Social relations and the idea of externality

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The concept of external storage system raises the question of what is or is not “external” to the person. This chapter offers an ethnographic commentary. Materials from Papua New Guinea lead one to consider the significance of social relations in this respect. The chapter is not so much concerned with relations as storers of information but with specific practices in which people lodge (store) material items in (with) other people. It is argued that these practices create one of the conditions by which people compute what is interior and what is exterior (to themselves), namely through the very fact of their enrolling other persons in their projects. It is further argued that any single difference, as between internal and external, depends on other differences also being held in place. The chapter thus explores some of the supporting conceptual structures which enable these people to imagine that they are able to give out and take in resources of different kinds, thereby created as alternately “internal” and “external” to themselves.

More than one contributor to this volume has commented on the part that social relations have to play in any account of human experience. We might also consider them a rather special resource in the development of external symbolic storage systems. Social relations make artifacts out of persons; that is, persons carry the kind of symbolic load that Renfrew (this volume) finds in material culture. What makes them special is their recursive and elicitory character.

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Quite apart from the collective sense in which separate minds might be said to be embedded in any evolving culture (cf. Donald 1993: 12), ongoing relationships afford certain looping possibilities. That is, people’s “working memory” (Donald 1991: 329) loops through other people. Social relations do not just contain a record of past interactions or store information about future behavioral possibilities. They act also as a stimulus to reflection. This social reflexivity is crucial, for instance, to what Esther Goody (1995) has called the role of anticipatory interactive planning in human cognition. In addition to the fact that actions are linked to response, and that persons become aware of others thereby and of themselves through others, is the capacity to reflect on interdependence itself. We might say that the entire loop is given a dimension of time (enduring obligations, over the generations) and space (between persons separated by biography or residence from one another) when social relationships themselves become objects of reflection and manipulation. We may add that the possibility of long-term relationships in which people anticipate the (dis)positions of others in relation to themselves also allows the same planning strategies to be mobilized at high speed in transient interactions. Long-term relationships are in turn sustained through the generic conditions or constraints (rules of behavior) expected of persons in particular locations (roles) in relation to one another.

This seems self-evident enough. Here I bring to mind certain ethnographic data, some of it well known, in order to make one further point. If social relations are not external symbolic storage systems in the sense intended by Donald, the parallel I mean to draw is nonetheless precise in one respect. Relationships work through persons consciously acknowledging the presence, and / or the intentions, of others as persons capable of action like themselves. This means that all kinds of boundary possibilities arise in which people may put one another at varying degrees of “otherness” or externality from themselves. Social relationships thus provide an analogue model for the very exteriorizing process that Donald describes, in which memory is externally looped via devices which also stimulate it.

Donald (1991: 309) argues that external memory is not simply coextensive with culture; he wishes to use the term for those mechanisms (artifacts such as literacy) that act as specific analogues to
internal memory. He himself deploys an analogue model in his appeal to the difference between biological memory and other memory mechanisms: he represents diverse properties as the difference between what is internal and what is external to the organism. Now that concept of difference depends on other differences being held in place, such as that of body and environment. The perception of body boundary in turn requires its own conceptual support—as in the idea of houses having interiors and exteriors, or in images of containment and extension, or in the altered state of whatever is held to cross a line. None of these conceptual supports can be taken for granted. Together they make up the kind of analogical system by which social anthropologists identify specific cultures. It might be of some interest in the present context, therefore, to explore ways in which the very concept of externality has been (analogically) modeled. I am interested in models that make loops, and that take in other persons in doing so. My examples come from cultures which pay an exaggerated attention to the recursive (e.g., Munn 1986) and elicitory (e.g., Wagner 1986) potential of social relations.

Figure 1. Plan of Mekeo village, Papua New Guinea. (From Mosko 1985: 26, figure 2.1., with kind permission.)
The eight villages belonging to the Mekeo, who live along the reaches of the Biaru River in the Central province of Papua New Guinea, follow a regular pattern (figure 1). Clubhouses of the resident clan chiefs are prominent at each end, while domestic dwellings and other structures are erected in parallel rows facing each other. In the center is an area cleared of permanent features. Coconut and areca palms, planted behind the façade of the houses, do not intrude on this central space.

The village is the focus of human activity—people eat, reproduce, and are buried there. However, as the ethnographer (Mosko 1985: 22) adds, the village is not limited to human beings. Domesticated animals, various plants and a whole range of humanly-fashioned artifacts belong there. These village-things are radically separated from those of the bush beyond. Indeed “village” and “bush” are conceptualized as distinct domains of activities and powers, and a well-defined croton hedge bounds the periphery of the village. The bush is inhabited by many bush-things, animal, plant, and spirit; it is also the source of what Mosko refers to as an astonishing array of natural resources, including garden food and hunting products. What is beyond the village is thus brought into the village for consumption, and wastes are thrown back into the bush. Mekeo draw on a conceptual opposition between “outside” and “inside” to encompass both a spatial partitioning of the village and bush and a temporal regulation of the daily cycle of life which takes people between the two (ibid.: 23). The terms are not organized quite as Euro-Americans might imagine, however: it is both bush that is categorically “inside” and the village that is categorically “outside.”

