

NONA

FORBOTTEN
FRUIT

Lucy Mackintosh

“A Long-Forgotten Art”: *Two Māori Flutes* *in the Peabody Essex* *Museum*

*Already we are boldly launched upon the deep, but soon
we shall be lost in its unshored, harborless immensities.*

Herman Melville, 1851¹

In May 1807, Captain William Richardson and the crew of the *Eliza* sailed into the harbor at Salem, Massachusetts, after an absence of two years. The *Eliza*, laden with luxury goods from Canton, docked at one of the dozens of wharfs lining the harbor, alongside other trading vessels recently returned from the East Indies and China. But while most trading captains had followed the well-established trade routes to the East, Richardson had taken a longer, less familiar route, around the bottom of Australia and into Oceania. In the cargo hold of the *Eliza*, among the silk, cotton, tea, porcelain, and spices, lay a collection of objects that Richardson had acquired on the journey. His collection, now held in the Peabody Essex Museum, contains a number of early, significant, and impressive Māori objects from New Zealand, including a *pare* (door lintel), *papahou* (treasure box), and a shark-tooth knife.² But it is two small, delicate flutes that have caught and held my attention.

Traders such as Richardson were among the first Americans to enter the Pacific and exchange goods, objects, and ideas with Polynesians, yet little is known about these early commercial voyages, which were not as well documented as scientific expeditions to the

1

Pūtōrino (flute), n.d.
Wood, 16¼ × 1½ in.
(41.2 × 4 cm). Peabody
Essex Museum, Salem,
Massachusetts. Gift of
Captain William
Richardson, 1807, E5515.



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Pacific.³ The early experiences of these people from different worlds, separated by the vast Pacific Ocean and encountering each other for the first time, have largely vanished. Historian and anthropologist Nicholas Thomas has suggested that one way to address the poor documentation of these early European voyages to the Pacific could be to focus more closely on museum objects, working toward a framework “that is empowered by the object we have—the artifact itself—rather than disempowered by what we lack—the contextual information.”⁴

Yet museum objects, displayed in the clean, quiet space of the gallery, can sometimes seem removed from us and appear as beautiful but static, lifeless products. As archaeologist Michael Shanks has said, “We can forget that objects haunt. We can fail to feel the ghosts.”⁵ But the Māori flutes in Richardson’s collection are connected intimately with life and resist being represented as inert, fixed objects. The flutes, crafted for mouths, fingers, and breath, draw me closer, to inspect their intricately carved surfaces and contemplate their dark interiors.

The first flute is called a *pūtōrino* (fig. 1). It is a cylinder about forty centimeters long, made from a single piece of kauri or totara wood split in two, hollowed out, then bound together again with rows of flax fiber. In the middle of the cylinder is a carved face with an opening in the shape of a mouth. The second flute is called a *nguru* (fig. 2). It is a shorter tube, about fifteen centimeters long, made from a single piece of hollowed wood. It has a curved end and several small openings surrounded by *pāua* (abalone) discs. The frame is elaborately carved with sinuous lines and small nodes.

Gaston Bachelard (1884–1962) argued that some things can occupy a space that resonates beyond their small size. Such a thing, he wrote, can achieve “conquest of its space, its power of expansion over and beyond the surfaces by means of which a geometrician would like to define it.” These objects, according to Bachelard, have a hidden grandeur. They are invested with intimate space, which becomes the center of all space. “For each object” he explained, “distance is the present, the horizon exists as much as the center.”⁶ If we were to turn to the *nguru* and *pūtōrino* and focus on them closely, might we glimpse fleeting moments of lived experience during these epic voyages and early encounters? This essay follows the flutes as they weave through space and time, tracing their passages and organizing power, exploring their hidden grandeur and examining their potential to deliver sensuous experience in the face of archival silence.



2
Nguru (flute), n.d.
Pāua shell (abalone, or
Haliotis), wood, shell,
5¾ × 1¾ in. (14.6 ×
4.4 cm). Peabody Essex
Museum, Salem,
Massachusetts. Gift of
Captain William
Richardson, 1807, E5520.

Captain Richardson left Salem on board the *Eliza* in May 1805, at the height of Salem’s short-lived era as a prosperous international trading port.⁷ Following the American Revolution, Salem traders were among the first Americans to make the long and treacherous journeys around Cape Horn and the Cape of Good Hope to open up new trade routes to China and the East Indies.⁸ Salem vessels left with rum, tobacco, clothing, and other goods, and returned one or two years later with sugar, coffee, pepper, porcelain, and silks, which were sold within America or exported to other markets.

Shortly after the scientific expeditions of Wallis, Bougainville, Cook, and others to the Pacific in the mid to late eighteenth century, Salem traders began sailing via the Pacific, stopping at ports along the way to collect products in demand in China such as otter and seal skins, sandalwood, and *bêche-de-mer* (sea slugs).⁹ Maps of the world were constantly being updated to incorporate the “newest discoveries” of explorers in the Pacific (fig. 3). These early commercial voyages initiated a period of closer exchange between Europeans and Pacific Islanders, bringing people, things, and ideas from around the Pacific into contact with Europeans and with one another for the first time.¹⁰



3
Bowles's New Four-Sheet Map of the World...
 (detail). (London: Printed for the proprietors Bowles & Carver, no. 69 St. Paul's Church Yard, [1800?]). Color, mounted on linen, 39 3/8 x 46 1/4 in. (100 x 117.5 cm). National Library of Australia, Canberra, Map RM 35.

