*, the inclusion of musical instruments and weapons is faithful to the aristocratic tradition which saw combat and music as the privileged activities of the upper classes (Schnapper 1988: 111), and the appreciation of the warrior-like qualities of the Brazilian Indians at the end of *Des Cannibales* implies that the native peoples of the New World are the last representatives of values which were already declining in Montaigne's Europe[33]. Not surprisingly, that courtier of four kings André Thevet shared Montaigne's inability to conceive of any other image of royalty than the traditional construct in which the king is above all commander-in-chief of the armies. His portrait of Quoniambec, a Tamoio chief, as king of Brazil, therefore meant that his feather diadem could be seen as a crown, his ornaments and jewelry as tokens of a royal costume, and the lodge or *maloca* is designated as a palace (Lestringant 1987b). Though it transports us to a later era, the same aristocratic filter on *americana* is betrayed in

33. For the echoes of the decline of the feudal aristocracy and its eventual incorporation in the life of the court in Montaigne's work, see Kohl 1981: 28.

Gibbon's recollections of an ancestor who had spent a year in Virginia. His passion for heraldry found satisfaction in the decoration of the bark shields and naked bodies of the native Indians in what he took to be the colours and symbols of his favourite science (Kiernan 1989: 89). In collecting and presenting exotic artefacts from distant lands, the European collectors were undoubtedly guided by the ingrained habits of their own sense of taste and aesthetics. Exotic objects could thus come to function within aristocratic contexts which were very different from their original setting. Thus Anthony Pagden writes: "Such items as the greenstone Aztec mask which one of the Medici had set with rubies and mounted in a gilded copper frame is wholly incommensurate with its original purpose, function or value, as either cultural symbol or object of exchange" (Pagden 1993: 33; cf. Acidini Lachinat 1997: 165). Exotic featherwork could function in a similar way: Archduke Ferdinand II included some feathers from one of the pre-Columbian feather headdresses inherited from his father in the helmet that he wore on the occasion of his second marriage (Scheicher 1985: 34). Another case of the quasi-heraldic use of *americana* in an aristocratic context may be detected in the pattern of ostrich feathers on the mantle and hat of a portrait of Lady Elizabeth Pope, painted to celebrate her marriage to Sir William Pope in 1615. Since Elizabeth was the only child of Sir Thomas Watson, one of the largest investors in the Virginia Company, the feathered pattern — as well as the bracelet of pearls and coral — might be an allusion to the riches of America, as well as a tacit allusion to the analogy between England's possession of the New World and Sir William's possession of his wife (Chirelstein 1990)[34].

Another aristocratic figure whose *americana* were interwoven with the fabric of courtly life was the humanist prince Johan Maurits van Nassau-Siegen, governor of the Dutch colony in Brazil from 1637 to 1644. He gave away numerous collections before his return to the Netherlands, many of which must have enriched private collections of curiosities, but it was above all in the Mauritshuis in The Hague where Brazilian feathers, ivory, various kinds of wood and animal skins, set amid the frescoes presumably based on the Brazilian paintings by Albert Eckhout and Frans Post, brought Brazil to

34. Visitors to the courtly masques designed by Inigo Jones, such as George Chapman's Memorable Masque of 1613, could see white ostrich feathers on the figure of an Indian torchbearer (Peacock 1990: 172).

the attention of numerous distinguished visitors (Mason 1989: 40). One of those who visited the Mauritshuis in December 1644 even attributed the natural objects a higher status than that of the works of art on display, for while works of art had the secondary status of representations which referred to an absent reality, the exotic objects on display themselves partook of that very reality (Worp 1915: 107). Another way of trying to bring Brazil to life in a Dutch setting was the execution of a dance by naked Brazilian Indians during a feast organised in the Mauritshuis in the same year, to the horror of certain preachers and their wives who were among the guests (Worp 1915: 52). However, no proper description of the interior was made during Johan Maurits' lifetime, and it was lost to posterity when the Mauritshuis was gutted by fire in 1704. Perhaps the best reminder of the two ship-loads of *brasiliana* which Johan Maurits brought back with him is the splendid painting in oil on paper of two South American tortoises which is still in the collection of the Mauritshuis and has been attributed to Albert Eckhout (Whitehead and Boeseman 1989: 94ff).