Figure 1 is not of course the plan of any specific village; Mosko has abstracted sets of relations that signify differences of various orders, here rendered in terms of position and space. Now we may ask of the village, first, what kind of information is being stored in the placing of

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1. The so-called “Bush Mekeo”; I draw principally on Mark Mosko’s (1985) original ethnography referring to the 1970s.
2. Double quotation marks indicate vernacular phrases.
3. A term for a discourse derived largely from twentieth-century North American and Northern European cultures to which the language of analysis (such as the one in which this chapter is written) belongs.
its houses and fences, and, second, what kind of spatio-temporal functions does it allow people to operate upon it. The demarcation between inside and outside, made visible through the croton fence that runs round the village, allows what we might call (after Harris, this volume) **displaced communication**: the ability to imagine oneself either side of it. This can be rendered in terms of seeing different sets of social relations. If the bush beyond the fence is “inside,” this is also the view that people have from the perspective of their overall territory; they are contained within the larger circumference of the land their tribe occupies, and the bush lies within this. A person going from village to bush “goes inside.” The tribe and its territory does not, however, form an undifferentiated unit. It is composed of villages, each of which contains members of one or more clans, and people interact regularly with other villages of their tribe with whom they are intermarried. From any one person’s point of view, then, a tribe contains not only blood kin, but also the affines from whom spouses come, and mother’s kin from whom no spouse can be taken. These latter are so to speak “outside people” (my term) and it is in villages, the places of human habitation, that one encounters such people. To go “outside” in going into one’s own village is thus to include in one’s view those with whom one’s clan is intermarried, and across more than one generation. In mimetic mode, distinctions are thus sustained, held in place, by other distinctions.

These Mekeo formulations prompt me to consider other material from Melanesian societies showing similar intellectual preoccupations with the relationship between “inside” and “outside.” As Thomas (this volume) notes, the very conceptualization of the person is at issue.

4. Mekeo were composed of two mutually hostile political units (“tribes”), at war with one another; each of the tribes was endogamous. Population figures were tiny (383 and 1258 respectively in 1970) (Mosko 1985: 15). While I follow Mosko’s account closely in many places, the observations on perspective are mine.

5. I simplify an interlocking set of analogies. The relationship of one’s own clan to one’s spouse’s clan, or of blood kin to non-blood kin, is analogous to that of inside to outside, while the relationship between the clans of one’s mother and spouse’s mother is analogous to that between inverted outside and everted inside (see below) (e.g., Mosko 1985: 144). The range over which these analogues are repeated forms the subject of Mosko’s book.
One has to understand the person in an expanded sense: there are necessarily many people involved.

**Inside and outside**

The idea that it is social relations which separate out aspects of persons and present them with worlds beyond themselves has many antecedents in anthropological accounts. This was Fortes’ interest in the West African Ashanti stool, and the concept of office it created. Regalia that embodied the virtues and powers of a particular office, in this case politico-religious positions of authority, came in turn to bestow virtue and powers on the person of the office-holder. The artifact thus both absorbed the person, and outlived any one incumbent in its own durability. What was being displayed to the rest of the world was the transformed status of the incumbent, a visible reminder in material form of the immaterial counterpart in the rules that the office-holder also observed in his person. In such circumstances, the artifact was created as “external” to the person precisely insofar as it embodied extra-personal power. That social separation of the incumbent from the office provided the conceptual basis for imagining a source of authority beyond the individual person. The same principle may hold elsewhere, as in the more diffuse system of the Tallensi of Northern Ghana (to keep with Fortes’ material), where the power of senior men was seen to emanate from their status within a domain of social life held separate from domestic affairs. From the perspective of the domestic domain, in turn, activities were understood as both belonging to it and lying beyond.

While in many contexts Melanesian people conceptualize a removed realm of power (a spirit or ancestral world), a preoccupation with what is internal and what is external seems to govern the perception of all kinds of relations. Distinctions between two features may be held in place by other distinctions between other features; they may also be held in place by movement “across” the boundary between features, or by shifts in perspective which substitute the view from one side by the view from the other. Such movement and shifts

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6. *Kinship and the social order* (1969) brings this and the next example together.
may well be anticipated in both terminology and imagery. Let me start with the example of a clan group.

