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MALANGAN: ART AND MEMORY IN A MELANESIAN SOCIETY

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The article contributes to the anthropological study of art with the analysis of an ethnographic example well known to those working with museum collections and to anthropologists working on Melanesian societies. The art is known under the indigenous term as *Malangan*. It is a collective term for sculptures and dances as well as for the mortuary ceremony and ceremonial exchange. *Malangan*-art is ephemeral, left to rot, burned or sold to European visitors after the sculptures have been displayed on the grave and have been transacted as primary items of value in the exchanges. This article investigates the implications of impermanence for the transmission of the imagery embodied in the art. The imagery of *Malangan*-art is invisible for most of the time, recalled from memory for production, display and transaction in the concluding phase of the mortuary ceremony. *Malangan*-sculptures are reembodiments of memorised imagery, a fact which is both ethnographically and anthropologically interesting.

Approaches to non-western art and material culture are numerous and follow mainstream anthropological theory in their development. The subject has been treated by Layton in a recent work on the anthropology of art (Layton 1981). Two main trends in the analysis of non-western art, however, deserve to be mentioned since they have inspired the present analysis of Melanesian art. Following the concern in early writings with technique and form on the one hand and social and cultural content on the other (Boas 1955; Firth 1952), most recent studies aim to reveal the dynamic relation between these two (Forge 1970; Bateson 1973; Biebuyck 1973; Munn 1966; 1973; 1977; Strathern & Strathern 1972; Gell 1975; Lévi-Strauss 1983). Within a number of these studies is a concern with the relation between social and cultural reproduction which is especially central to recent and forthcoming work (Forge 1970; Munn 1973; Gell 1975 n.d.; Morphy 1984; n.d.).

This article develops a methodological and theoretical approach which takes a novel perspective on the dynamic and mutual relation of cultural and social reproduction by questioning the relation between the form given to art and the process of its transmission. This perspective is the conclusion of my own attempt to come to terms with ethnographic material collected in a Melanesian society and follows a line of enquiry which most recently has been argued by Sperber (Sperber 1985). Like Sperber, I shall ask how it is possible that the imagery embodied in the art has a continuity irrespective of the temporary existence of particular works (cf. Sperber 1985: 80). The question, however, is

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not why and how imagery continues, but what difference its mode of transmission creates in the appearance of the art. It is also suggested that a particular mode of transmission is historically specific and central to processes of social and cultural development.

The question of transmission is central to the art tradition known as *Malangan* which serves as example in this paper. *Malangan*-art is ephemeral, its objects being destroyed or sold to western art collectors soon after their public display. The imagery of the art, therefore, is not transmitted from one generation to the other through the preservation of material culture. Rather than being subjected to permanence or persistent innovation, objects are reproduced so that each is reminiscent of an object seen in the past. The imagery which characterises these objects is recurrent and stereotypic, but nevertheless varying to such an extent that no one object is the exact replica of the other. This tension between the redundancy and variability of imagery is anthropologically interesting, since such cultural objects are a product of the mnemonic processes of retention and recall. The generation of variability is embedded in performance and in a mnemonic technique whose application involves culturally elaborated cognitive operations. This technique is central to the capacity to reproduce works that are convincing and compelling in their visual appearance (cf. Gell 1985; n.d.).

An approach to such art cannot restrict itself to iconographic and contextual analysis, but has to ask for the properties of objects that are remembered and reproduced and for the relation of these properties to the mnemonic process. Constancy and variation in the art, therefore, will be analysed with respect to the mnemonic process and culturally elaborated cognitive operations. The concern with the interpretation of meaning adhering to the imagery will thus be replaced by an inquiry into the possibility of its reproduction.

The practices surrounding the transmission of imagery integrate linguistically and ecologically diverse areas into a region. It will be argued that the operation of the visual mnemonic system as articulated in *Malangan*-art is central to the development of such a regional social system.