An incomplete logbook of a crew member on the *Eliza* voyage, together with shipping records in newspapers, indicates that the *Eliza* sailed around the Cape of Good Hope and stopped in Mauritius before taking the new “easternmost route” around the southern coast of Australia and traveling to Canton via Port Jackson (Sydney), the Norfolk Islands, and possibly Padang in Sumatra.¹¹ The logbook notes the *Eliza*'s passage through areas yet untraveled: “Gentle breezes and pleasant weather, three islands in Sight, not laid on the Chart.”¹² The vessel left Canton on December 25, 1806, and returned home via an unknown route in mid-1807 with the Pacific objects on board.¹³



Researchers believe the New Zealand objects originally came from the Bay of Islands, an area at the top of the North Island frequently visited by Europeans at the turn of the nineteenth century.¹⁴ Architectural

historian Deidre Brown has noted that Richardson’s collection is the earliest dated and provenanced museum collection of carvings from Tai Tokerau (Northland, including Auckland and areas north of Auckland) and that the carvings have always been regarded as *taonga* (cultural treasures) by Māori. *Taonga iti* (small treasures), including musical instruments, were often kept inside their owner’s house or storehouse, sometimes in a *papahou*, alongside other intimate possessions such as hair adornments, pendants, and feathers (fig. 4).¹⁵

Like all *taonga*, each musical instrument was unique and possessed its own spiritual power, life force, and spirit.¹⁶ Anthropologist Amiria Henare has explained that *taonga* instantiate whole ancestral lineages; they *are* ancestral efficacy and power in specific form, rather than merely representing or carrying these concepts.¹⁷ *Taonga*, according to anthropologist Anne Salmond, can bring about “a fusion of men and ancestors and a collapse of distance in space-time. . . . The power of [such things can] give men absolute access to their ancestors.”¹⁸ A musician’s performance on the flutes could break down spatial and temporal distance, connecting distant places, ancestors, and gods with the present in a powerful yet ephemeral way. To play the *nguru*, a musician placed his mouth against the open, curved end, inlaid with *pāua*, and moved his fingers across the holes on the body of the flute, producing either a soft, mellifluous sound or a loud, high-pitched whistle.¹⁹ Musicians may also have played the *nguru* with the nose, creating a less controlled sound with extraneous noises. According to Māori elders, the breath from the nose is a manifestation of *mauri* (life force), and the stray sounds produced from the *nguru* are the echoes of ancestors.²⁰

4

Papahou (treasure box),
n.d. Totara wood, *pāua*
shell (abalone, or *Haliotis*),
tooth, stain, 6 × 30 × 10 in.
(15.2 × 76.2 × 25.4 cm).
Peabody Essex Museum,
Salem, Massachusetts.
Gift of Captain William
Richardson, 1807, E5505.



To play the *pūtōrino*, a Māori musician placed his mouth over the end of the flute or over the carved face in the center of the instrument, and adjusted his hand over one of the openings, producing a deep sound that trembled, much like the “bubbling of water into a calabash held under the surface.”²¹ The instrument had a number of different voices, including a loud male voice for summoning people, a softer female voice for mourning, and a third voice producing unpredictable sounds and which was considered to be the voices of Raukatauri, the goddess of flutes, and her daughter, Wheke, who reside in the interior of the *pūtōrino*.²² According to some traditional music experts, musicians may also have recited or sung words into the *pūtōrino*.²³ Little is known about the unusual interior shaping of this flute, since the chamber is not visible from the outside and few of the traditional examples kept in museums have been opened.²⁴

A nineteenth-century Tai Tokerau song written for the *pūtōrino* (and still known in the area today) narrates a journey across the Pacific Ocean from New Zealand to Tonga, Tahiti, and Hawaiiki (the mythological homeland of Māori), naming ancestors, events, and places along the way (fig. 5).²⁵ The song was part of a complex oral tradition that transmitted information from generation to generation about past migrations across the Pacific, navigation techniques, and genealogies.²⁶ It described the Pacific as a place of connections and crossings between ancestral homes, the gods, and the underworld, conveying a very different way of relating to the Pacific than the nineteenth-century European notion of a vast unconquered territory on the “edge” of the world measured in a series of lines and grids.²⁷

The flutes also encouraged the collapse of space and time by requiring an intimate engagement between player and instrument. Each flute was unique and carefully carved, its shape determined by its place in Māori cosmogony and its carvings materially incorporating the shapes of the sounds, ancestors, and stories associated with the flutes. Flutes were often carved with a face at the blown end, so that the nose of the flute met the player’s nose, in a *hongi*, or traditional greeting of sacred breath. A face could also be carved at the end of the flute, where the breath exits, which was considered to be the face of the music.²⁸ These intimate, momentary interactions, the joining of a performer’s lips and nose with those of the flute, the flow of breath in and out of the flute’s interior, and the mingling of saliva with wood, created a mutual involvement that challenged the separation, or boundaries, between person and thing, subject and object, meaning and materiality, and past and present.

5
Extract from “He Waiata Pūtōrino” (“The Song of the Pūtōrino”). Recorded by Hare Hongi in 1918. Hare Hongi, “An ancient ‘Flute-song’”, *The Journal of the Polynesian Society*, 27 (1918), 222–224.

He Waiata Pūtōrino

[...]

*...Tawhiri-ma-tea!
Tukua a au kia eke
I te awhiowhio
I te pu-roro-hau
E tuku ki te muri*

*Whakahinga a au nei
Te one ki Rangaunu
Tāku mumu-hau
Taka ki Manawatawhi
Ka whara ki te uru*

*Te amokura, e!
Marunga mai koe
Te tai-Tokerau
E tu ki Tu-tonganui*

*Whakaruru ana ko Te au ki Manuka
Nga tai pēhi-riri
Nāu, e Kupe!
Ka hora ki te Ao*

*Whakarongo ake ana
Nga tai-tangirua
Roto Tawhitinui;
Mihi mai, mihi mai;
Te Tai-kakare-rua*

*Te Whaka-Tawhaki nei a au
Kia utaina atu
Te Paparoa-i-Hawaiki
E tuku ki te Po*

[...]

The Song of the Pūtōrino

[...]

Lord of the tempests!
Let me ascend
Upon the whirlwind
Upon the storm-wind
To be borne to the north.

I would be borne over
The sands of Rangaunu
And the humming winds
Around Manawatawhi
And on to the north-west.