Such courtly settings for the display of *americana* passed them on to a select public through an aristocratic filter, reinforcing the values of the princely *Kunst-* and *Wunderkammern*. Within this mode of presentation, the New World was displayed as being inextricably linked to the colonial adventures of the French, Dutch and English in Brazil and North America, and objects of value or pride to their native owners acquired the status of huntsmen's trophies. Though the impact of such presentations must have been considerable, those who had access to them were relatively few in number.

The fact that the destination of the *americana* was in collections of curiosities had effects on the selection of objects collected as well as on their display, for to feature among other rarities they had to be precisely that — strikingly unusual or singular. This was one of the features of the cosmological collections which may strike us as paradoxical today: on the one hand, they set out to display the rich variety of the world in a number of different facets; on the other hand, the fact that each object on display was marvellous tended to enhance the differences between objects, making the task of building up a representative collection impossible. To cite Céard:

> The order of the world can only evade the confused monotony of identity through the existence of differences. There are no two creatures or things which are absolutely the same. In this sense, each creature or thing is a rarity. This rarity may seem unimportant to us if it is only a question of a distinctive feature which does not appear to affect its nature; and yet, since the order of the world only exists by virtue of differences, the most tenuous distinctive feature has its place within this order. It is precisely one of the functions of extreme rarities, monsters, prodigies, marvels to make us aware of these differences. Nature, which is not a simple given, but a living being engaged in constant activity, does not cease to multiply differences in order to perfect its order and to maintain its coherence at the same time: differences are thus marks (and, in this sense, signs) of this activity [1977: xi].

The exotic object might be striking as a paragon of its kind (like the animals displayed in zoos); or it might be striking as a deviation from its kind (like the animals displayed in freak-shows and fairs). On both counts, however, the collection created a context in which each object was deemed to have importance (otherwise it would not be there); to be in some way representative of the wonders of the world (the collection as *theatrum mundi, liber mundi* or microcosm); and to be in another way singular (the collection as a cabinet of curiosities).

This creation of a new context of display, with a heightened sensitivity to the brilliant and the bizarre, resulted in an unusually rich visual diet. The objects put on display had to be striking, and they should preferably be paragons of their kind. We find the latter aspect, for example, in the explanatory text to an allegorical frontispiece for a catalogue of the cabinet of Levinus Vincent (1658-1727). The figure personifying North and South America is described as reclining in a hammock with a basket full of "beautiful curiosities" (*schoone vremdigheden*) under her left arm, while in her right hand she holds a bow at the ready to shoot down birds. Their feathers are to adorn her hair, but "the best" (*de beste daar uit*) are to be sent to Vincent's cabinet (Vincent 1706: 10)[35].

As we have seen, the detachment of the fragment from one cultural setting and its display in an entirely different one was accompanied by an

35. The Dutch merchant in drapery Levinus Vincent (1658-1727) moved from Amsterdam to Haarlem in 1705, providing him with a reason to have the first catalogue of his collection of rarities published in Amsterdam the following year (Mason 1998: 92-99).

enhancement of the symbolic efficacy of the object. As a striking metonym, it could have more force than the whole of which it was a part. At the same time, this exotic quality of the object in a collection of curiosities was contagious, for if every object on display was a curiosity, each of the objects might be supposed to be equally curious. This levelling effect of the presentation was an elevating one, which tended to make everything more rather than less exotic.

The principle that exotic objects belong with other exotic objects further created a notion of the globe as the source of wonder which exceeded geographical boundaries. It was not the specific geographical provenance of the artefact which was important, but its capacity as a singular object to partake in the world of *exotica* in general within a cabinet of curiosities. This too can be illustrated from the collection of the Amsterdam merchant Levinus Vincent. In a large cabinet in his *Theatrum Naturae Mundum* was a collection of

> Indian rarities, artfully made, consisting of jewellery, clothing, ornaments made from beautiful and strange feathers and other materials, cleverly constructed baskets, a rifle, tools and weapons, as well as many other curiosities which have reached us from diverse shores and which brevity prevents us from citing here [Vincent 1706: 26].

The word *Indian* in such a context could mean Asian as well as North or South American[36]. On the accompanying engraving[37], at any rate, we can distinguish a string of wampum from North America, Indian featherwork and a bow and arrows, as well as a toucan preserved in a jar, but the

36. One wonders how many of the sixty pieces of "Indian" hand weapons, arrows, shafts, javelins and bows that Rembrandt owned came from the Americas (New Netherland?) and how many from Asia; on the deficiencies of catalogues as far as provenances are concerned, see Feest 1995: 335.