The ethnographic material referred to in this article was collected during fieldwork in northern New Ireland, one of the islands in the Bismarck Archipelago in North-East New Guinea. Northern New Ireland is a sub-grouping of the New Ireland-Tolai languages and comprises seven Austro-nesian languages spoken in geographically and ecologically distinctive areas on the island.¹ These areas are cross-cut by matrilineal clans that are scattered throughout the northern part of the island and are integrated into a regional form of social organisation through the operation of the *Malangan*-system.² The complexity of the *Malangan*-system has been discussed elsewhere and will thus only be mentioned when necessary in this article.³

Social history and cultural reproduction

Kinship and art are mutually related at all levels of complexity. One level where this mutuality can be recognised is language, another is the form given to art objects. *Malangan*-art is sculptural, its production being described as *tetak* or 'the

dissecting and joining of skins'.⁴ The sculptures are conceptualised as 'skins' which replace the decomposed body of a deceased person and thus provide a container for the life-force (*noma*).⁵ Absorbed into the artistic system, this life-force is rechannelled to the living in the form of power. This power constitutes political authority and is derived from the control over the re-embodiment of the memorised imagery into new sculptures. The right over the reproduction of the imagery of a sculpture is transacted in the ceremonial exchanges which accompany the display of the sculpture.

Malangan-art is thus in the widest sense a model of social immortality. This model evokes the independence of social reproduction from uncertainties embedded in marriage, birth and death. It does this by means of absorbing these events into the process of cultural reproduction. This process redefines as the source of the continuous situations that are experienced as introducing discontinuities into social relations. As model and medium of social reproduction, *Malangan*-art plays an active part in the manipulation and legitimation of inter-generational and inter-group relationships.

The destruction of sculptures immediately following their ceremonial display and transaction can be accounted for with this cultural simulation of processes of social reproduction. Like the human body after death, so the sculpture after it has been 'killed' in ceremonial exchange has to decompose to set free the force so that it can be rechannelled into people and sculptures. A modern version of destruction is the sale of objects to Europeans. The currency received from the sale is utilised for a further reproduction of the sculpture and is thus returned to the ceremonial system. As a result of this integration of interests generated in the art market into the indigenous system, European collections of these artefacts are rather large, dating from the earliest expeditions in the 1840's to the present day and comprising approximately 4,000 objects.

What is valued in this society is not the real sculpture, but the memory thereof. This memory is used in disputes over land and resources and in the legitimation of political authority. Value is thus not attributed to the objects, but to the memory of their imagery and to the right over their reproduction which is transacted in the exchanges. The greatest value is attributed to a form of ownership which is called *wun in e Malangan* or 'the source of *Malangan*', allowing the owner to produce an infinite number of sculptures. The term for 'source' can also be translated as 'womb' and as 'smoke', all translations referring to the reproductive capacity surrounding this ownership. The acquisition of this reproductive capacity is embedded in an exchange called *sorolis* that relates parts of the same matrilineal clan of different residence. Other restricted forms of reproductivity are transacted in exchanges called *aradem*, which is a sphere of exchange linking affinal matrilineal clans who have a history of inter-marriage and co-residence.

The imagery embodied in sculptures is reproduced after intervals of twenty to thirty years. The imagery of a sculpture, seen and acquired during the childhood of a deceased person, is reproduced for the final mortuary ceremony of that person. The artist is instructed how to design the object by another elder who shared with the deceased the right over the reproduction of the imagery. This claim over the right to reproduce imagery is proven by the knowledge of the

names carried by every sculpture and by the knowledge of how these names are related to the imagery of the sculpture. As in Eskimo society where the model of masks is derived from the transformation of the shaman's dream into the first mask of its kind, the artist in northern New Ireland is hired and does not know anything about the imagery he is asked to carve (Ray & Blaker 1975: 51). He is told about it in the form of names and is given plant ingredients which are meant to stimulate the appearance of the imagery in his dream. The common source of newly innovated and transmitted imagery in dream-work with its known mechanisms (condensation, displacement, overdetermination) accounts for the general affinity between art works of this kind (cf. Layton 1981: 179).

Changes in what will be referred to in this article as motif composition, however, are not just by-products of the repetition essential to dream-work. These changes are governed by the relation between recall and the grounding of its performance in the context. There is a relation between the recall of an image for transaction in a certain sphere of exchange and the shape given to the sculpture.

The interpretation of a sculpture is based on a recognition of what has been altered in its reproduction. A sculpture thus informs about the relationship between those currently transacting the rights over its reproduction. The production of history and the transmission and transformation of art in the mnemonic process are mutually related and it is on the basis of this relationship that *Malangan*-art attains its political and social significance.