Think of the rule of exogamy, the stipulation that one should marry outside a particular group, such as a clan. Exogamy simultaneously defines sets of people as insiders (those who cannot marry one another) and as outsiders (those from whom spouses come). Taking up the vantage point of one’s clan group makes this clear. But note the consequence of this particular example, and it is not fortuitous; the positions fold back on themselves. If members of other clans are outsiders from the point of view of marrying spouses from them, then these spouses are also brought within the clan through those marriages. That movement of persons “between” clans and thus “across” clan boundaries helps sustain (make durable) the initial distinction. I take a cue from the recent history of the area I know best, Mt. Hagen in the Papua New Guinea Highlands. A woman would be separated from her own clan through the exchange of bridewealth gifts between the intermarrying patrilineal clans, components of which were equated with mortuary payments. Thus a woman was referred to as being “severed” from her clan of origin in order to “go inside” (as they said) the husband’s clan. Meanwhile her brother would be taking a wife from an outside clan and through her outside powers be producing further members for his own. If pressed to the point, Hagen people would probably have said that it was only by bringing in external sources of fertility that a clan could reproduce at all. That external source was kept external. Although a woman went inside her husband’s clan, she did not lose her connections with her own kin; far from it, she became a “road” between them, her outside origins being conserved in her natal clan name which she kept. Rather than being fully absorbed by the new clan body, it enclosed or encased her, like a foreign body. Hagen men sometimes referred to their wives as being inside a fence, as though one could imagine a small enclosure within the clan territory contained within the wider circumference of the clan land, an image also summoned by gardens which were individually fenced within a clan territory.

7. The material will be familiar to many readers. Relevant to the present account are A. Strathern 1971; A. and M. Strathern 1971; M. Strathern 1979, 1987, 1988. I refer to events as they were first recorded in the 1960s and 1970s, when the combined population of two related dialect areas was some 80,000.
There are other images for this enclosing movement. Across Melanesia, one can generalize, the alimentary and procreative functions of the human body chart the process of substances seen now as inside and now as outside. These comprise a reproductive model of life, one which draws readily on metaphors of feeding and evacuation, of sexual union and childbirth. There is thus an interplay between notions of externality and internality imagined as body processes within a single organism, as one might have an idea of a fetus within the mother’s enclosing body, and the conjunction of distinct bodies in cross-sex intercourse. Union, however, would be a bad translation, at least in the Hagen case, for (by contrast with Euro-American idiom) conjugal partners are not joined together as one person—rather each conserves their distinct social identity. Indeed, each party elicits from the other behavior appropriate both to their sex and to their social origin. Thus it is because the husband is socially distinct from his wife that the child she carries is socially distinct from her (in this patrilineal system, women carry children for the husband’s clan). If this were Mekeo one might say that the husband plants an “inside” seed within her “outside” body.

The flow of body substance between persons is also a process of extraction or elicitation. What the woman takes within her she later brings forth as the newborn child. Now while one might raise one’s eyebrows at this platitude, one might lower them again on thinking about the way in which Hagen people incorporate this into their thinking. We should understand these different body states as having their counterpart in social divisions marked by marriage rules and food taboos. Transfers of body substance through such rules and conventions in turn have a counterpart in various artifacts (such as bridewealth valuables) that also flow between people (cf. Wagner 1977). Bodily flows are both made visible in the transfer of material items “between” people and “across” boundaries, and the transmission of energy and life an analogy for those transfers themselves. This counterpart movement of artifacts is locked into body process in a second mode. The items to which I refer have value because they are regarded as being extracted from persons, just

8. One may think of “artifacts” as material items such as valuables flowing against the flow of persons, as in compensation payments for bodily injury or loss. But we may compress the analogy (between flows of persons / artifacts) and also think of the one in terms of the other, e.g., persons as artifacts.
as persons (like the bride) are regarded as extracted from other persons. In fact the two modes interpenetrate precisely at the point of marriage. In arrangements of the Hagen kind, it was these material artifacts that elicited persons. One clan yields its daughters (in marriage) to another because that other clan had offered artifacts (bridedeath) in the form of valuables for her. Each elicitation was in fact an instance of the elicitory potential of relationships.

The same elicitory potential was played out in the long-term reciprocal exchanges of wealth between political units (such as clans) for which men in the central Highland of Papua New Guinea were once renowned in the ethnographic literature. And what was this ceremonial exchange but the extraction of items of value from one group—pigs, formerly shell valuables, more recently money—by another who in turn took them “in” order to give them “out” again? People’s constant recourse to body imagery supposed wealth as always within someone’s body: it was only taken from one to be lodged in another. In Hagen, the recipient clan literally took the valuables inside its men’s house and pigs inside its territory. This passage from “outside” to “inside” was further sustained by the distinction between the visible and invisible. What momentarily appeared also disappeared again. Items thus oscillated between the condition of being internal and being external to the body of one’s own clan.