37. For the content and arrangement of Vincent's collection we have three types of sources: various catalogues, ranging from the *Wondertoneel der Nature* (1706) to the *Korte beschrijving* (1726); the prints to illustrate the contents of the various cabinets, which were included in the 1706 publication; and a unique drawing of the interior of Vincent's cabinet in 1703 by the amateur Jan Velten (Bergvelt and Kistemaker (eds) 1992, cat. nos. 22 and 285n respectively).

weapons on display also include an Indonesian kris, which may be assumed to have reached the Netherlands via the United East India Company.

This lack of geographical specificity was a feature of all the curiosity cabinets. In this respect there is a striking disparity between the imprecisions in the specification of provenance and the geographical knowledge that had been acquired by this time by European travellers. The title of a seventeenth-century catalogue of Léonard Bernon's cabinet in La Rochelle is revealing in this respect: *Recueil des pièces curieuses apportées des Indes, d'Egypte & d'Ethiopie & de plusieurs autres lieux. Avec des raretés servant à la personne d'un général des Sauvages* (Paris, 1670). While the author gives the Antilles, Madagascar, Java, Bantam and other places as the provenance of his grains and fruits, he fails to specify where this "savage general" came from (Schnapper 1988: 109, 226). In his various surveys of the presence of artefacts from the Americas in the *Wunderkammern* of Europe, Feest provides many examples of such geographical incongruities. For instance, an early colonial Mexican obsidian mirror from the Vienna *Schatzkammer* was originally thought to be Chinese, as were the characters on Mexican codices, and Mexican objects were often referred to as "Moorish;" the Brussels "Montezuma's mantle" is Brazilian, not Mexican; a Brazilian pipe in the catalogue to the collection of Ole Worm has a North American provenance; a "leathern Japanese little ship" in an inventory of the *Kunstkammer* in Prague is a kayak; a "garment of an Indian priest" in the Cospi museum is a woman's parka; and so on (Feest 1985, 1990, 1992).

Amid this welter of geographical guessing, there is a dominant tendency: the assumption that Brazil can serve as an iconographical model for the Americas as a whole. Hence allegories of the four continents, which replaced the triad of Europe, Africa and Asia after the discovery of the New World, and which make their appearance at the same time as the first European *Wunderkammern*, are based primarily on Brazil, with hardly any reference to Mexico or North America (Poeschel 1985: 185ff)[38].

38. In particular, she remarks: "the iconographic characteristics of the personifications of America are thus very restricted by comparison with the sources, and remain such for centuries" (Poeschel 1985: 187).

In a comprehensive survey of the relevant iconographical sources, William Sturtevant (1988) has referred to a process he calls "Tupinambisation." One of the earliest representations of native Americans is a woodcut broadsheet published in 1505, depicting a number of Tupinamba Indians engaged in cannibal practices, dressed in feathered skirts and headdresses. Though only two copies of this source are still extant, it would appear to have had a decisive impact at the time. Reinforced by the illustrations of Tupinamba in the works of Hans Staden, André Thevet and Jean de Léry, it was not only the primary sources for allegorical representations of the continent America, but it even affected the iconography of the North American Plains Indians as well (Sturtevant 1990; Mason 1993a). Eventually, after the adoption of this stereotype image of the American Indian in Europe, it was adopted by the Indians themselves.

The European iconography of the Indian was thus not based on the Caribbean population which Columbus encountered in the Antilles, but on the Tupinamba of Brazil encountered by Pedro Alvares Cabral and Amerigo Vespucci around 1500, only to disappear in the course of the seventeenth century (Boucher 1992: 18ff)[39]. Montaigne was only following this privileged position of Brazil in 1580 when he based the American observations contained in his essay *Des Cannibales* on the evidence of a man who had spent years in Brazil as an interpreter and on three Brazilian Indians whom he had met in Rouen after the siege of 1562. In the later essay *Des Coches*, first published in 1588, Montaigne returns to the New World to describe the magnificence of Peru and Mexico, but the apparent contamination of his account by some of the themes of *Des Cannibales* suggests that the portrayal of the states of Mexico and Peru through Brazilian eyes can best be seen as a case of "discrete Tupinambisation" (Lestringant 1990: 251; Mason 2000c)[40]. Since Montaigne's collection of

