Feathers and shells: Learning to see

There is no deep meaning to my choosing this topic [“Learning to see”]. On the contrary, far from being of central interest to my work, visual material has always been to the side. But peripheral vision can be very powerful—the half-glimpsed, the half-grasped, continues to hold possibilities for exploration. I am sure you have all experienced what happens when you focus intently on something: it somehow dissipates, disintegrates through inspection. As when you want to define something in order to write an essay—what you thought was such a solid idea dissolves the longer you pay attention to it. The power of the lateral thought, by contrast, is its constancy. The sidelong image remains as it was first glimpsed, before it comes into focus.

So what I am presenting now hasn’t been the subject of deep thought or great theoretical attention on my part. Rather, I present you an accumulation of glimpses. But they hold themselves in my peripheral vision because of the way they color, or make visibly present, aspects of social life in Melanesia. They are not alien—they just catch things from the side, and continue to make the Melanesian material fascinating. One of the most significant ways of paying ethnographic respect is for the anthropologist to create as “interesting” other people’s concerns, other people’s agendas, so that they hold our attention. I don’t take lightly the task of making material fascinating: it is a form of engagement open to us as academics and scholars.

There is something else. These lectures are heavily dependent on images. I just like looking at these pictures. Not so much for the personal memories summoned by some of them, which can’t be shared, as for a reminder of the intimacy and intensity of people’s presence, how-
ever distorted—or reperceived—they are by time and by the medium. You may or may not be aware of the direction of the distortions, but perhaps they may touch intimate moments you have known also.

Finally, if anthropologists really have been developing a relatively coherent account of Melanesian society, then any particular part should [be able to] generate the whole. This is why the materials are set in a certain time frame: it gives something of a coherence to anthropological approaches.

Preamble

The part of Melanesia addressed here is Papua New Guinea. The area is interesting because it has been anthropological convention that while some places in Papua New Guinea “have a lot of art” others have none at all! Or at least as is recognizable in “art objects”—sculptures, painting, carving, figures, architecture, and so forth. And, as you will see, I am going to start with somewhere that apparently does not.

In a way, this was addressed by Alfred Gell in *Art and agency* (1998). Insofar as he was inspired by Melanesia, we might ask what we need to know about Melanesia [in order] to understand his arguments? What were the problems to which his book was the answer? Two are relevant to present purposes. [Added note: These lectures were initially assembled before his book was published. I do not go into his brilliantly executed arguments about art objects as social agents, and art as a system of action, although the schema he develops would be more than applicable to the materials that follow. As the commentary on the two problems shows, immediately below, my own trajectory is a quite different one.]

I. One problem: the way that the “anthropology of art” has been treated as different from the rest of anthropology.

If social anthropology is the study of relationships—is about persons and relations—then it encompasses objects (things) to the extent that objects mediate social interactions, for example [my example] jewelry handed over in bridewealth in the context of marriage arrangements between kin groups. The anthropology of art, on the other hand, has always been about art objects, and about persons and relations insofar as persons are the transactors and producers of these objects—i.e.,
persons stand to them in relation of creator, artist, spectator, trader, and so forth. [Neither is satisfactory. Indeed, in respect of the first position] in mainstream anthropology generally what has happened is that the objects have seemed incidental to the social relations or the society, and much analysis proceeds simply by putting these art objects “into their social context.” A more sophisticated version of this is that in these objects we can see social roles, cultural values. . . . But that is part of the problem. When we put these items back into their social context—when the jewelry is thought of again as bridewealth—as anthropologists what we see is the social value: we don’t see the jewelry.

What Gell wants to do is treat objects the way an anthropologist will treat anything else, and thus produce a specifically anthropological theory of art to account for the relations entailed in the effect that such items have on the world. And to do so in such a way that we do not lose sight of those objects, so that they retain their centrality.

Often such objects are thought of as things or artifacts. I have taken this admonition very literally in these lectures. Each lecture is keyed into a particular set of artifacts—feathers, shells, canoes, houses, trees, netbags, axes, wigs. As we find, however, many of them point to other objects that do not take the form of “things” at all. The problem we thought we began with, “art” or “art objects” in relation to “society,” evaporates. If we are to retain the centrality of “objects” they have to appear as rather more than things or artifacts or art. At the same time, to retain some continuity with the starting problem (“art objects”) we might find ourselves more interested in some areas of social practice than others. My premise is that what we [ordinarily] separate off as artifacts are the outcomes of aesthetic and social practices that get to the core of [give us a glimpse of] Melanesian sociality, through devices of concealment and revelation that draw attention to items made to be seen.