Art and its mode of transmission are central to the social system as can be seen in the present expansion of the ceremonial exchange system over the region of northern New Ireland and beyond. One of the preconditions for the spreading of the *Malangan*-system is the sharing of a common conceptual framework that enables people of different languages and social settings to receive, interpret and transmit the imagery embodied in sculptures. This common framework for interpretation is visible thematically in *Malangan*-art. Sculptures are composed of motifs taken from the animate environment and ranging from representations of birds to shells. Motifs and motif combinations are recurrent and are named. Both motifs and names are standardised and do not vary considerably throughout the region in which the art is produced, nor have they significantly changed since sculptures first reached western institutions.

Representation

It is important, however, to realise that the non-random character of a sculpture does not derive its significance from its stereotypic representation of images taken from the lived-in environment. In the case of *Malangan*-art, representation has to be analysed in relation to the transmission of the imagery. Central to the ability to receive and transmit imagery in transactions of regional character is the sharing of a technique of cultural reproduction that allows sculptures to be interpreted in an informed and interested manner. The organisation and arrangement of motifs in sculptures vary in the history of their transmission and it is this variability of possible motif combinations that is subject to constraints.

It will be argued that these constraints cannot be accounted for with a contextual analysis of the art alone.⁶ They are embedded in the operation of a visual mnemonic system.

Malangan-art has been the focus of numerous studies throughout this century.⁷ By concentrating on particular sculptures produced at certain times an impression of infinite variability of the imagery was created, each sculpture being apparently singular in its significance and existence. For a sculpture to be recognised, accepted and thus to continue its existence in future reproductions, however, it has to comply with anticipations based on past experiences and on implicit modes of understanding. In need of further exploration is how combinations of motifs can be anticipated and interpreted in socially informative ways.

Visually, sculptures of the kind discussed in this article pay tribute to the thrill derived from discovering and playing with problems of combination (see fig. 1). Carved motifs and painted patterns overlap to leave the eye searching for clues which could uncover a hidden organisation. The instantaneousness of interpretation in the form of names by those familiar with the artistic system can be explained by the culturally elaborated technique that enables the generation of ever new combinations reminiscent of those seen in the past. The emergence of an artificial mnemonic system, of which *Malangan*-art is an example,



FIGURE 1.

facilitates the investigation of the dynamic interplay between cognitive and social processes in the interpretation and production of cultural representations.⁸

The existence and social significance of mnemonic systems is not only a feature of New Ireland society, but has been documented in the now classic study of the Iatmul by Gregory Bateson.⁹ Names among the Iatmul in the Sepik river region of mainland New Guinea are remembered in their thousands and are recited in a particular order which led Bateson to suggest that their recall is based on higher mental processes rather than rote memory.¹⁰ The recitation of names involves mnemonic techniques that are the basis of social differentiation and identification:

Among the Iatmul definite efforts are made to increase the memory endowment of individuals, by means of magical techniques. Soon after birth, a male child is made to inhale smoke from a fire which has been bespelled, in order that the boy shall grow up to be erudite in the totemic names of his clan (1958: 221).

The significance of the naming system is recognised by Bateson not to lie in the facts remembered. Its significance lies in the development of artificial mnemonics, in the culturally specific stimulation of the cognitive machinery (Bateson 1958: 221). The order of reciting names is reproduced in every recitation and it is this order, rather than the names, which is subject to persistent and yet consistent transformation (Bateson 1958: 223). This order is shown by Bateson to correspond to the organisation of social relationships and of ritual activities.

Bateson's analysis of naming among the Iatmul as mnemonic system does make sense and explains why it would be fruitless to attempt an interpretation of each name taken in isolation. When turning to art objects, however, such an approach can only be accepted with difficulty since it contradicts the assumption of the particularity and value of the object on which western art appreciation is based. It will be proposed, however, that *Malangan*-art is generated like a string of names recited by Iatmul men. It is a tool that enables the retention and recall of socially relevant information, but it is not representational in the sense of depicting the information to be remembered. The cultural elaboration of a visual mnemonic system is unusual in Melanesia and must be situated within the historical development of the regional social system characterising present-day New Ireland.¹¹

Constancy and variation

Mnemonic techniques are informed by cognitive tools that are specific to a culture and its social history (Neisser 1976: 134). The statement that 'higher mental processes are primarily social phenomena' has only recently been given recognition in psychologically oriented studies (Neisser 1976: 134). It is, however, firmly embedded in the conclusion drawn by Bartlett based on experiments described in his work on 'remembering' (Bartlett 1932). Bateson's study of Iatmul society is heavily influenced by this work, and he reports having taken the volume with him to the field (Bateson 1958: 222). Bateson's book,

moreover, appeared a few years after the first edition of a work by the French scholar Maurice Halbwachs, who became known mainly through this study of 'the collective memory' (Halbwachs [1950] 1980). This is not the place to trace the influences on Bateson's work, but it is interesting that both authors' insights into the cultural elaboration of memory have been largely ignored in anthropology to the present day. This article attempts to resurrect some of these insights and to apply them to the analysis of a cultural system that distinguishes itself from the naming system of the Iatmul in being explicitly concerned with the processing of visual imagery.