Thou amokura there!
Thou hast come along
From the northern seas
Of the Tonga-island group

The wondrous calms
Attend the currents of
Manuka [equatorial]
The anger-suppressing tides
By thee, O Kupe!
Spread abroad on the earth.

There might I listen
To the sea-duet
In the Tahiti group;
Greeting welcome to me;
These tides of double current [equatorial]

As I, like the god-like Tawhaki
Am borne to be landed
On the mountain ranges of Hawaiki,
Ere passing to the Shades below.

[...]



We do not know exactly when, where, or how Richardson obtained the *pūtōrino* and other Oceanic objects, since there is no evidence to suggest that the *Eliza* visited New Zealand.²⁹ Given the substantial size of some of the objects, it is likely that Richardson acquired them from one of the ports he visited. Port Jackson (Sydney) is a strong possibility, since there was already a steady flow of trans-Tasman commercial traffic by 1805.³⁰ Richardson had ample time to collect the artifacts during his three-month stay in Port Jackson, where he sold six thousand gallons of brandy and Jamaican rum and recruited ex-convicts as crewmen.³¹ It may have been whalers who transported the artifacts from New Zealand, since they were regularly visiting the Bay of Islands in the first few years of the nineteenth century.³² Whalers, like traders, tended to be “casual collectors,” preferring small, portable, carefully carved, and rare artifacts.³³

Scholars often interpret early exchanges between Māori and Europeans as ones in which both parties shared a common understanding of the transaction, but others have pointed out that Māori and Europeans had very different understandings of reality and the way it could materialize during these exchanges.³⁴ Māori had a well-established trading system before the arrival of Europeans, which included exchanging *taonga* between individuals, family groups, and tribes to acknowledge relationships, friendships, and other significant social events. When Europeans began visiting New Zealand regularly in the late eighteenth century, Māori showed interest in new items on offer, particularly metal objects, that could be incorporated into their own systems, and often exchanged them for food or *taonga* (fig. 6).³⁵ While Europeans viewed a transaction as the final stage in a relationship between two parties, Māori viewed the gift of *taonga*, which instantiated ancestors and the power and prestige of a lineage, as the beginning of an ongoing relationship between the parties and the lineages of these parties. Even though the object had been removed physically following a transaction, it continued to generate ties across territorial and cultural boundaries, stitching the parties together, then and in the future.³⁶



For Richardson, the objects served a very different purpose. Richardson was a founding member of the East India Marine Society, a unique and exclusive organization established in 1799 for “persons who have actually navigated the seas beyond the Cape of Good Hope or Horn.”³⁷ The

6
 Artist of the Chief Mourner [Tupaia], “A Maori Bartering a Crayfish with an English Naval Officer,” from *Drawings, in Indian ink, illustrative of Capt. Cook’s first voyage, 1768–1770, chiefly relating to Otaheite and New Zealand, by A. Buchan, John F. Miller, and others*, f. 11, no. 12. Pencil and watercolor on paper, 105 × 82 in. (267 × 210 cm). The British Library, London, Add. 15508, f.11, no.12.



society included a museum of “natural and artificial curiosities,” which, like other early museums in America, emerged from the European tradition of personal cabinets and was closely linked with late eighteenth-century Enlightenment practices of collecting and categorizing things in the name of science and reason.³⁸ But Salem was primarily a place of enterprise, and the members of the society were particularly interested in “useful and entertaining” knowledge, of the kind that might help them understand and control foreign cultures and markets.³⁹ At the annual banquet of the society in 1804, six months before Richardson embarked on his journey on the *Eliza*, a toast was proposed to “A Cabinet: That every mariner may possess the history of the world.”⁴⁰

When he embarked on the *Eliza* voyage, Richardson was in his midthirties and had already spent over ten years as a shipmaster on voyages around the world.⁴¹ His hardiness and determination come across in a letter written to his father during a trading voyage from Havana to Salem a year before he embarked on the *Eliza* voyage: “I have been under the doct [doctor’s] hands ever since I arrived here but I paid him off yesterday. . . . I do not expect to be any better till I get to sea. I got mine by a bad cold coming down the old straits of Bahamia. As my mates were unacquainted, I was obliged to stand on the Decks day & Knight [*sic*] for fifteen days. I never went into my cabin.”⁴² A portrait of Richardson, painted around 1800, now hangs alongside portraits of other captains in the Peabody Essex Museum. His clothes, pose, and close-lipped smile conform to the accepted portraiture conventions of the time, but he appears younger, livelier, and more robust than his contemporaries (fig. 7).

The founders of the East India Marine Society were America’s first global entrepreneurs, establishing the society at the beginning of a period of enormous market expansion in America.⁴³ In 1831, when Alexis de Tocqueville (1805–1859) visited the United States in the midst of this “market revolution,” he observed that Americans were prudent, self-controlled, anxious, and uncertain of their social and financial situation: “In no country in the world are private fortunes more precarious than in the United States. . . . It is not uncommon for the same man in the course of life to rise and sink again through all the grades that lead from opulence to poverty.”⁴⁴ Historian Ronald Takaki described Tocqueville’s American as “the epitome of the self-controlled and regulated man of enterprise,” for whom physical possessions were an extension of the self and determined his social position.⁴⁵ For Richardson, perhaps, the Oceanic objects served to declare him a man of the



7
Artist unknown,
*Portrait of Captain
William Richardson*,
ca. 1800. Oil on canvas,
25¼ × 18¾ in. (64.1 ×
47.6 cm). Peabody
Essex Museum, Salem,
Massachusetts. Gift
of M. Helen Tibbetts,
1923, M2773.