Concealment and revelation

This oscillation is interesting if only because of the explicitness of the accompanying social practices. Persons could be oriented outwards or inwards, even as parties to the exchanges alternated in their positions vis-à-vis one another. The men of two clans engaged in exchange alternated from being the recipients to being the donors of wealth; indeed we may say that they were exchanging perspectives on each other (Strathern 1988: 230). And the possibility was anticipated in the relationship between them. A donor was a future recipient, and vice versa. An exchange relationship thereby objectified that conceptual

9. Not universal in Papua New Guinea by any means. Some of the controversy is adumbrated in Godelier and Strathern (1991). Readers will have inferred that I am describing arrangements in which men have more stake than women.
move, that recursive ability to see oneself from the view of another, through moving items (artifacts) between persons. These artifacts thereby moved the places persons occupied.

This was not a logic that the anthropologist had to excavate. People acted openly by it. On an occasion of a public gift, the ceremonial ground would be thronged with those who had come to see what the recipient was getting, among them those who would be in turn potential recipients of such wealth as he passed on. At the same time the present donors, imagining themselves as future recipients, and challenging the present recipient to give back at least an equivalent amount, did not just draw attention to the size of their present gift—it anticipated their own future ability to raise as much again later. The whole matter might be about the politics of clan composition and the economics of wealth creation; it was also about reproduction, ensuring the capacity to be productive and revealing that capacity through its effects.

Now such claims could not be made in isolation; one could not so to speak reproduce by oneself. Donors depended crucially on recipients receiving their gifts, and for taking them inside, for how else was the donors’ creativity to be revealed? This was a prestige system where those who claim prestige depended on others to recognize it. Similarly, the producers of wealth would only be able to produce again, in the future, if those to whom they were giving the wealth were prepared to accept the immediate gift. In other words, donors required willing containers in which to pour the results of their prowess. We may think of these as an audience, or a body of consumers for products, with the proviso that the transactions were locked into a social alternation so that those who were producers at one point became consumers of equivalent items at another.

The social alternation was explicit: the categorical division into donors and recipients created the possibility of future creativity. It was imagined in terms of different bodily orientations. First, I noted that a clan receiving wealth took the wealth into itself when it took the wealth into its men’s houses. (The analogy between houses and persons, mediated through the concept of a body, is elaborated

10. For a recent general statement, see Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995.
throughout Papua New Guinea. 11) Like their ornaments that Hageners wrapped up in dark packages—dark because of the soot that caked the interior of houses—shells were secreted away by the recipients of an exchange gift, and money even more easily. Pigs were dispersed to different households. Men removed their dancing attire, redistributing it among those from whom it was borrowed. Walk into a place a few days after a display and you would see nothing—a shabby man in ragged clothes which only tell you, if you did not know by other means, that you have no idea of the wealth he received. All visible evidence would have vanished, the artifacts given away to others or wrapped up and stored inside the house, a process which in the case of shells was thought to make them grow, until the next occasion on which people brought them outside. Everything was then turned inside out.

![Shells laid out down a ceremonial stand, streaming away from a house (where the viewer is standing). Mt. Hagen, 1964. (Photograph by author.)](image)

Figure 2. Shells laid out down a ceremonial stand, streaming away from a house (where the viewer is standing). Mt. Hagen, 1964. (Photograph by author.)

11. Most notably the Sepik river region where much play is made (for instance) of boy initiates entering houses that are simultaneously male and female in structure, and emerging forth in altered state. Gender distinctions comprise another set of conceptual supports.
So, second, in standard Hagen iconography, wealth would stream from the now open men’s house (figure 2). Dancers turned themselves inside out too—on the exterior of their bodies they wore all the ornaments that signified their inner state of well-being—and took omens to reassure themselves that the interior would yield its fruits. Men anxiously poured glistening oil from dull, smoky flasks, waiting for the liquid to flow, as evidence of their ability to bring internal capacities forth. Wives whom the male donors kept “enclosed,” the fertile centers of their clans, they turned inside out too. When women danced, they were decorated by their kinsmen, and covered in the red paint that indicated among other things the inferiority of wealth, now everted, turned outside for all to see.

The important point to retain here is what these people retained. That inner state was not brought outside, revealed once and for all, so that people could forever see inside, as one might imagine Euro-American knowledge systems where what is brought outside remains (more or less) permanently in view. Rather, what you saw on the outside was an everted inside: an interior state turned momentarily outside, subsequently to be folded back and concealed from view. So it remained an “inside” being brought out, the externalizing effect a momentary one.

All this was apparent in the form of the pearlshell, a valuable which became for a time the most potent symbol of economic exchange, political power and generative reproduction Hagen men possessed. The shell, enclosed in its resin surround, painted with ocher, was occasionally likened to a fetus within a womb. Connolly and Anderson (1987: 251) reproduce a photograph from the 1930s, in the days when pearlshells first entered the Highlands in number, in which men shoulder dozens of shells in special netbags, not unlike the carrying bags of women (the same term is used of womb). These were bags in which women put the products of their creativity—food for pigs and food for their families—containing thereby what would shortly come outside for others to consume (figure 3).