Like the order which Bateson isolates in spells, songs and speeches, motifs and their combination in *Malangan*-art undergo a slight, but continual variation every time a sculpture is reproduced (Bateson 1958: 223). Both for the Iatmul and for the people of New Ireland, the totality of names and motifs comprises a stock of knowledge that is the basis of social integration and differentiation. While all aspiring young men know, only the elders can recite names and talk in an informed manner about motifs adhering to sculptures (Bateson 1958: 227). Contrary to oral traditions such as the naming system of the Iatmul, however, the order to be uncovered in *Malangan*-art unfolds diachronically and can be studied on the basis of the ethnographic collections which extend over one hundred years. The order and its transformation, which can be elucidated from the analysis of such collections, thus adds a historical dimension to the synchronic study of naming as undertaken by Bateson among the Iatmul. Like Bateson, however, I shall follow Bartlett's recognition that the order or 'scheme' underlying a succession of reproductions of visual information is 'an important factor in what makes remembering possible' (Bartlett 1932: 81).

Of the thousands of sculptures stored in museums, not one can be said to be a replica of another one. Not one sculpture, however, differs so much from the others that it would prohibit the ease of identifying the sculptures, experienced even by the innocent visitor to an ethnographic collection. Where the outsider sees just a general likeness, the informed can recognise distinctive sets among *Malangan*-sculptures.

To define what constitutes the general likeness and distinctiveness of these sculptures I want to draw on the interpretation of a western artist in a work of modern art. The comparison between a work of modern and of non-western art aims to highlight what appear to be the recurrent structural features of *Malangan*-art and does not imply an affinity between the 'modern' and the 'tribal'. The work chosen for this task is a sculpture made by the surrealist artist Alberto Giacometti, called the *Cage*. The *Cage* was produced by Giacometti in 1932 and might have been informed by his knowledge of *Malangan*-art. It is possible that he was familiar with the art from collections of his surrealist colleagues and from the collection of his patron Joseph Mueller.¹²

Visually, one can discern a relation between the *Cage* and *Malangan*-art. Both are spatially complex and are intricate in their design. In both, this complexity is achieved by surrounding the figurative elements with thin, parallel rods which are connected by short bridges. In Giacometti's work, unrelated shapes are seemingly arbitrarily juxtaposed. This juxtaposition is found in *Malangan*-art in the relation between motifs and painted patterns. The

juxtaposition in both has the effect of denying the three-dimensionality of the sculpture.

Both works, moreover, give the impression of being disjointed, their shapes seemingly being detachable and being thematically independent of the main body of the sculpture. In *Malangan*-art this visual impression is achieved by the technique of making sculptures. Wooden sculptures are composed of a number of motifs that are carved in separate pieces of wood and later joined, together with items taken from the flora and fauna. Moulded or woven sculptures, conversely, have wooden motifs attached to the main body of a work. This compositional character of *Malangan*-art is crucial to its embeddedness in ceremonial exchange. Several social units can have rights over the reproduction of different components of a memorised sculpture as a result of their co-operation in the mortuary exchanges that surround the production and exhibition of sculptures. The knowledge of the relation between the components to a more encompassing image is used in disputes over inter-personal and inter-group relationships. The correspondence between formal properties and social processes of integration and fragmentation in the society producing *Malangan*-art is represented in an abstract sense in the *Cage*, whose shapes could be removed and replaced by others without changing the overall appearance of the sculpture.

Giacometti's interpretation of *Malangan*-art isolates two formal properties persisting in the sculptures to the present day. The name given by Giacometti to his work, the *Cage*, is a pointed characterisation of the tension persisting between the properties of constraint and fragmentation that govern the reproduction of *Malangan*-art. *Malangan*-art can be described as a puzzle whose components can be removed or new ones added within the confines of an all-encompassing image.