II. The second problem is an implicit one in Gell’s book. Sight and seeing are common Euro-American metaphors for knowledge. Gell says he is interested specifically in visual art: but what is involved in “seeing” something?

We exhibit art objects because they are visible [or otherwise available to the senses], and indeed make artifacts visible by exhibiting them. Gell argues that it is museums and art galleries that make art
objects visible insofar as these (museums, galleries, etc.) incorporate certain (Euro-American) traditions in “ways of seeing.”

However, anthropologists may be with people who deliberately make things with detailed attention to their visual aspect and then hide them [from being seen]. Rita Astuti’s 1994 article is called “Invisible objects”; the context is a mortuary ritual carried out by the Vezo of Madagascar. Large wooden sculptures are put up on the edge of cemeteries—striking to the observer [although when she was there in 1987–89 they were no longer being made]. But, in fact, these apparent monuments are not meant to be seen; the cemetery is hidden in the forest, and the sculptures are supposed to be hidden to the eye. People keep away from them. They separate the living from the dead.

Astuti then asks how the anthropologist is supposed to “look at” these sculptures—and answers the question by saying that we should not look at the objects as items on display but look at the work that goes into making them, that is, all the ritual activity that makes their making necessary. In other words, look at the sculptures (so to speak) and draw out of them what went into their making; [they are part of] “working for the dead” as a way of giving them [the dead] pleasure, making them happy and keeping them away from the living. In that making, visual contact was essential. But the Vezo don’t want to go on looking at the objects afterward; once they have made the ancestors happy by all their work, [visual contact is disrupted and] they can forget them. The results of that work are appropriately kept out of sight.

So there are traditions in ways of seeing. Manipulating what is and is not visible [like the specific stipulation that people should keep away from these Vezo sculptures and not see them—the negative prohibition] is itself a productive and a social process. Seeing is regarded as an activity. [And this turns out to be true of Melanesia too.] Indeed, in some cases seeing—by an audience—becomes part of the “work” that goes into the production of artifacts. All this will become clearer as we go. For now, you should appreciate that what I want to do is convey for one part of the world (that is, Melanesia) what an indigenous visual theory might look like. [Added note: I use “theory” as a provocation for taking seriously what we might otherwise take for granted, an inflection more easily handled orally than in writing.]

An indigenous visual theory? It turns out to be a theory of practice, programs or recipes for action. We shall find ourselves needing to
confront notions of personhood, affect, power. We may even find ourselves looking at what we could call social technology, technologies of the self that are technologies of relationships.

For Papua New Guinea I shall thus focus on what people do make to be seen, and ask: When people display objects, artifacts, and so forth precisely as “things” to be displayed, what invitation are they making, what is behind the invitation to the audience to see? If Vezo make in order to conceal, Melanesians often make in order to reveal. Yet, obviously, each act also contains the other: Vezo mortuary statues are seen before they are hidden away, while in the Papua New Guinea case I start with, there is constant play both on alternation between display and non-display and on what display conceals as well as reveals.

Papua New Guinean societies allow enough continuities in basic local assumptions about social action, across diverse instances, for me to generalize about “Melanesian” premises in social relations—indeed, enough continuities in visual practices to be able to draw from four or five different regions and still be addressing a common phenomenon. As noted [see original outline in the Introduction], the materials come from a specific time frame, from works written primarily in the 1970s and 1980s and drawing in places on observations from the 1960s. There is a further coherence to this time frame in that these instances present the kinds of material that fed into Gell’s book; although that ranged far more widely than Melanesia, these would have been among those he had in mind.

In each location, we have to rely on the anthropologist’s exegesis of specific circumstances. I offset that with reference to some of the visual assumptions that we find emanating from the culture that creates visible objects by putting them in galleries and museums [or displaying them in books]. So let me first expand on certain assumptions in the Euro-American tradition, as they were articulated by one proponent in the middle of this period (1981).
The photographer’s gallery

The portrait photographer Malcolm Kirk is德尔berate about the works he displays. One of his most famous productions uses a series of images from Papua New Guinea in order to illustrate a thesis about “man as art.” So we start off from the assumption that this is a paradox, that is, the provocation in the title is the idea that “man” is not ordinarily to be thought of as “art,” anymore than in this Euro-American way of thinking “persons” are “things.” As we shall see, the Melanesian ethnography raises some questions about the way people objectify themselves, turn themselves into objects to be seen by others; even in areas where people do not produce “art” in the conventional sense, they do produce aesthetic objects.