12. I anticipate / borrow Mosko’s terminology here, although the Hagen configuration is by no means directly mappable onto that of Mekeo.
Incorporation and inscription

Whether we address the person or the body, we might want to ask just what is inside and what is outside. Or perhaps one should be asking what the personification of artifacts (the house as a body, the shell as a fetus) does to the idea of things being external at all. In what sense are items external if they are also caught up in the network of relations which bind people to one another? If the shell you have is mine because you owe it to me, in whose body does it reside, and in what sense is it external to either of us? Such “Hagen” questions, and the analogies they presuppose, recall Thomas’ (this volume) reference to Connerton’s (1989) arguments on memory. On the face of it, Connerton’s contrast between “inscribing” and “incorporating” practices resonates with that between the external storage of information as opposed to an internal one. Inscribing practice he sees as exemplified in devices for storing and retrieving communications—he mentions encyclopedias, tapes, computers—that all have the characteristic of literacy itself; it “traps and holds information, long after the human
organism has stopped performing” (1989: 73). Incorporating practices, on the other hand, are gestures that require the presence of bodies to perform them. Protocols of posture or habits of eating may convey information, but cannot be done outside the context of the performance. This does not mean to say that they have no lasting effect. On the contrary, his thesis is that even in societies whose practices are dominated by inscribing techniques we find a continuity of bodily habit, information transmitted from one person to another over time. The social dynamic with which he is concerned, then, is transmission and the duration of memory, so that ancient practices are projected into the future not just through the records that people leave behind but through their bodily routines. Thus memory may be passed on in non-textual and (he adds) non-cognitive ways (ibid.: 102–3). Now this is the point at which Connerton both praises anthropology for attending to performance and castigates anthropology for being interested in the momentary communications of the present rather than seeing the performative potential for the storage of memory of past practices, and thus of information about them.

In attending to the present, the anthropologist is of course attending to the pasts and futures that people encapsulate (in the present) for themselves. We might say that the performance of ceremonial exchange, or bridewealth, is at once an incorporating practice, replete with gestures carried out by human bodies / persons, including communication through the artifacts they transfer from one to another, and an inscribing practice, insofar as persons’ bodies hold information about previous states of affairs that they can indicate without re-enacting. Previous roles that people occupied, as we might say a recipient was once a donor, or the anticipation of an outcome, as one might say that a clan in handing over a young girl is also handing over a mother with potential to have a child, comprise information held over from other times and places. It comes from previous performances when the actors occupied different positions, or from the projection of absent people’s performances onto those present. So what the present body enacts is less an incorporating

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13. For example, “By substituting a visual record for an acoustic one, the alphabet frees a society from the constraints of a rhythmic mnemonics” (Connerton 1989: 76).
repetition of a former state of affairs than a transformation of them, a mimesis that works through inverting or everting a previous position.

Instead of imagining persons / bodies ("minds") as embedded in a "culture," Melanesians (not just Hageners) imagine them as embedded in other persons / bodies. As artifacts for one another, they are processing entities of a sort. The social dynamic is not that of personal memory holding everything one needs to know, to be used when the occasion arises in order to repeat past experiences or summon former knowledge. Rather, the social dynamic is that of persons in relationships where one body elicits things from another, and where one body can only bring forth in the presence of the other. A mutual history is contained "between" them. It allows, at least in the exaggerated form presupposed by exchange relationships, that each person can anticipate being in the position of the other. As we have seen, this is an interdependence which requires that persons do not merge but remain (socially) external to one another. Here the idea of externality sustains the possibility of relationship as such. Let me produce my own mimesis. What do we substitute for "culture"? Rather than saying that already existing things are incised with cultural value (inscription), or that the body takes culture within itself in its habits and postures (incorporation), we may say that persons create effects as at once external and internal to themselves. That becomes evident when it is their relationships which they wish to reproduce. People do not have to re-enact specific events when past events are subsumed under (objectified in) relationships. But they do, so to speak, have to re-enact the relationships themselves.

**Reiteration**

In his exploration of *Technologies of choice*, Pierre Lemonnier (1993a; 1993b: 22) remarks on the puzzle of technical invention. The issue he has in mind is how is it that people perceive a sufficient gap in what they have to hand to want to plug it. If a system works, how can that conceptual gap arise? How can one conceive of something one does not have? His interest then becomes why some technical practices get chosen over others. One answer is already contained in Latour’s contribution to Lemonnier’s volume: this is a false model of the relationship of language to other cognitive processes, even as questions about cultural elaboration are a false model of the relation-
ship of (useful) artifact to (ornamental) object (Latour 1993: 378). If Euro-Americans tend to see the pig first as an animal (one of his examples) and then as an item of cultural value, they arrive at inscription as the archetypal “cultural” activity. Latour develops his counter-model of quasi-objects as technique and sociality enfolded inseparably together. The anthropologist should be no less adept than his or her informants at taking on other perspectives. If we were to start with the Hagen view, we might well wish to ask about quasi-persons: persons have relationships enfolded within their bodies, simultaneously external and internal to themselves. Now if Lemonnier’s question were also about information (if people are already in communication, why should they wish to add anything?), would this also contribute to an answer?