Enlightenment, of commerce, and of independence, all virtues that helped Salem men move along their life course from mate to supercargo to captain and, finally, to merchant.⁴⁶



Before the flutes reached Salem, they paused for a year or more on board the *Eliza* as it crossed vast distances, weaving in and out of different worlds. Goods collected during the journey were stored in boxes, crates, barrels, and chests in the cargo hold, a giant cavity at the bottom of the ship. Down in the hold, there was a world of things, gathered together from distant places and cultures that had never before interacted, constantly moving and knocking against one another with the motion of

the waves. These things were packed away, yet they were out of place and at large. They were disconnected from their original context but had not yet reached the European world of markets and scientific classifications. I imagine the flutes in the hold, jostling for space among the “100 Tea Setts of assorted China, handsome figures,” the “snow white” cotton cloth, the “chest of 30 yard piece black Satin,” and the soft, smooth, fine Chinese silk, all advertised by Richardson when he returned to Salem.⁴⁷ The *Eliza* was a borderland of sorts, a mobile intermediate space or contact node governed by its own calculated kind of knowledge where different cultures and systems of value came into contact.⁴⁸ It was a space where objects such as the flutes, enveloped by commercial goods in the hold, were in the process of being gathered, quarantined, and redefined under the banner of the expanding Salem empire.

The hold was beneath the feet of the sailors, but the tween deck on many Salem trading vessels was raised to maximize the hold space for cargo, reducing the already cramped living quarters of the crew and enlarging the presence of the hold literally and, perhaps, imaginatively in the minds of the crew members.⁴⁹ Crew moved in and out of the hold regularly and interacted with the goods in a very tactile way. Things were constantly loaded, unloaded, and rearranged as the ship traded around the world. “All hands employed breaking out the cargo and storing . . . it again,” Philip Payn Pinel (1782–1864) noted on board the *Eliza*, after a couple of months at sea. “Employ’d in overhauling the Skins—found them greatly damaged by the Storms,” he recorded later in the journey. “Second officer being in the hold found a Brandy pipe which was stored under the main hatch way both heads of which fell in and all the liquor out,” wrote Pinel on another occasion.⁵⁰

If Richardson had picked up the *nguru* or *pūtōrino* and paused to look at it closely during this journey, what would he have made of it? Improbable though this may seem, there are reasons why a crew member might take one of the flutes out of the hold and bring it into his living quarters. Musical instruments were an important source of entertainment and emotional release on these long, wearisome journeys, and crew members often brought along their own instruments to play in the evenings or to accompany work.⁵¹ While the crew worked long hours under difficult conditions for much of the journey, there were also times when there was little to do. Pinel’s boredom was evident only a few months into the voyage: “This day find ourselves to the Southward of the Equator, after a long and tedious Passage of Sixty-Eight Days.”⁵² The small, portable Māori flutes could easily be slipped into a pocket or a crevice, or passed around a table.

Born in 1769, the same year that Captain Cook made the first European landing in New Zealand, Richardson came of age just as New Zealand was taking shape in the European imagination.⁵³ The Salem and Boston newspapers of the time featured extracts from the journals of European visitors to New Zealand and mused about its commercial possibilities: “It is much to be wished that the flax of New Zealand (phormium tenax) was introduced into this country.”⁵⁴ The articles also reflected the contemporary debate about “noble savages,” often depicting Māori as dangerous and unsophisticated. Not long before the *Eliza* departed Salem in 1805, an article in the *Salem Gazette* inaccurately reported that the French explorer La Perouse had been killed by Māori.⁵⁵ These early European voyages established an enduring vision of the Pacific, later elucidated in Bernard Smith’s seminal historical work, and summarized recently by Matt Matsuda as “a space of paradisiacal idylls, of exoticism, sexuality, and savagery, of escape, or of transit to better things—the fabulous mysteries and wealth of Asia and India.”⁵⁶ Ideas of race were also being played out closer to home, where Americans had built a shared identity as “white people” prior to the Revolution, and in the early nineteenth century were beginning to build a “New World” master narrative that included replacing the “uncivilized” American Indians with the modern and “civilized” order of culture, science, and reason.⁵⁷

Richardson had seen, heard, and experienced more of the world than most of his contemporaries. But could a Salem captain, raised during the “Age of Reason,” with a Christian background and a head for commerce, have looked at the flutes and seen something beyond souvenirs from a “‘savage’ country”?⁵⁸ I picture him on the upper deck, with the world in his head, looking out across the ocean toward the far distance. But he must also have spent some time in the relative calm and quiet of his small cabin. Here, perhaps, he picked up the *nguru* or *pūtōrino*, turned it over slowly, pressed his lips to the mouthpiece, and blew into the tube, wondering, fleetingly, whose lips had touched the mouthpiece, whose breath had flowed through the tube, whose fingers had covered the sound holes, whose face was carved into the wood. I imagine a moment in the cabin of the *Eliza*, on the Pacific Ocean, a place between worlds, when Richardson’s imagination took him beyond the distant horizon, when he fleetingly glimpsed a different, unknowable world embedded in the flute.

It is an imagined moment, but one that considers the possibilities and limits of moving between different worlds, both physically and

conceptually, during these early encounters. Perhaps the most a trader like Richardson could do was to employ familiar Enlightenment tropes when engaging with non-Western objects, viewing them as objects of superstition and ignorance. But at the very least, Bernard Smith points out, the early European voyagers who came home with artifacts set in motion “a contradictory process” that led to the development of European appreciation of nonmimetic art in the twentieth century.⁵⁹ Furthermore, Amiria Henare, Martin Holbraad, and Sari Wastell have noted that while the concepts instantiated by the Polynesian artifacts of these early exchanges may be untranslatable and incommensurable in certain respects, things can conjure the outlines of a different, incomprehensible world right in front of us if they are approached with conceptual creativity. In order to engage with different worlds, they contend, we need to “think through things.”⁶⁰



In December 1807, six months after the *Eliza* had returned to Salem, Richardson died after a “long, distressing” illness, leaving his wife pregnant with their eleventh child.⁶¹ Shortly before his death, Richardson handed the Māori objects to the East India Marine Society.⁶²