Anyway, Kirk’s wonderful photographs are good for our purposes since they come from Papua New Guinea. And implicit in his imaging is an indigenous visual theory [my words], in this case a Euro-American one. It is not a theory about social action, though, but a theory about where one stands in relation to what is seen, a theory about perspective if you like.

Kirk is interested in what these people do to their bodies, and the way they make the body into what he calls an “art form”—in other words, an object of contemplation capable of evoking an aesthetic response. “[T]he human form can become art, and may indeed have been mankind’s original work of art, stirring emotions similar to those we experience when confronted by any other art form” (Kirk 1981: 9, note omitted). He goes on:

If costume was originally designed to replace the natural fur that once protected us against the elements, people must have quickly understood it had a potential to be more than this. By shrouding the human body, clothing disguises our exposed, vulnerable selves, and elevates the way we feel (ibid.: 10).

Costume, he says, “masks not only our bodies but also our inhibitions and raw natures” (ibid.). In other words, costume is something that is added to the body in the sense of encasing, enclosing, concealing the naked form beneath. More than that, it can be transformative—it instills a sense of potency in the wearer, it can fashion gods out of mortals [his phrasing]. We can thus regard costume as work of art. But we also have here a Euro-American model of the person: costume is like the
roles that people put on “over” their raw nature. Indeed, as we shall see, this model of the person dominates the photography and is integral to what I suggest is his theory of perspective.

Now, when Kirk refers to art he means “their” art, that is, he is imputing to the subjects of his portraits the recognition—in their costumes and thus in the human form—of aesthetic objects, which call forth emotions. He says that when people [non-Papua New Guineans implied] see the pictures, they often exclaim “What fabulous photos,” and he (Kirk) has to correct them and say, “No, what fabulous images” (ibid.: 9). In other words, he is trying to portray the artistry as theirs [his sitters’]. “My own contribution has been simply to record what exists” (ibid.)—he strives for a plain, realistic photography in order to let the images speak for themselves.

So here we have an indigenous person, a Euro-American, talking about his own aesthetic practice: he is going to reveal the beauty and complexity of the costumes / body forms of these people from Papua New Guinea, plainly, denying his own artistry. Yet his verbal statements [they come from a brief Foreword] about what he is doing are on occasion at odds with my perceptions of what he has done. Or rather, what he has done is show Papua New Guinean people’s artistry as it might look if we were looking for “Papua New Guinean artistry” via Euro-American conventions.

[Added note: It should be clear that I am making a didactic point, not a criticism of Kirk. Exactly what has just been said could be said of much anthropological writing—including my own—as, for example, when the anthropologist lays out what Papua New Guinean concepts of “social relations” might be as though Papua New Guineans entertained such a concept. Introducing the photographic observer in this way is, it will become evident, a prelude to setting up another indigenous Euro-American, namely the anthropological observer, on whom, before the end of this first lecture, I spring a surprise.]

Let us ask what “simply exists.” We are shown costumes, and costumes as clothing people, in other words, covering up their inner natures: clothing disguises. [There are several] Euro-American assumptions here: (a) that people have the kind of sense of a whole style that one might impute to “a costume”; (b) that the decorations these people put on are like clothing that covers; (c) that covering the body conceals the person—to be naked is to be exposed; and (d) finally, that there is
an implicit equation between the body and the person. [Added note: Kirk’s book includes some photographs of carvings too, as though the skin were like wood, a natural material that is or can be reworked, the grain of the wooden objects evoking the texture of the skin he portrays. They are collected together under the rubric of “masks.” Masks, he observes, heighten the metamorphosis that is brought about by wearing face and body decoration, turning “the individual image into something less recognizably human” (ibid.: 9).]

As it happens some of Kirk’s photographs are from the vicinity of Mt. Hagen in the Papua New Guinea Highlands where I worked, originally with Andrew Strathern. As I go through I shall comment on the effect the photographs have on me [including deducing an ethical stance on the photographer’s part], showing Kirk’s images dating from the 1960s–70s (taken between 1967–80) and then a short series from Hagen of about the same time. He has photographed men and women [in very many cases not all] as they would be decorated for ceremonial exchange: moka prestations in Hagen [for example] are accompanied by displays, both of the wealth [which is the subject of prestation] as such and of the donors who are giving the wealth to recipients.