39. Boucher's account should be read with caution: see the critical remarks in Mason 1993b: 95-107.

40. By the 1590s the word "Tupinamba" was even being used as a synonym for Amerindians (Lestringant 1990: 247, n. 43). The persistence of the phenomenon of "Tupinambization" can be gauged from the following mid-seventeenth century example. In a letter appended to his *Petits Traitez en forme de Lettres escrites à diverses personnes studieuses* (Paris, 1648), the pyrrhonist François La Mothe Le Vayer records the case of a man called Lambel who could speak all manner of languages in his sleep. After the man had replied in Canadian to a question in Canadian, and in English to a question in English, a certain

americana appears to have been confined to objects from Brazil, he is thus deprived of visual supports for his account of the Aztecs and the Inca, and his Brazilian "reading" of America moves in to fill this vacuum. In fact, Frank Lestringant's characterisation of Montaigne's geography as "aleatory" (1990: 144) is very apt, since it is hard to imagine what Montaigne thought corresponded precisely to what he called the *païs infini* of the New World.

This notion of an "aleatory" geography is as accurate a description of the collections of curiosities as it is of Montaigne's textual representations of the New World. Moreover, if we move from strictly textual representations to visual representations of the same period[41], the same lack of attention to geographical precision can be discerned. Of course, the phenomenon is not confined to the process of "Tupinambisation," as the following citation makes clear:

> Artists lacking appropriate models often assumed that all non-Europeans resembled each other, and transferred images from known cultures (classical, Oriental, or African) to the New World setting. More common still was the assumption that Indians and their artifacts vary little: Brazilian Indians appear in Mexico, Patagonians are found in central New York, Florida Indians hold Brazilian clubs, Natchez Indians in Louisiana use a North Carolina temple, and Pocahontas wears a Tupinamba feather costume [Sturtevant 1976: 418][42].

Monsieur de Guitaut uttered the words 'Paraousti Satouriona', which he had come across in André Thevet's portrait of a so-called King of Florida, published in 1584 in the French cosmographer's *Vrais Pourtraits*. When Lambel responded by babbling in his sleep, a sailor who happened to be among the twenty-five or so persons present declared that he was speaking the language of the Tupinamba. In his eyes, at least, there was no reason to suppose that the Indians of Florida were any different from the Tupinamba of Brazil (Lestringant 1991a: 318).

41. It is worth noting that the evaluation of visual representations as against textual representations has changed over the years. Whitehead gives the example of the Latin descriptions of Tupinamba bows and arrows given by Marcgrave, which are perhaps based on actual handling of the objects in Brazil. Despite their usefulness, he claims, "they simply cannot rival the wealth of data to be extracted from the superb picture of a Tupinamba Indian holding perhaps even the same bow and arrows and painted by Marcgrave's colleague Albert Eckhout" (Whitehead 1987: 141). For critical comments on this overdependence on Eckhout's paintings as sources of ethnographic data, see Mason 2001 a and Alvarado Pérez and Mason (in press).

42. See Massing 1991.

In the illustrations of Book II of the collection of travel accounts known as the *Great Voyages*, published by Theodor de Bry from 1590 onwards, the images of the Timucua of Florida, based on drawings by Jacques Le Moyne de Morgues, include not only European hoes, Aztec headgear and a curious version of an Aztec tunic, but also a profusion of Tupinamba clubs. Le Moyne thus not only "Tupinambised" Florida, he "Mexicanised" it too. Le Moyne's source for some of these representations may have been illustrated works, but he could also have had access to collections of exotic objects in Paris or London (Lestringant 1990: 186-188).

The engravings in the early volumes of De Bry's *Great Voyages* and the woodcut illustrations to Thevet's *Singularitez de la France Antarctique* can probably be counted among the iconographical sources of the *Album des habitans du Nouveau Monde* by Antoine Jacquard, a French engraver from Poitiers whose activities can be situated between 1613 and 1640 (Hamy 1907 a). This set of engravings represents men, women and children of the New World, each figure or pair of figures set within a classicising architectural framework. On the frontispiece and the first two plates we see pairs of children at play. The following two plates are of naked women and children dancing together in pairs (Fig. I). The remaining eight plates, however, are of men, each occupying a separate niche, depicted in a variety of aggressive poses. Some of them are engaged in acts of cannibalism; others carry human or animal victims over their shoulders; one is flayed, his skin dangling over his shoulder; and one has been reduced to the macabre figure of a skeleton (Figs. II and III).