The tension between constancy and variation in *Malangan*-art can be understood as a property of the mnemonic process to which sculptures are subjected in the course of successive reproductions:

In a chain of reproductions obtained from a single individual the general form, the outline, is remarkably persistent, once the first version has been given . . . At the same time, style, rhythm, precise mode of construction . . . are very rarely faithfully reproduced (Bartlett 1932: 93).

The relation between art and memory specific to this material is, however, not merely retrievable through analysis. The tension between constancy and variation which is articulated in Giacometti's interpretation in the sculpture the *Cage* is articulated by those who produce *Malangan*-art. The polysemic term for the generative capacity of *Malangan*-art situates images of reproduction within diverse social experiences and thus creates a notional relation between them. These experiences combine visual and cognitive elements such as pregnancy, smoke and flowing water (cf. Küchler 1985). *Malangan*-art has thus a cognitive efficacy in selecting, ordering and organising experiences in a socially relevant manner.

Every sculpture, either memorised or presently seen, is thought to have been produced out of *wune*, a polysemic term which is translatable as 'source', 'womb' or 'smoke'. Throughout this article I will use the term 'template' to

capture the double character of the indigenous concept, that of generation and structure (cf. Morphy 1977; 1984; see also for alternative terms: 'family' Wilkinson 1978; 'genera' Gunn n.d.). The concept of template was developed by Morphy in his study of Yolngu art where he refers to it 'as a structure of possible relationships between sets of things, which generates both alternative paintings and alternative interpretations of them' (cf. Morphy n.d.).

The imagery, which relates successive reproductions of sculptures, is invented in dreams and is talked about in the form of myths. Nine named types of imagery or 'templates' are currently known throughout the region, but many more are restricted to particular localities. These nine known over an ever increasing area have spread as a result of the ceremonial transactions of the right to reproduce their imagery in sculptures. The mythical themes associated with the templates are articulating issues of social continuity and reproduction. These themes are: 'the relation between fire and culture', 'the relation between brothers and sisters', 'ecology and social differentiation', 'warfare and social migration', 'rain and the productivity of land', 'the relation between people and place', 'mortality and the continuity of the clan', 'the manifestation of power' and 'the process of growth'. Myths pertaining to these themes are not told except with reference to *Malangan*-templates and to the imagery of the art. Every 'template', moreover, is known under a name associated with a particular location where the imagery is believed to have been transformed into sculptural form for the first time. Those who claim the right over the reproduction of a sculpture have to be able to relate the imagery to a mythical theme and to trace a relationship between the location of its innovation and its present reproduction.¹³

The generality of the themes facilitates the ease of fitting new variations into an existing conceptual scheme. It enables, therefore, the continuing boom in the production of sculptures for ceremonial exchange. The generality, however, also leaves its mark in the formal properties of the art. Not only the motifs, but their arrangements in a sculpture are recurrent in sculptures collected over the past century. This standardisation is one of the effects of the mnemonic process as recognised by Bartlett:

With frequent reproduction the form and items of remembered detail very quickly become stereotyped and thereafter suffer little change (1932: 93).

Every template is known to have a number of motifs reappearing in stereotypic form and combination. The template *Walik* is the most widespread and most easily recognisable in its sculptural forms. Its sculptures have either one of the following two motifs: one called *medane hede*, or the 'eye of the fire', the other *mamaze*, or 'Palolo worm'. Each of these motifs is composed of a number of parts that are either carved into wood or painted over a carved surface. 'The eye of the fire' is a round dotted area with the part of a shell (*Turbo petholaurus*) in its centre. It also has a raised section comprising two further components, a half moon and a water stopper. The 'Palolo worm' is depicted with minute incisions, with the resulting planes being painted in the colours red, black and white (see fig. 2).

The fire is a metaphor of the life-force and is extinguished immediately after



FIGURE 2.

the death of a person. Each stage in the mortuary cycle, which culminates in the performance of the *Malangan*-ceremony, is named after a stage in the process of building up a fire from ashes (*mat*) to glowing heat (*malang*). These stages trace the growth of the life-force until it is absorbed into a sculpture and channelled into the reproductive *Malangan*-system. The Palolo-worm is associated with the growth of the life-force in living beings. Throughout the South Pacific region, the Palolo-worm appears for mating during one night in the year in the lagoon and is fetched in containers. In the early morning after this event, children are taken to the sea and bathed in the water in which the *mamaze* had been mating. The eating of the Palolo-worm and the bathing in the water from which it has been fetched is thought to produce 'heat', which is like the 'heat' generated in the mortuary ceremonies, an expression of a vibrant life-force. The embeddedness of the motifs in common experience enables them to appear together in a single sculpture and to refer to a single template.