[Added note: The images are not cropped here: they are as Kirk has presented the portraits in Man as art. In some cases they include details taken from larger images or close-ups taken at the same time as a larger image, both referred to here as “details.” The ascriptions in the captions are taken largely from the identifications given on pages 43–7 of Kirk’s book; pages 37–42 offer considerable additional information on the composition of the decorations. My selection is restricted to male portraits.]
Recall that Kirk is trying to neutralize and naturalize his photography (work with realism) in order to bring out indigenous artistry [and that he is making portraits]. So he gets people to pose against a plain backcloth. People displayed singly. Because what he wants us to look at is the assemblage, the color. The reader of his book is the audience.
Figure 2. Portrait by Kirk of Nigel, from Kaul (Tambul) in the Western Highlands Province (between 1967–80). The careful dark-light composition of the headdress and wig can be seen very clearly, as can the touches of color that offset the darkening effect of the oil. Nigel is wearing on his chest a tally of wealth items given away during the course of prestations to diverse partners. Photograph: Malcolm Kirk. [Reproduced with author’s permission.]

Previous depiction was a bit stiff, so here is an attempt to portray the body more informally. He wants to treat these people with respect, so he also has them sitting. [We should also note that he gives the sitters of his portraits their personal names.]
This man is sitting in a way that draws our attention to the fact that we are not being shown the whole body—focus is on the head and torso. In fact if you go through the collection, I think only one of the photographs [as they are reproduced in the volume] has a figure entire with feet in as well [plate on p. 102]. So we can deduce that some parts of the body are more significant (for the photographer) than others.
Figure 4. Portrait by Kirk of Moga, from Melpa (Baiyer River) in the Western Highlands Province (between 1967–80). Moga has a special type of exposed wig, rather like Napo’s (figure 3), and is wearing “second best” feathers. A detail is given in figure 11. Photograph: Malcolm Kirk. [Reproduced with author’s permission.]

Emphasis is put on the upper part of the body.
Figure 5. Portrait by Kirk of Kin’gal, from Melpa (Baiyer River) in the Western Highlands Province (between 1967-80). He is wearing a bead necklace as well as a ceremonial tally, and has armbands made of small tradestore beads. Over Kin’gal’s wig is a striped netted [technically, “looped”] covering. Photograph: Malcolm Kirk. [Reproduced with author’s permission.]

And Kirk zooms in on the head and face [of another sitter] in order to show us detail. We become aware, through his photographs, of the detail of each item of ornament. Each object can be picked out for itself. Like showing the detail of a painting.
Striving for clarity, and a sense of texture. Hence the caked paint. Items very clearly differentiated—here, the painting of the face and treatment of the beard.
Figure 7. Detail of a portrait by Kirk of Mokai, from Huli (Piribu) in the Southern Highlands Province (between 1967–80). The preceding image in Kirk’s sequence shows Mokai standing much as he depicted Moga (figure 4), see figure 68. Photograph: Malcolm Kirk. [Reproduced with author’s permission.]

But there seems to be something else going as well: the photographer is showing the mask and he is showing the person behind the mask at the same time.
He dwells on people’s faces, although he focuses sometimes on the nose, lips, sometimes on the eyes—the eyes are especially expressive: the person underneath! He says: “Our faces themselves are constantly shifting masks that mirror varying moods . . . and our eyes become an outward reflection of the emotions within” (Kirk 1981: 10).

Note that here the outward body form hides inner feelings: so we have three layers—the outer clothing that conceals the body and the body with its facial expressions that in turn conceals the person and personal feelings: retreating perspectives.
Figure 9. Detail of a portrait by Kirk of Ongol, from Mendi (Tente) in the Southern Highlands Province (between 1967–80). Even though one can only see a portion of his portrait in the reproduction, Ongol’s decorations recall those of Sali (figure 1). Photograph: Malcolm Kirk. [Reproduced with author’s permission.]

We can say the same here, though the portrait sitter is from a different area.
Figure 10. Detail of a portrait by Kirk of Maum, from Kauil (Tambul) in the Western Highlands Province (between 1967–80). Photograph: Malcolm Kirk. [Reproduced with author’s permission.]

Once again, we are, I think, being invited to see “through” the paint and decorations to the [person as an] individual beneath.
Figure 11. Detail of a portrait [see figure 4] by Kirk of Moga from Melpa (Baiyer River) in the Western Highlands Province (between 1967-80). Photograph: Malcolm Kirk. [Reproduced with author’s permission.]