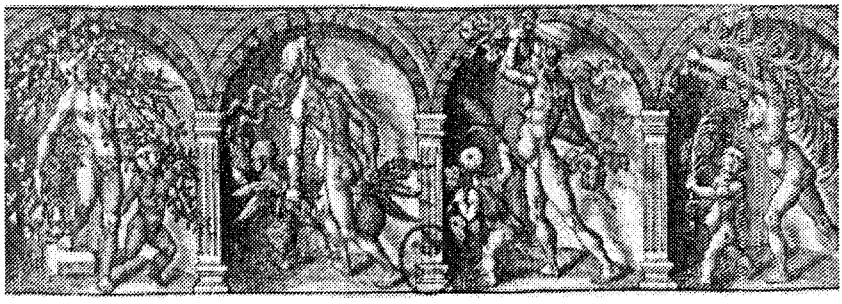

Figure I (Phot. Bibl. Nat. Paris)

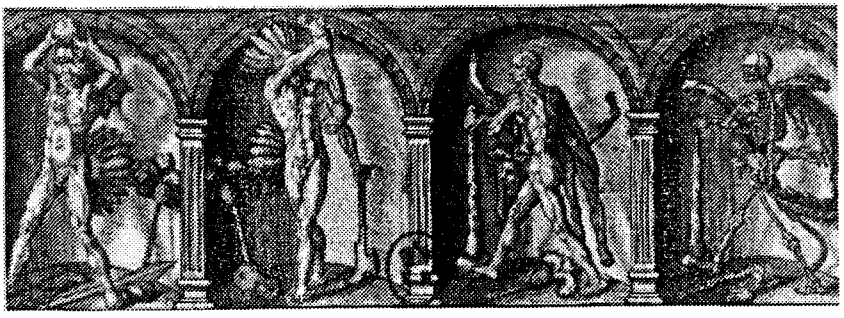

Figure II (Phot. Bibl. Nat. Paris)

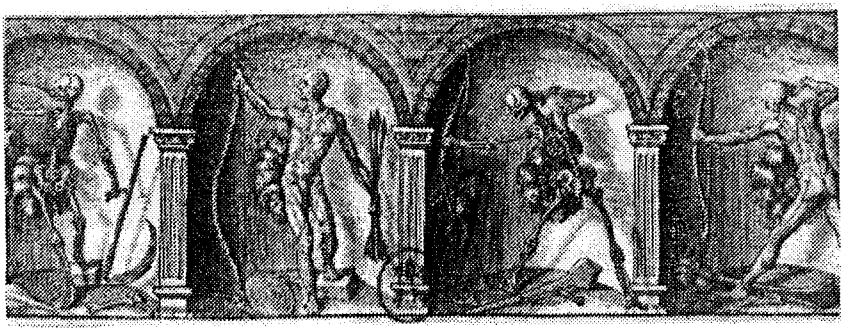

Figure III (Phot. Bibl. Nat. Paris)

The artist was drawing on artistic tastes of the end of the sixteenth century in the elongated female figures, and the skeleton and flayed man are derived from the anatomical collections of Andreas Vesalius and his followers (Mason 1992). For present purposes, however, it is not the human figures themselves which concern us, but the objects portrayed in their vicinity. Among the flora depicted are palms, pineapples, gourds and ears of corn; the fauna include a flying fish, a serpent with a forked tongue, and a toucan. Among the cultural artefacts are various maracas and a hammock. The following identifications of the weapons wielded by the men have been made: a Tupinamba club, a *boutou* from Guyana, an Antillean or Gê club[43], Tupi shields, and weapons from Florida and the Upper Amazon. The hair-styles seem to be variously Huron, Tupinamba and Virginian.

It is possible to match the toucan and maracas with those illustrated in the *Jardin et Cabinet poétique de Paul Contant*, one of the poetic catalogues accompanied by reproductions of the plants and animals[44] from the collection of curiosities of Paul Contant, a French apothecary and fellow townsman of the engraver Jacquard. Contant received numerous curiosities from his circle of friends and acquaintances, such as a one-eyed lamb, armadillos, swordfish, and a thirteen-foot long crocodile. In particular, the arms dealer Moriceau, from a family which had been trading with America for generations, was able to provide him with *exotica* from the New World (Schnapper 1988: 223-225).

There was a lively interest in Indians after the arrival of the Tupinamba brought from Maranhão by the French officer Razilly and displayed in Paris in 1613 (Hamy 1908: 234), but it has been argued that there is no reason to suppose that Jacquard borrowed the ethnographic attributes of his engravings from them (Hamy 1907a: 234). It is more likely that he took them from the collection of curiosities of Contant. In that case, the Jacquard engravings can be added to the corpus of representations of America based on the presentation of *americana* in the European curiosity cabinets.