It is no new observation to say that information may be produced as a by-product of other activities (see the discussion on language in Goody 1995). This may be true even when inducing states of knowledge seems part of the actors’ intentions. Observers of initiation rituals from Richards (1956) onwards have noted that boys and girls are “taught” what they already appear to know; there seems no fresh information as such to be gained. Take the Wahpeton Dakota village (Spector 1993) and the archaeologist’s reconstruction of a girl’s first menses: a girl who already knew how to quill was submitted to four intensive days of nothing but quilling in order to make her “good with the awl” (1993: 38). Spector interprets this celebration of the girl’s future domain of accomplishment (the future woman would have her achievements at robe or tent making inscribed on the flaps of the Council tipi (1993: 37) in terms of the significance accorded to the artifact, the awl. We may add that it is also the instilling of a bodily routine. Far from information being imparted into her, it seems that the four days instead demonstrated the capacities that could be drawn from her. But why did it have to be reiterated?

14. He has a wonderful passage (1993: 380) about the insouciance with which we identify “more [a higher level of] society” with “more technology.” (Euro-American definition of human society becomes the more certain the more we can identity the enlistment of non-humans—tools, artifacts, plants—in people’s interactions.)

D’Errico (this volume) refers to the significance of the accumulation of notches on bone and other artifacts. He argues that carving a new notch on a tally stick without altering the previous record deploys a temporal but not necessarily a spatial or morphological code, though these are found in combination in other contexts. If we attend to the social activity of Dakota notching, we may learn something further again.

Someone who has spent hours boring holes in hide then makes a single, though unpierced, hollow in the bone handle of the tool with which she is making those holes. Perhaps the one notch stands for the completed artifact; but perhaps the action of making the notch also stands for the countless hand movements and uses of the tool with which she brought other artifacts to completion. (Note that the tool has so to speak changed position: it has become the recipient of the boring process rather than the instrument of it.) Of course the Dakota used quite different tallies as well (e.g., sticks), just as Hagen men in the past used tallies for the number of “hands” of shells they had given to others. Indeed, as Spector surmises, we might wonder if the tool was not also an ornament, an extension of the body also receiving an impression upon it. [She uses the term “inscribe” to describe the impression that finding the awl made on her own mind (1993: 34) and she no doubt wishes to bring to mind the inscribed impressions on the awl handle itself.]

The Hagen tally, demonstrating the prowess in disseminating the wealth the (male) wearer had attracted, was made to be worn on the chest (figure 4). When it came to a ceremonial occasion, a man might either wear his own tally or else give it to a brother or son to wear, or even divide it up: there was no confusion over information created by such actions, for no-one would reckon the status of a man by his tally alone. People were openly agnostic in Hagen, as elsewhere in Melanesia, about what could be inferred from external markers; one never knew what revelations also concealed.

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16. As in the case of a Dakota notch for each set of 10 hides, or tent, which a woman worked, so each small Hagen slat of bamboo recorded a set of 8 (or 10, a superior 8) shells given.
Figure 4. Tally made of bamboo slats, recording exchange transactions, worn here by someone decorated for an accompanying dance. Mt. Hagen, 1967. (Photograph by author.)
But apart from that, reputation depended on the configurations of the present, and past exploits were only a partial pointer to it; in any case, to distribute his signs of achievement among close kin was apt for a man who depended on support for success. Exploits could not, then, simply be “added” to exploits. Rather, each giving away of shells indicated the tremendous effort acquired afresh on each occasion to assemble and distribute, as each pushing of the awl through the hide required new effort. The exchange tally was a sign of the repeatedly summoned energy by which the wearer brought off yet again a grand gift. In other words, the number of occasions made a long tally awesome precisely as evidence of someone able again and again to draw out of himself the capacity to dispense wealth, a kind of insistent rehearsal of activity or energy, as though iterative endeavor had a virtue of its own.

In this mimetic re-presentation of past actions, people represent the very ability to act, and that in turn may have “informational” content of a kind. What has to be learned afresh is that it is only by (fresh) social action that the conceptual universe is kept in place. In the oral and politically uncentralized regimes of the kind I have been describing in this chapter, where persons deploy others as signs for their own states of being, orienting themselves to artifacts like themselves, constant repositioning becomes both condition and outcome. It takes effort to keep social distinctions in motion. In communicating information about the results of those efforts, people stimulate themselves to further effort. As a consequence, positions are made anew. We might say that social mimesis thus creates the possibility of “information” as new knowledge. Certainly, it is overt cultural dogma in a place such as Hagen that relationships will wither away unless they are kept in a state of activation.