Seeing the individual person behind the decorations is to see the decorations, the feathers, shells, and face paint, as being added to the surface of the body. From the way he has photographed them, [I surmise that] Kirk also wants us to see the combination—the resultant body form—as an aesthetic object.
Now it is I who has sequenced these photos to show what I think is Kirk’s art—displaying objects where making them visible means making them as close to real life [that is, to the impression made at the time] as possible. In fact, in the way attention is drawn to texture, more than.

[Added note: Kirk records his impression in his Foreword: the images convey an “unearthly presence. . . . These are human faces, yet there is some other intangible presence reflected in them” (Kirk 1981: 9)]

And what is the medium—the art—for presenting this reality? The detail, color, and assemblage of the objects, just as one might turn a light on items in a gallery.

The anthropologist’s context

The overall effect the photographer’s pictures has on me: isolated bodies removed from social context. Coming from Hagen, my first reaction is to put these into context. So is this—looking to context—inevitably an anthropologist’s response?

Figure 12. Part of the large crowd watching a line of male moka [ceremonial exchange] dancers. Kuli, Mt. Hagen, Western Highlands. 1967. Photograph: Marilyn Strathern.

Not isolated—donors display themselves to an audience, here a crowd at an exchange festival (moka) . . . people don’t dance singly.
Figure 13. A space has been cleared in front of these moka donors: the whole body is visible, and pride is taken in the line of the ceremonial apron that sways in formation with the dance. Ndika, Mt. Hagen, Western Highlands. 1967. Photograph: Marilyn Strathern.

Never sit—people do not display themselves sitting. In fact the sitting image breaks the line of the adornments. Visually, men present a row of upright dancers, in an aggressive posture, with the whole body on display.
Figure 14. Shadows from the trees enhance the faces in shadow. A different kind of display formation (by comparison with figures 12 and 13), with men wearing specially short aprons, but as previously the aim is a massed effect that hides the individuality of the performer. Remndi, Mt Hagen, Western Highlands. 1967. Photograph: Marilyn Strathern.

Don’t see the individual—the audience is supposed to see the massed effect of all the dancers together, eyes drawn towards the decorations as such, which are enhanced by being presented deliberately in movement (an effect aimed for by the dance movements).
Figure 15. The dark, obscuring effect is desired; it was said that shadows at the neck lodged the soul / one’s ancestral spirits. Ndika, Mt. Hagen, Western Highlands. 1967. Photograph: Marilyn Strathern.

Decoration disguises—you don’t look to see the person beneath. One should see the decorations, not the dancer.
Interpretation: Learning to see

Isn’t this where Kirk began?

Figure 16. Portrait by Kirk of Moga, from Melpa (Baiyer River) in the Western Highlands Province (between 1967–80). A detail is given in figure 11. Photograph: Malcolm Kirk. [Reproduced with author’s permission.]
Warning, re: realism—if Kirk presents “art,” then my pictures present “social life.” And of course we can’t stop there. The pictures I show are not more “realistic” than Kirk’s posed portraits—they simply partake of the “ethnographic” rhetoric of social realism where Kirk partakes of a “studio” rhetoric of realism in relation to portraiture [under a spotlight, for example]. If the anthropologist’s first response is to put these [images] into, frame them by, context (social, cultural), then, it is the context of social realism. This is the conventional response, as I said earlier, it means that these images then become subsidiary to what emerges of “real” interest: the context. No difficulty about piling on the ethnographic realism.

Figure 17. A young man is helped by his wife to get ready for a practice. Ndika, Mt. Hagen, Western Highlands. 1967. Photograph: Marilyn Strathern.

This is someone being decorated. The realism of practicality: how the decorations are “actually” brought together (here for a rehearsal).
However, as I have implied, that [finding the context] is not sufficient. Given the care and attention being paid here it might seem obvious that one has to understand indigenous aesthetics. What are less obvious are assumptions about visibility. For instance: the [Euro-American] assumption that to be naked is to be exposed. There is a profound sense in Hagen that *to be decorated is to be exposed.* How on earth might this be? What it means to “see” something comes back to the issue of what activity is going on here. How are we to understand this act? The context for the context? Through social identity? The man in figure 17 is being decorated by his wife.