More than 130 years later, Ernest Dodge (1913–1980) and Edwin Brewster (1866–1960) picked up the *nguru* and *pūtōrino*. Dodge, a curator at the Peabody Museum (as the East India Marine Society was then known), and Brewster, a science teacher (and author of *Natural Wonders Every Child Should Know*), set out to study the “acoustics and operation” of the flutes. In a paper on the flutes published in 1945, Dodge and Brewster expressed frustration with the inaccurate labeling of museum wind instruments, which, they wrote, “tend to be discussed without much regard to any acoustic principles or much concern for the way in which any particular pipe can actually be blown and the notes which it will actually yield.”⁶³

Like many ethnographic objects donated to museums in the nineteenth century, most of Richardson’s artifacts had been mislabeled when they were recorded in the accession notebook.⁶⁴ The *nguru* and *pūtōrino* were listed as musical instruments from New South Wales, Australia.⁶⁵ For much of the nineteenth century, the instruments had been kept in one of the cluttered curiosity cabinets that lined East India Hall, a capacious room that contained all the society’s objects from China, the East Indies, and Oceania (fig. 8).⁶⁶ Here, objects were arranged by type or function rather than by geography, and served

8

East India Marine Society,
Pacific Collection, 1876,
from Christina Hellmich
Scarangelo, "The Pacific
Collection in the Peabody
Essex Museum, Salem,
Massachusetts," *Pacific
Arts* 13/14 (July 1996): 75



to entertain their audience, who expected museums and galleries to deliver a visual spectacle.⁶⁷ The museum was enormously popular with locals and tourists, who variously described it as “whimsical,” “wonderful,” and a “fairy land.”⁶⁸ Members of the society accompanied visitors through the hall, telling stories about the objects and places they had visited, remembering and reinventing the world, while the visitors became virtual tourists, inventing the world through the objects and narratives.

By the time Dodge and Brewster picked up the flutes in the early 1940s, the Oceanic collection at the Peabody Museum had been rearranged into geographical groups. The *nguru* and *pūtōrino* were now displayed with other Māori objects in the museum, alongside photographs and portraits of Māori.⁶⁹ This shift toward emphasizing the original context of the objects reflected the growth of American ethnographic folklore studies at the end of the nineteenth century and the corresponding interest in temporal and cultural relativism.⁷⁰

Playing the flutes, however, was no easy task for Dodge and Brewster. “The *nguru*, like the *pūtōrino*, offers a problem that is thus far unsolved. . . . Sounding . . . is a long-forgotten art. All that anybody can do now is to make the best guesses he can concerning both.”⁷¹ Traditional Māori musical instruments were scarce and many of the playing techniques had been lost, after missionaries and teachers in New Zealand had consistently discouraged Māori music throughout the nineteenth century.⁷²

Dodge and Brewster turned to research in New Zealand to study the flutes, where Pākehā (European New Zealanders) and Māori

ethnographers had recently consulted with Māori about traditional songs, instruments, and games (fig. 9). Although these surveys were conducted within a framework of Western theories, as Professor Linda Tuhiwai Smith has pointed out, they also demonstrated an understanding of the important connection between objects and Māori concepts, or things and ideas, at a time when anthropologists around the world were moving away from focusing on objects and toward linguistic methodologies.⁷³

As well as researching the flutes, Dodge and Brewster engaged directly with the objects, imagining and attempting to reenact the movements of Māori musicians. They practiced in front of a mirror, watching their own engagement with the instruments as they attempted to perform the past. Their description of the “lip-fipple” method conveys the physical intimacy and intricacy required: “The blow-hole should come about the middle of the red skin of the player’s under lip. Above this, about where the skin of the lip joins the mucous membrane that lines the mouth, between the upper and lower lips, is formed just about such a wind-way as would be used for any transverse flute. The player’s breath does not strike across the opening of the tube as for a pan-pipe, but even more into the tube than for a transverse flute.”⁷⁴

Dodge and Brewster applied scientific and rationalist theories to their subjects, but they also attempted to take the concepts embedded in

9
New Zealand ethnographer, Elsdon Best, recording lehu Nukunuku playing a flute in the traditional manner in 1923. The flute was made out of a gas pipe, since traditional wooden flutes were no longer readily available. Photograph. Alexander Turnbull Library, National Library of New Zealand, Wellington, 1/2-015842-F.



the flutes seriously and to apply them directly. They declared that “the *nguru*, laboriously drilled, carefully shaped, elaborately ornamented, is, like the *pūtōrinō*, unique in all the world, found nowhere outside New Zealand.”⁷⁵ Their efforts were rewarded when they managed to produce sound from the flutes, probably for the first time since the instruments had arrived in Salem. Anthropologist and musician Georgina Born has described music as “an extraordinarily diffuse kind of cultural object,” one that constantly moves between different planes of sociality and intimately mediates between player and instrument, transforming those who engage with it.⁷⁶ Dodge and Brewster haltingly, momentarily, had reanimated this ephemeral cultural object, allowing it to spill over and beyond the physical boundaries of the *nguru* and *pūtōrino*. They concluded that the flutes had “acoustic” purposes, but also that they had “a hint of magic properties.”⁷⁷ Dodge and Brewster had briefly grasped something different, something unclassifiable and incomprehensible, in the flutes. They had sensed the possibilities of a sonic connection with the past.⁷⁸



For the last thirty years, New Zealand musicians and carvers, including Hirini Melbourne, Richard Nunns, and Brian Flintoff, have examined, played, recorded, and composed with Māori traditional instruments from museums around the world. While they initially focused on recording and preserving existing traditional songs, more recently musicians have been composing new songs based on traditional styles (fig. 10).⁷⁹