For a motif to persist throughout successive reproductions it has to fit these requirements of both generality and simplicity. There are about twenty such named motifs, some of whom are associated with a particular template while others can be shifted from template to template. With every reproduction of a sculpture and its recall from memory, the selection and combination varies in a manner that is conscious and articulated with reference to the practice of ceremonial exchange. Irrespective of whether a motif is replaced by another one or omitted, however, the arrangement of motifs in a sculpture remains constant. The hornbill, for example, is always carved on top of the head of a wooden sculpture, the drongo along its sides and the owl at the bottom. The owl can be replaced by a cornshell, the head of a fish or the head of a pig, while the hornbill

can be replaced by an eagle, a fishhawk or a chicken. The use of certain motifs such as birds, snakes and fish is locality-specific so that the transference of rights over the reproduction of a sculpture between places leads to an alteration of the motifs without changing their combination and arrangement in subsequent reproductions.

Alterations and omissions of motifs undertaken in the process of reproduction express particular kinds of relationships between the present and the future beholder of the sculpture. Omission attests to a relationship of dependency in relation to the use of land, while alteration reflects a dependency between the transacting parties which pertains to the organisation of mortuary ceremonies. The mutual relationship between those sharing the memory of a sculpture is articulated also in the pattern painted over the carved or woven surface of a sculpture. This pattern can only be altered when the right over the reproduction of a sculpture is transacted between parties who do not cultivate the same land and who do not co-operate in each other's mortuary ceremonies.

The relation between the potential range of motifs suggested in a template and their specific selection and arrangement in a sculpture is described as a song whose text differs from place to place, but remains recognisable in its rhythm and melody. Each localised community of two or more sub-clans who share a single cemetery has rights over the reproduction of several named sculptures. Only a few, however, have rights over the generation of variations upon the imagery suggested in a template. In theory such a control over the capacity to produce variations is vested in certain matrilineal clans. In practice, however, such rights change hands every other generation. The extinction of a sub-clan claiming such rights leads to the immediate absorption of the knowledge surrounding the imagery by a co-resident sub-clan and to the forgetting of the relationship between template and clan as it obtained in the past. This process of forgetting and shifting the rights over templates from clan to clan and place to place is an ongoing one. Since the control over a template implies also the control over the cemetery and over the ceremonial activities directed to this place, the scattering of the rights over the template plays a vital part in social processes which impose their character on inter-clan relationships.

The production and processing of memory is thus intimately connected with attainment and maintenance of power and authority. The past is encapsulated in sculptures, but it is an interpreted and constructed past, because of the temporary and reproduced character of sculptures. The mnemonic process and the production of history are thus mutually related processes. Mnemonics, however, is not merely a mental phenomenon that enables the retention and recall of information. The organisation and structure of its operations is conditioned in a learning process and thus open to social and historical influence.

Memory as artifice

Given the social relevance of the production and processing of memory, it should be no surprise that the method of memorising in New Ireland has gone well beyond the untrained capacity to remember. The technique used in remembering visual imagery appears not to be culturally specific, since it is

documented for a number of societies. The effectiveness of this technique seems to lie at least partially in its correspondence to the cognitive requirements and operations of the mnemonic process.¹⁴

This technique is the 'method of loci', which is known to have been practised by Greek and Roman orators for the memorising of speeches (Yates 1978: 20–1). It is described in a classical text known as 'ad Herennium', compiled by an unknown teacher of rhetoric in Rome between 86–82 B.C. (Yates 1978: 20). The 'method of loci' involves a number of cognitive operations, which relate a word with an image and the image with a particular spatial location:

The artificial memory is established from places and images, the stock definition of which is repeated forever down the ages. A 'locus' is a place easily grasped by memory, such as a house, an intercolumnar space, a corner, an arch or the like . . . Images are forms, marks or simulacra of what we wish to remember . . . The art of memory is like an inner writing. Those who know the letters of the alphabet can write down what is dictated to them and read out what they have written. Likewise, those who have learned mnemonics can set in places what they have heard and deliver it from memory (Yates 1978: 22).