Let us leave the question of “context” to one side. [Kirk does not pretend to be offering more than his personal reactions (“a few speculative thoughts”) as a photographer. We might want to reserve rather more criticism for the automatic response of mine—reach for the context—as an anthropologist.] “Context” is not going to solve anything in a strong sense (it will continue to do some work in a weak sense). Instead, after Astuti, I want to question the activity. Because the image is the outcome of an activity, the gathering together of an exhibit. Why display feathers and shells, and why display them on the body? Why are they attached that way, and what are we being made to see? If it is the decorations that the spectator is meant to see first, then does this mean that the decorations are a kind of “art object” after all? But, if so, then why does the dancer’s individual person actually have to be “concealed?” And if something has to be concealed then what [in fact] is being displayed?
A decorated woman: she is dancing as the wife married into the donor clan, and will probably have been decorated by her father or brother.
[To take Kirk’s insights about transformation in a different
direction.] Transformation turns on the relationship with the
observers / spectators [who are present]. In sum, when we (spectators,
audience) see the feathers and shells, we are invited to see the person,
but the person in a transformed state. Not the person as an individual
but the person as a nexus of relationships. Not a matter of clothing
concealing the body, but of the transformation of a person composed
by his or her domestic and private relations into an object for public
gaze that then conceals those domestic and private relations.

* * *

At this point in the lecture, depending on time, I would refer in greater
or lesser detail to Aletta Biersack’s account of Paiela initiation [like
Hagen, in the former Western Highlands of Papua New Guinea] in the
1970s, where boys are concealed not only by not being observable
from people’s residences, but by themselves purging their vision of the
sight of these (domestic) spaces. Seeing as an activity was evident in the
discipline they underwent—through washing the eyes, for example. The
intention was an ultimate revelation of just how much the boys had
grown in seclusion, entailing relations with a spirit woman, measured by
the reaction of an audience as witness. An enhanced spiritual state was
brought to the surface and shown on the outer skin, making visible on
an outside what was on an inside. There was a similar move in Hagen
in an equation between growth and concealment / display and the
termination of growth in what is brought out. No initiation, but moka
displays are mounted to similar effect.

* * *
Dances take place *in the open*, in daylight, to be seen so spectators can see. [Added note: The ornamental trees (initially planted in tubs) associated particular people’s “life” with the land / soil, to regenerative effect.]

This is an empty ceremonial ground, cleared for the purpose. The issue is to convince people that growth has taken place since the last performance. Growth of what? Not just the “skin” (the body) but wealth (pigs and shells). . . .
Figure 20. With their aprons tucked up, moka donors display the shells they are about to hand over. The pearleshell, mounted on a resin board and covered in red ochre, circulated as a valuable at the time. Ndika, Mt. Hagen, Western Highlands. 1967. Photograph: Marilyn Strathern.

Shells are brought out and lined up in display (for a moka prestation). Just before they hand the valuables over, the donors draw victorious attention to them.
Figure 21. Not all exchanges are accompanied by dancing. At this showing the shells are flanked by a line of pigs, though at that moment everyone’s attention seems to have been caught by the camera. Displayed at the moka pena of Minembi Kambila, these are destined for Tipuka recipients. Mt. Hagen, Western Highlands. 1964. Photograph: Marilyn Strathern.

Here shells and pigs together appear to stream out of the men’s house at the end of the ceremonial ground.
Figure 22. The same occasion (as in figure 21): pigs lined up waiting for a separate set of recipients. Minembi, Mt. Hagen, Western Highlands. 1964. Photograph: Marilyn Strathern.

Recipients may come from more than one clan. Accompanying the gift depicted in figure 21, a separate gift of pigs alone is also lined up in the ceremonial area.
In the same way as valuables are brought out of the men’s house (so to speak), decorations themselves are brought out of concealment to be assembled for the occasion.

Pigs are exchanged, feathers are worn: with shells you can do both. Made to be visible. In fact they are all [part of what is seen to be] “on the skin.” . . . So what do the spectators affirm? What is their role? They are witness to the activity of these men, both production: internal growth, and exchange: flow of wealth between donors and recipients, elicited as clans, big men, and so forth. In brief, you disguise the individual but reveal the person [as a nexus of relations]. Let’s return to the point that when we [the audience and spectators] see the feathers and shells, we see the person, but see the person in a transformed state. That state turns on relationships both with the spectator and with others . . . many of those feathers will have come from others. Unpacking this will [maybe!] get us a bit nearer to understanding why these things are carried on the body. Some of this will be expanded in the next lecture.