According to curator Fanny Wonu Veys, these musicians and researchers have literally blown new life into traditional Māori instruments.⁸⁰ Performing with *taonga pūoro* (singing treasures) from museums activates several planes of social mediation. For Māori, it can reanimate a kin group’s ancestral landscape and allow descendants to relive the events of past generations, as well encourage new creative encounters with the instruments.⁸¹ The process of gaining access to the flutes has also initiated relationships between curators and members of the Māori community. Furthermore, the live performances and recordings have activated imagined communities that experience the sound of the flutes as part of New Zealand’s unique soundscape and collective identity. As far as I am aware, the *pūtōrino* and *nguru* in the Peabody Essex Museum have not been played since Dodge and Brewster picked them up in the 1940s, but the sounds created by traditional Māori instrument experts on other flutes around the world allow us to project our associations with the music back into the flutes, continuing the process of bringing it to life.⁸²

Historians are constantly balancing the tension between the known and the unknown, the tangible and the intangible, the personal and the impersonal, and the particular and the general. If we can allow these oppositions to nurture and encourage each other when we engage with the past, so that “space, vast space, is the friend of being,”⁸³ then we may be able to reach beyond our own experiences and glimpse flashes of intense intimate moments among the shadows of a vast, unknown, distant past. The *nguru* and the *pūtōrino* occupy space that reaches beyond their small frames, crossing between the intimate depth of their carved surfaces and the unknowable immensity of their dark interiors, and encouraging conceptual creation between musician and flute, subject and object, idea and thing, and present and past. Their intricate exteriors deliver small shards of lived experiences: the fingers, mouths, and breath of a Tai Tokerau musician, Richardson, Dodge, and Brewster. Their slim, delicate frames slip into rich contexts: the interior of a *papahou*, a capacious cargo hold, cluttered curiosity cabinets, and the dimly lit, reverential galleries of the Peabody Essex Museum. Their unknown, unpredictable interiors conjure the presence of the flute goddess Raukatauri, the vast Pacific Ocean stretching between America and New Zealand, and incomprehensible worlds generated in a passing sound. All these entanglements, moments, and spaces are harbored in the small yet infinite bodies of the *nguru* and *pūtōrino* in the Peabody Essex Museum.

10
Richard Nunns playing
a *pūtōrino*, ca. 2008.



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1 Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick* (1851), 2nd ed., ed. Harrison Hayford and Hershel Parker (New York: Norton, 2002), 151.

2 Jennifer Wagelie, “Māori Art in America: The Display and Collection History of Māori Art in the United States, 1802–2006” (PhD diss., City University of New York, 2007), 25–26. As Wagelie notes, several scholars and curators have written about various objects in Richardson’s collection, including Augustus Hamilton, “A *Maripi*, or Scarifying Knife, and a *Pare*, or Carved Door-Lintel in the Salem Museum, U.S.A.,” *Dominion Museum Bulletin* 3 (1911): 106–7; H. D. Skinner, “A Waka-huia in the Peabody Museum, Salem,” *Journal of the Polynesian Society* 36, 4 (1927): 366; and Deidre Brown, *Northland Māori Wood Carving: Tai Tokerau Whakairo Rākau* (Auckland, NZ: Reed, 2003). The *pare* has also been exhibited at the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago and at Museum of Modern Art in 1946.

3 Thanks to Amiria Salmond for highlighting this point. Ernest Stanley Dodge and J. Phillips offer the most-comprehensive summaries of commercial voyages to the Pacific. Dodge, *New England and the South Seas* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965); Phillips, *Salem and the Indies* (Cambridge, MA: Riverside Press, 1947). For a list of objects brought home by American whalers who made voyages in the Pacific and whose gifts survive in New England museums, see Rhys Richards and Margaret Richards, *Pacific Artifacts Brought Home by American Whalers* (New Bedford, MA: New Bedford Whaling Museum, 2000).

4 Nicholas Thomas, “The Case of the Misplaced Ponchos: Speculations Concerning the History of Cloth in Polynesia,” *Journal of Material Culture* 4, 1 (1999): 7. The Artefacts of Encounter project, based at the University of Cambridge, is currently researching Polynesian artifacts as primary evidence of the exchanges between Polynesians and Europeans between 1769 and 1840. See its website for further discussion: <http://maa.cam.ac.uk/aofe/>.

5 Michael Shanks, “The Life of an Artifact in an Interpretive Archaeology,” *Fennoscandia Archaeologica* 15 (1998): 16.

6 Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* [*Poétique de l’espace*], trans. M. Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), 202–3.

7 *Salem Gazette*, May 17, 1805.

8 C. Copeland, “To the Farthest Port of the Rich East,” *American Heritage Magazine*, Feb. 1955, 1; Phillips, *Salem and the Indies*, 31, 46.

9 The first American vessels to sail to the Northwest Coast via Cape Horn were the Boston vessels *Columbia Rediviva* and *Lady Washington* in 1787. Dodge, *New England and the South Seas*, 24–25, 60–61. The first whaling vessel to enter the Pacific was the *Emilia* in 1789. Richards and Richards, *Pacific Artifacts Brought Home*, 2.

10 Anne Salmond, *Between Worlds: Early Exchanges between Māori and Europeans, 1773–1815* (Auckland, NZ: Viking, 1997), 175.

11 Philip Payn Pinel, Logbook of the *Eliza*, 1805–7, Phillips Library, Peabody Essex Museum. Pinel mentions passing Amson’s Island, Cape St. George, New Britain, and New Ireland. He also mentions stopping in a place called “Padang” (his handwriting is nearly illegible at this word). Rhys Richards, “A ‘Lost Galleon?’: The Spanish Wreck at Taumako,” *Journal of Pacific History* 34, 1 (June 1999): 124; *Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser*, Mar. 2, 1806.

12 Pinel, Logbook of the *Eliza*, 1805–7, June 6, 1806.

13 *Salem Gazette*, Apr. 28, 1807; *Salem Gazette*, June 9, 1807.