Movement

I have been drawing on the exaggerated attention that certain modern peoples pay to the recursive and elicitory character of social relation-

17. Melanesianists will recognize an allusion here to analogic kinship (Wagner 1977; Gillison 1993). The most salient distinctions have to be the most actively sustained.
ships. Their models are suggestive about what both mimesis and analogy can entail in human interactions.

Whereas a fence can keep the distinction between inside and outside precisely because it is built in one place, for that is all it does, when persons become signs for what is internal and external to themselves, movement may be required to keep the very distinction in place. Persons present themselves to others in terms of what they have closed off or, on the contrary, what they can draw out of themselves. This is communicated by movement through time and space, so that the body appears in varying states of openness and closure (to itself and to others).\footnote{Mekeo have developed this to a fine art (see Mosko 1983; 1991).} But if different times (such as times of the day or points in an exchange cycle) and space (such as the center or periphery of a village or ceremonial ground) provide measures for different social states, then it means that persons are also perceived as constantly liable to differentiation—when they act and where they move takes on a signification to which they have to respond. As if to emphasize that there is no escape from having to respond, the Melanesians I have been describing here find a further analogue in the body’s mode of processing materials, the unavoidable relationship between ingesting and egesting. This iteration is not mere repetition.\footnote{But then nor is repetition (Deleuze 1994); cf. Donald’s (1993: 13) comment that human beings in effect start from a new base line with each generation.} The body is held in a state of animation through what it takes in and gives out. The ability to repeat actions in other registers, to conceptualize concepts in this sense, in turn enacts the replenishment of energy.\footnote{The Melanesian material describes a world where people do not just reflect on their activities but are reflexive about them, able to switch perspective, to anticipate outcomes and see the past as versions or transpositions of the present. The recall cues (cf. Mithen, this volume) include the changing social positions that people take on one another.} I repeat the point that renewal of energy or capacity is not confined to the repetition of the same tasks (replication) but can be equally well effected in the ability to transform one task, or relationship, into another (reproduction). Mekeo underline that point for us.

Let us look at the plan again (figure 1). The conceptual alignments and separations impose a bodily regimen on the occupants; indeed
the village is itself a kind of body. I said that there were constant transfers of produce from the bush into the village, and return of refuse to the bush. This is not an undirected coming and going but a flow of substance conceptualized as though it were coursing through the human frame.

Observe the empty space in the center, used for feasting and occasions when guests are taken into the village. Mekeo do not conceive of this as the center of a center or as the inmost part of the inside. On the contrary, they cannot do so because we know that the village as such is already an “outside” place in relation to the surrounding bush. But the same relationship between bush and village is repeated in the relationship of the periphery of the village where the houses are and the empty plaza in the center: the center is an inside of a kind. Given that the village as a whole is an “outside” place, it is the outside’s inside, and Mosko uses the phrase “inverted outside.” Similarly in relation to the inside bush: the bush immediately adjacent to the village is distinguished from the more remote bush as a kind of evened region, an “everted inside.” The English language phrasing is awkward; the conceptual space as it is lived by the Mekeo can be simply re-rendered as movement.

Every day follows a similar course. Food is brought from the remote bush to the village, not to the center but to the peripheral dwelling houses where in the evening it is cooked and eaten. This bringing of food into the village is complemented by a scrupulously observed regimen of waste disposal. A rule specifies the place of excretion. Early morning each villager makes his or her way to the bush, not the remote bush but the peripheral bush just over the fence, to empty their abdomens. When they return they clean up the village, sweeping all the refuse and leavings into the central plaza. The rubbish is piled up in the centre, before being carried to the edge of the village and dumped where human beings have also evacuated. The abdomen of the village is thus cleaned out too. Indeed the central plaza is called just this: “village abdomen.”

Now the village center or body cavity is not in any simple sense an internal place. If, in the English senses of inside and outside, you think of the alimentary tract through the body as taking in food from the outside and returning it to the outside, one could think of those inner chambers as exposed to the outside world, as though it were the
person’s outside within. In Mekeo terms, the waste that collects in the abdominal cavity is already outside the person, as though it had been already swept there, and must be taken from this “outside” to “inside” the bush: “the abdomen of a human being is homologously conceived as inside the body only insofar as it is an inversion of space outside the body” (Mosko 1985: 27). The abdomen is thus simultaneously an inside and an outside place, as the village abdomen makes evident. As we have seen, Mekeo always sweep refuse here before removing the stuff to dump over the fence. So rubbish is swept “into” an area thereby demarcated off from the rest of the village, while as part of the village it otherwise remains an “outside” place. Waste is separated from produce within the village, even as the source of produce in the (remote) bush is separated from the place (adjacent bush) where waste is deposited. “By virtue of the daily transfers of objects between village and bush,” writes Mosko (1985: 25), “outside and inside domains are bisected by a reversal or inversion of each, such that the outside village has its own inside place (i.e., an inverted outside) and the inside bush has its own outside (i.e., an everted inside).” In sum, the village abdomen is an inversion of an “outside” (village) space, while the area over the fence is correspondingly an eversion of an “inside” (bush) space. Food and materials collected from the bush and gardens and processed within the village thus travel in human eyes from inside to outside and then, in finally being evacuated, from an inverted outside to an everted inside.