43. This weapon is wielded by the second f igure in plate 6 (Fig. 2); on its identification see Hamy 1907a: 236; Lestringant 1991: p. 224 n. 23.

44. One of the first illustrated catalogues of a collection in France was that of the cabinet of Paul Petau, engraved under his supervision in 1609-12 and published around 1612-13, shortly before his death in 1614 (Anonymous 1966).

There are a number of parallels between the mode of presentation of exotic objects in the collection and the mode of representation practised by the engraver. First, there is the same lack of geographical precision in both cases. Despite the presence of a strong Tupinamba colouring, the artefacts associated with the human figures are taken from a variety of American provenances. Second, the combination of the presentation of material artefacts in the apothecary's collection with a written commentary in a literary form has its parallel in the way the engravings combine a realistic portrayal of human figures, fauna and flora with Mannerist references to classical and Vesalian iconography. Third, in the case of both presentation and representation, the presence of certain bizarre objects has the effect of increasing the exotic quality of each and every object presented or represented. This is the levelling effect of collections of curiosities described earlier. In the case of Contant's collection (as we know it from the catalogues) the juxtaposition of a canoe, bat, toucan or swordfish implies that they share an equal degree of strangeness. Relatively "normal" lizards become exoticised when they feature in the same context as a one-eyed lamb or an eight-footed anomaly. The armadillo becomes even more exotic when juxtaposed with a dragon and a two-headed pigeon. The same tendency can be seen to be at work in Jacquard's engravings. The relatively innocuous scenes of children playing or of women and children dancing are rendered more exotic by their disposition in the same sequence of representations which contains the savage male cannibals. The sparring matches of the children acquire the sinister undertones of early lessons in the grim combats practised by the male adults, and the lively poses of the dancing women bear too close a resemblance to the aggressive thrusts of the males once they are viewed within the whole sequence.

Faithful to the context?

Discussions of early representations of America have generally tended to operate in terms of the degree to which they accurately represent an absent ethnographic reality. Thus in presenting a list of 268 depictions of native Americans up to 1590, Sturtevant introduces it as "the catalogue of extant illustrations prior to de Bry and having some claim to ethnographic accuracy" (Sturtevant 1976: 420, 1991). Hamy's comment on the Brazilian

figures on a mid-sixteenth-century bas-relief in Rouen was: "il ne faut pas leur demander cette vérité ethique qui échappe alors à la plupart des artistes, peintres ou sculpteurs" (Hamy 1907b: 6). Similarly, in a study of representations of the New World from 1493 to the volumes published by De Bry a century later, Falk has drawn a distinction between those representations of poor artistic quality but high ethnographic value, on the one hand, and those of good artistic quality but little ethnographic value, on the other hand (Falk 1987). Within this period further distinctions may be made between inaccurate representations of the physiognomies of Amerindians versus relatively more accurate portrayals of hammocks, weapons and other ethnographic objects (Hamy 1907a: 226); or between the relative ease of assimilation of botanical and zoological objects in the eyes of Renaissance artists, on the one hand, and the difficulty they encountered in reproducing crafted objects from the New World (Dacos 1969).

All of these accounts imply an opposition which also featured in the description of the *ART/artifact* exhibition: that between aesthetic considerations and fidelity to the ethnographic context. There the discussion was centred on the presentation of objects, while it is now focused on their representation. There is a fundamental difference in poetics involved in the transition from the contiguity with which an American artefact which partook of the New World could metonymically present a part of that world, to the inevitably secondary nature of a visual representation which could and can only stand for a world which it will never actually touch. Nevertheless, even though presentations imply a visible and tangible connection of the objects in collections with the totality of which they are fragments, it would be hazardous to suppose an enhanced fidelity to the "original" context on the basis of that contiguity.

Both the metonymy of presentation and the metaphor of representation are founded on an absence: the absence of the rest of the whole of which the metonymic presentation is a part; or the absence for which the representation is a substitute[45]. In the gap marked by this absence — in the process of the transfer of the objects to a collection, or in that of their

45. Despite the enormous differences between their respective positions, this is a point on which Jacques Derrida and Carlo Ginzburg are in agreement (Derrida 1967: 372; Ginzburg 1991).

translation to a representation — they were exoticised. The exotic quality of both collections and representations does not reside in the nature of the objects (re)presented. The difficulty of assimilating crafted objects was not because they were exotic, but they were made exotic because they were difficult to assimilate. Not only do we make fragments; we make exotic fragments; and we make fragments exotic.

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