- 14 Ernest Stanley Dodge, *The New Zealand Maori Collection in the Peabody Museum of Salem* (Salem, MA: Peabody Museum of Salem, 1941), 7; Brown, *Northland Māori Wood Carving*, 128.
- 15 Brown, *Northland Māori Wood Carving*, 71, 46.
- 16 *Ibid.*, 218, 248.
- 17 Amiria Henare, "Taonga Māori : Encompassing Rights and Property in New Zealand," in *Thinking through Things: Theorising Artefacts Ethnographically*, ed. Amiria Henare, Martin Holbraad, and Sari Wastell (New York: Routledge, 2007), 56–57.
- 18 Anne Salmond, quoted in *ibid.*, 57.
- 19 Brian Flintoff, *Taonga Pūoro: Singing Treasures, the Musical Instruments of the Māori* (Nelson, NZ: Craig Potton Publishing, 2004), 72. The literature is clear that men were generally the carvers, but there is little scholarship about whether both men and women played musical instruments. Brown, *Northland Māori Wood Carving*, 31.
- 20 Flintoff, *Taonga Pūoro*, 72. Researchers have had differences of opinion about whether Māori flutes were played with the nose. Richard Nunns and Allan Thomas suggest researchers redirect this question: "Instead of asking whether the instruments were played by nose or mouth, [revival musicians and researchers] are able to accept that both were possible, and to suggest that in certain circumstances one or the other was the more likely mode of performance." Nunns and Thomas, "The Search for the Sound of the Pūtōrino: 'Me Te Wai E Utuutu Ana,'" *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 37 (2005): 76.
- 21 Johannes Carl Andersen, *Maori Music with Its Polynesian Background* (Wellington, NZ: Polynesian Society, 1934), 275.
- 22 Flintoff, *Taonga Pūoro*, 74, 101; Nunns and Thomas, "Search for the Sound of the Pūtōrino," 73.
- 23 There are early European accounts of Māori singing or reciting into a *pūtōrino*, but scholars have varying opinions on whether Māori actually used the *pūtōrino* in this way. For further discussion on this issue, see Mervyn McLean, *Māori Music* (Auckland, NZ: Auckland University Press, 1996); and Nunns and Thomas, "Search for the Sound of the Pūtōrino."
- 24 Flintoff, *Taonga Pūoro*, 101.
- 25 Andersen, *Maori Music*, 283–84; Rutene Gabel, "Pipīwharuroa!," *Mai Review* 1 (2009): 1.
- 26 Hauiti Hakopa, "The Paepae: Spatial Information Technologies and the Geography of Narratives" (PhD diss., University of Otago, New Zealand, 2011), 149.
- 27 For a more detailed discussion of Māori and European views of time and space, see Salmond, *Between Worlds*, 170–72; and Matt K. Matsuda, "The Pacific," *American Historical Review* 111, 3 (2006): 763.
- 28 Flintoff, *Taonga Pūoro*, 16, 22, 120.
- 29 Researchers have often assumed that Richardson picked up the Māori objects from New Zealand. See, for example, Dodge, *New Zealand Maori Collection*, 7; Salmond, *Between Worlds*, 528; and Brown, *Northland Māori Wood Carving*, 160. But the logbook of the *Eliza* and other available primary sources provide no evidence that the *Eliza* visited New Zealand.
- 30 Salmond, *Between Worlds*, 321–32; Rhys Richards, *Tracking Travelling Taonga* (Wellington, NZ: Paremata Press, 2015).
- 31 *Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser*, Mar. 9, 1806. Christopher Nelson is recorded as applying for leave to board the *Eliza* in the *Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser*, Dec. 29, 1805. William Brown and Abraham Dismore are recorded as receiving permission to leave New South Wales on board the *Eliza* in the *Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser*, Jan. 5, 1806.
- 32 Salmond, *Between Worlds*, 321.
- 33 Steven Phelps Hooper, *Pacific Encounters: Art & Divinity in Polynesia, 1760–1860* (Wellington, NZ: Te Papa Press with the British Museum Press, 2006), 61; Flintoff, *Taonga Pūoro*, 17; Richards and Richards, *Pacific Artifacts Brought Home*, 17.
- 34 Hooper, *Pacific Encounters*, 24; Amiria Salmond and Anne Salmond, "Artefacts of Encounter," *Interdisciplinary Science Reviews* 35, 3–4 (2010): 7.