Needless to say, this daily routine is only the beginning of the conceptual operations Mekeo perform on their own thoughts. For instance, the whole system is bisected by what appears above ground and what appears below ground, and there are various rules about what holes can be dug in the ground where, including rules about the burial of bodies. The plan is also in effect a multidimensional grid that directs not just the daily activity of food and waste production but the conduct of ceremony (in feasts and mortuary rites and so forth), the manipulation of supernatural powers, and the relationship of persons to one another. Indeed, one may argue it is a presentation of a basic conceptual schema that relies crucially on the recursive operation of relations on relations. The iterated behavioral routine of persons moving between bush and village, in the collection of resources and disposal of waste, recalls whole sets of analogies.
A regular recapitulation, then, of the movement of items between village and bush is given long-term spatial presence in the permanent layout of Mekeo houses and plaza. Hagen people enact similar movement in a quite different temporal trajectory. In dwelling on a particularly public set of practices (ceremonial exchange), I have suggested that behind the change of perspectives entailed by the simple alternation of donors and recipients in relation to each other lies a social dynamic of elicitation: a world in which capacity is predicated on the ability of persons to draw that very capacity out of one another. What lies within is potentially external precisely because it can be taken inside by someone socially external to oneself. In men’s reciprocal exchange, the external other actually takes one’s externalized inside into his own inside. The artifacts that flow between them carry this movement: whether they flow toward one or away from one will indicate the current social axis of the relationship. In Hagen the movement itself takes place over a span of years. However, the long-term temporal sequencing between the occasions on which donors and recipients switch places is re-enacted spatially in the brief display on the ceremonial ground. The re-enactment is to great visual effect, for the handing over is ordinarily staged in front of the house that has both taken in and gives forth valuables.

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There is a final observation to extract from the way in which certain Melanesian peoples combine various analogies to communicate the actors’ effects or influence on one another. And that is that they furnish themselves with a calculus for those effects; this is how one could describe the tally of shell gifts worn in the past by Hagen men. There is a corollary to this observation. An analogic calculus will require constant social work to keep its measuring capacity in place. Each distinction requires more distinctions to sustain it.

Men from the Trobriand Islands at present living in the capital, Port Moresby, make displays of their urban harvest in imitation of the harvest competitions people hold at home; Debbora Battaglia (1995)

21. Though the Hagen movement is in turn foreshortened, speeded up one might say, by contrast with cycles that unfold over generations, as is true for instance of Etoro (cf. Kelly 1993).
describes one such event that took place in 1985. They built, as people do at home, mounds of yams in the shape of a cone. The cone has to be composed in one go, a maneuver which requires a fine judgment of dimensions and in particular of the size of the base to start with. The builder must project the correct dimensions for the base from the number, sizes, and shapes of yams, to make a stable and well-shaped stack from them. The whole display would be a test of the gardener’s capacity to turn his effort to effect in its impact on others. This effect requires a temporal division into past and present, the past being brought into the present as something formerly hidden and now revealed. By virtue of having happened already, the completed activity being celebrated is thus categorized as off-stage (hidden), and what happens off-stage is growth (cf. Biersack 1982). But once the growing is complete and the yams ready for collecting, the transformed labor and soil become a visible aesthetic object of people’s relations with one another. The two states (concealment and revelation) are thus kept distinct from one another through accompanying distinctions of past / present, growth / cessation of growth, and so forth. On this occasion, however, Battaglia was made aware of a problem for the city dwellers. Unable to make these cones of yams next to their gardens, and having to transport the yams in pickup trucks across the city—instead of being immediately amassed as they emerged from the ground, they were individually wrapped to prevent damage in transit—gardeners fell under suspicion for surreptitiously adding tubers from other sources. They were thought to be secretly combining their own with other people’s. As a result, “displays were growing at a time when growth ought to have ceased” (Battaglia 1995: 85). The distinction between growth and display could not be held stable by all the other temporal and spatial markers—and, accordingly, raised questions about how to measure the accomplishments being claimed.

22. It is the size of the base which is measured (by a piece of string) in the competition between gardeners. Being able to complete the building in one go is a mark of aesthetic power also demonstrated in the carving of canoe prows.

23. Size and quantity are significant dimensions. “Yams . . . as much grow their subjects [the gardener] as the other way round. Gardeners trade on their ability to embody supplementation, incorporating others in exchanges that expand their own political parameters” (Battaglia 1995: 80).
References