The 'method of loci' requires the learning of a cognitive map with enough distinct 'loci' (Neisser 1976: 137). It is a mnemonic system whose universal effectiveness is explained by Neisser with its capacity to anticipate information not then available:

Our image of an object in a particular place is simply a readiness to pick up information specifying the object when we get to the place. Anyone familiar with a particular environment has a cognitive map in which the schemata of many individual loci are embedded and can anticipate what he would see at each of these places in turn. Anyone can change a cognitive map on the basis of verbal information and later give verbal descriptions of what he is ready to see, can use the Method of Loci to organise and recall arbitrary lists (Neisser 1976: 137–8).

The use of spatial patterns in mental processing is thus a particular property of mnemonics. The choice of what Neisser calls the cognitive map, however, is culturally specific. Using the example of *Malangan*-art, I contend that this map is developed in a dynamic relation with social processes and practices that surround the organisation of space and time (cf. Gell 1985: 273).

The concern with the moulding of space and the confounding of time in New Ireland culture is visible in the sculptures and in the settlement pattern. Both are at once of great complexity and yet highly stereotypic in terms of the layout and arrangement of parts within a larger complex. The significance of space appears also in the structuring of inter-generational relationships. The relationship between localised units of a matrilineal clan is apprehended in terms of places and movements of people between places so that genealogies take on the character of a map of the landscape as known to the New Ireland person.

The cognitive map pertaining to intra- and inter-clan relationships and to *Malangan*-art utilises the framework of the house and the tree as 'loci' for the placing of imagery. This common choice of 'loci' reflects the kinship-based organisation of the *Malangan*-system. It enables sculptures to be about relationships without actually representing any particular social unit.

Tree and house are two possible 'loci' for the placing of imagery and are used with varying emphasis in geographically distinct areas of New Ireland, namely

the mainland and the Tabar island to the north-east. Myths claim the innovation of *Malangan*-art on the Tabar islands from where the imagery spread through exchange to the mainland of New Ireland. To the present day, Tabar island uses predominantly the structure of a house for 'loci' in mnemonics, while the mainland population employs the structure of a tree.

Houses are built out of wood, bamboo and sago leaves. While they appear to be fixed and static in character, a study of settlement patterns shows that the movement of house-sites is related to social processes that are initiated with the death of a person. When a person dies, the house he or she had occupied is destroyed, replaced by cooking houses during the *Malangan*-ceremony and thereafter transformed into a part of the secondary forest which edges around each settlement. Years later, a new house is built at the spot where the old one had been by someone who can claim a relationship with those who are remembered in connexion with this location. The house itself is central to the mnemonic process which transmits information about relationships from one generation to the other. It lends itself, therefore, to the active process of fitting which accompanies the recognition of sculptures and their retention in memory.

Imagery, which is carved into sculptures, is both visually and conceptually placed into the structural components of a house. When a dreamt image is first given shape in a sculpture after its innovation, it is given a vertical form and called 'post' (*eikwar*). As a result of the transaction of the imagery in the exchanges and the spreading of rights over the reproduction of memorised sculptures, later manifestations take on a horizontal shape and are called 'beam' (*kobokobor*). Imagery which has been transacted for a considerable time is likely to take on most frequently the shape of a figure, and is identified as 'support'. The transformation of shapes and transference from one 'locus' to the other results from the reproduction of imagery for transaction in the sphere of exchange that links units of the same matrilineal clan, but different residence.

When the finished sculptures are exhibited they are placed in the raw framework of a house erected for this purpose in the cemetery. The shape of these houses can vary between a pig's shelter, caves and trees and house-like structures of extreme height. The placing of the sculpture in such a house accompanies the mental process of fitting which leads to the recognition of a sculpture and to its continuing processing in memory.

The use of the tree as the basis for 'loci' on the mainland is a logical development of this technique, inspired by the social transformations that accompany the spreading of the *Malangan*-system across geographical and linguistic boundaries. The dispersion of the imagery in the course of its reproduction and transaction in the exchanges follows the 'roads of marriage' and thus integrates distinctive linguistic groups into a region. Every clan is capable of recalling a list of place names irrespective of their distance and of reciting how members of the clan came to move from a mythical birth place to all the places inhabited by the clan today. The scattering of the clan is a distinctive mainland phenomenon and it is also only here that political units and sculptures are classified in accordance with the structure of a tree. Contrary to the house, the image of a tree suggests the process of continuing growth and reflects upon the experience of the progressively expanding network of a clan.