- There is a large and complex body of anthropological literature on systems of exchange. This includes Marcel Mauss's work on Māori gift exchange, *The Gift* (London: Cohen & West, 1954), in which he distinguished between gifts and commodities in exchange practices and developed his theory of social obligation that impels reciprocity. Later works sought to dissolve these distinctions by considering the dynamics surrounding objects. These include Arjun Appadurai's work on the circulation of objects, Annette B. Weiner's study of "inalienable possessions," and Nicholas Thomas's work in which he argued that "the problem with such unitary conceptions of indigenous economies is that they suppress the entanglement with other systems such as capitalist trade," and that in fact "objects are not what they were made to be but what they become." See Appadurai, "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value," in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 3–63; Weiner, *Inalienable Possessions: The Paradox of Keeping While Giving* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); Thomas, *Entangled Objects: Exchange, Material Culture, and Colonialism in the Pacific* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 4.
- 35 Brown, *Northland Māori Wood Carving*, 35; Hooper, *Pacific Encounters*, 44.
- 36 Brown, *Northland Māori Wood Carving*, 35. Henare, "Taonga Māori," 60; Amiria J. M. Henare, *Museums, Anthropology and Imperial Exchange* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 7.
- 37 *The Salem Directory and City Register* (Salem, 1843), 119.
- 38 John R. Grimes, with Christian Feest and Mary Lou Curran, *Uncommon Legacies: Native American Art from the Peabody Essex Museum* (New York: American Federation of Arts and the University of Washington Press, 2002), 17–18.
- 39 Salmond, *Between Worlds*, 32; James M. Lindgren, "'That Every Mariner May Possess the History of the World': A Cabinet for the East India Marine Society of Salem," *New England Quarterly* 68, 2 (1995): 184; Nathaniel Hawthorne, quoted in Dane Anthony Morrison and Nancy Lusignan Schultz, *Salem: Place, Myth, and Memory* (Lebanon, NH: Northeastern University Press, 2004), 113–14.
- 40 Lindgren, "'That Every Mariner May Possess the History of the World,'" 184.
- 41 Richardson's uncle (Isaac) was lost at sea in 1791 and his nephew (Addison Richardson) drowned in 1806 during the voyage of the *America*. Two of William Richardson's sons died while at sea. John Adams Vinton, *The Richardson Memorial* (Portland, ME: B Thurston, 1876), 554, 592.
- 42 William Richardson to Addison Richardson, Dec. 12, 1804, Acc. 15, rec. no. 299, Phillips Library, Peabody Essex Museum.
- 43 Ronald T. Takaki, *Iron Cages: Race and Culture in 19th-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 375, 73; Grimes, with Feest and Curran, *Uncommon Legacies*, 17.
- 44 Alexis de Tocqueville, quoted in Takaki, *Iron Cages*, 73.
- 45 Takaki, *Iron Cages*, 74.
- 46 Rixey Ruffin, *A Paradise of Reason: William Bentley and Enlightenment Christianity in the Early Republic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 154.
- 47 *Salem Gazette*, June 12, 1807.
- 48 For a fuller discussion of theories about objects moving between different categories, see Fred R. Myers, ed., *The Empire of Things: Regimes of Value and Material Culture* (Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, 2001); and for a fuller discussion of borderland history, see Pekka Hämäläinen and Samuel Truett, "On Borderlands," *Journal of American History*, 98, 2 (2011): 338–61.
- 49 The tween deck was the storage space between the hold and the main deck.
- 50 Pinel, Logbook of the *Eliza*, 1805–7, July 4, 1805, June 3, 1806, and Oct. 2, 1805.
- 51 H. Morton, *The Wind Commands: Sailors and Sailing Ships in the Pacific* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1975), 373–74.
- 52 Pinel, Logbook of the *Eliza*, 1805–7, July 25, 1805.
- 53 Vinton, *Richardson Memorial*, 591.

- 54 *The Boston Sheet Almanack, for the year of our Lord God, 1774* (Boston: Thomas and Mills & Hick, 1774); *Salem Register*, May 31, 1804.
- 55 *Salem Gazette*, May 29, 1804.
- 56 Matsuda, "The Pacific," 772.
- 57 Alan Taylor, "Squaring the Circles: The Reach of Colonial America," in *American History Now*, ed. Lisa McGirr and Eric Foner (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011), 17; Jean M. O'Brien, *Firsting and Lasting* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), xxi, 5.
- 58 There were so many Salemites traveling and living around the world during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that Morrison and Schultz describe them as "citizens of the world." Morrison and Schultz, *Salem*, 110.
- 59 Bernard Smith, *European Vision and the South Pacific*, 2nd ed. (South Melbourne, Australia: Oxford University Press, 1989), 109.
- 60 Henare, Holbraad, and Wastell, introduction to *Thinking through Things*, 12–16. I am grateful to Amiria Salmond (formerly Henare) for input here.
- 61 *Salem Gazette*, Dec. 11, 1807.
- 62 East India Marine Society, Notebook of Donations, 1799–1820 [accession notebook], MH-88, Phillips Library, Peabody Essex Museum.
- 63 Ernest S. Dodge and Edwin T. Brewster, "The Acoustics of Three Maori Flutes," *Journal of the Polynesian Society* 54, 1 (1945): 39.
- 64 Hooper, *Pacific Encounters*, 67.
- 65 East India Marine Society, Notebook of Donations, 1799–1820, MH-88.
- 66 Lindgren, "That Every Mariner May Possess the History of the World," 194.
- 67 Wagelie, "Māori Art in America," 29; Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East, 1945–2000* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 6:16–17.
- 68 Lindgren, "That Every Mariner May Possess the History of the World," 198.
- 69 Wagelie, "Māori Art in America," 29–30.
- 70 Sonnet H. Retman, *Real Folks* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 8.
- 71 Dodge and Brewster, *Acoustics of Three Maori Flutes*, 56.
- 72 P. Beatson, "Richard Nunns: The Renaissance of Traditional Māori Music," *Music in the Air* 16 (2003): 17–33; Flintoff, *Taonga Pūoro*, 17.
- 73 Henare, *Museums, Anthropology and Imperial Exchange*, 228, 231; Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, 2nd ed. (London: Zed Books, 2012), 87.
- 74 Dodge and Brewster, *Acoustics of Three Maori Flutes*, 44–45.
- 75 *Ibid.*, 54.
- 76 Georgina Born, "Music and the Materialization of Identities," *Journal of Material Culture* 16, 4 (2011): 47.
- 77 Dodge and Brewster, *Acoustics of Three Maori Flutes*, 47.
- 78 Jonathon Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 19.
- 79 To hear music clips of these instruments being played, visit Richard Nunns, "Nga Taonga Puoro, Traditional Maori Musical Instruments: Instruments," accessed Jan. 15, 2012, <http://www.richardnunns.net.nz/a/instruments/>. Flintoff, *Taonga Pūoro*, 7; Charles Royal, "Mōteatea: Traditional Maori Song Poetry" (conference paper, "Oceania Meets Asia: World Music Days: International Symposium and Festival Dialogue in Music," Beijing, China, Nov. 3, 2009).
- 80 Fanny Wonu Veys, "Awakening Sleeping Objects," in *Pasifika Styles: Artists Inside the Museum*, ed. Amiria Salmond and Rosanna Raymond (Dunedin, NZ: Otago University Press, 2006), 123.

81 Paul Tapsell, quoted in Henare, “Taonga Māori,” 57–58.

82 Born, *Music and the Materialization of Identities*, 378, 377; Henare, Holbraad, and Wastell, introduction to *Thinking through Things*, 12–16.

83 Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, 208.