Both the clan, in its today merely imaginary unity, and the sculpture, in its complete embodiment of the template, are referred to as 'stem' (*wai*). It is not possible, however, to find on the mainland sculptures of a vertical shape, a fact attesting to the relation between social processes and the transmission of imagery in ceremonial exchange. When a sculpture is recalled for transaction between social units who have a history of ritual co-operation, but are not co-resident, its reproduction is given a horizontal shape and is called 'branch' (*iaiaran*). After its transaction and destruction, the imagery is retained in memory as part of a 'branch' and recalled either as a sculpture corresponding to the same 'loci' or to the subordinate 'loci' called 'leaf' (*bai*). Rights over the reproduction of sculptures of figurative shape integrate less encompassing units which usually do not extend beyond the village.

It is significant that only wooden sculptures are capable of being transformed in the manner just described. Templates, which specify the use of bush material and clay, are used for the production of sculptures only when it is certain that the image will not be transacted between units resident in different places. Their imagery is remembered by means of being placed into a map composed of spirit places (*masalai*) that are represented in the landscape by tall trees, rocks or springs. Spirit places have in common that their outstanding features are not created by people, contrary to settlement-places that are marked by planted trees and other remnants of human productivity. The 'loci' accommodating such imagery are thus unrelated to the social and political organisation of the regional social system.

The complexity of the mnemonic technique surrounding the reproduction of wooden sculptures is crucial to the escalation of ceremonial exchange and the development of regional forms of organisation.¹⁵ Both are governed by a shift of the primarily oral transmission of myth to a visual medium which historically is situated in a period characterised by the break-up of communities through warfare. The interest of traders arriving in the late seventeenth century in land certainly contributed to the increase in the frequency and vehemence of warfare. Traders, however, also introduced iron tools and thus furthered the production of sculptures for peace-making transactions. In northern New Ireland, there is no indication that warfare had to be stopped by the intervention of the colonial administration. Relations between localities, once created through the theft of women in war, were then and are still today retraced in the transactions of sculptures in the context of ceremonial exchange.

While this relation between art and memory is distinctive to the ethnography of northern New Ireland, it nevertheless shares with other Melanesian societies a naming system. It is not the case that one has replaced the other, but that both the visual and the naming system have merged in a manner peculiar to New Ireland culture. It is possible to suppose that the vanishing of the clan as a social unit initiated the change and led to the development of strategies which lend themselves more readily to alternative ways of social integration. By coming to share the memory of a wooden sculpture, the people of New Ireland perceive their relatedness in terms of, and yet independent from, the clan based kinship organisation. Sculptures, unlike names, are 'real' at least for the time in which

they are produced and seen displayed in the cemetery and thus enable the legitimization and manipulation of current interests.

Naming and serial reproduction

A single sculpture is associated with three names, one denoting its template and the place of its innovation, the second its mnemonic position or its stage in the history of its transmission, while the third denotes the selection and combination of motifs. Throughout successive reproductions of imagery, names given to its manifestations accumulate and vary. The third name, the name indicating the particular combination of motifs specific to individual sculptures, varies every time a sculpture is reproduced. The second name, associated with the shape given to the sculpture and its mnemonic position, is only altered when the transmission involves a transference of rights from one localised unit to another within the extended matrilineal clan. The name indicating the relation between a sculpture and a template, however, remains constant throughout the history of its transmission.

The names carried by a sculpture can thus be distinguished in terms of the variability of the imagery to which they refer. I am thus going to talk about first, second and third order names and indicate how this order, articulated visually in the art, corresponds to a pattern of social differentiation.

The third order name given to a sculpture defines the motif combination and selection peculiar to the individual object and is the only name which a sculpture shares with a person. All personal names are names which once had been attached to sculptures and which aid their recall from memory. In theory, a person is capable of making a sculpture which corresponds to the name the person received at birth. In practice, however, only those who receive the name of a sculpture at the time of its ceremonial display and transaction have the right to reproduce and transmit the imagery addressed in the name.

There are various named combinations of motifs that evoke a relationship with a certain named template. Imagery innovated in dreams on Tabar island is associated with motif-names of a distinctive Tabar kind. Names shared by people and *Malangan*-art on Tabar islands are different compared with those found in the northern part of the mainland of New Ireland. Both Tabar island and northern mainland names, in turn, are different from names found in the central and southern area of the island.

The third order names are thus grouped together under the name of a template such as the one known as *Mendis* which is thought to have been dreamt on the northern Tabar island called *Simberi*. This clan is today scattered over the region of northern New Ireland. Individual names associated with this imagery are found at present on the north-west coast of New Ireland, carried both by people and by memorised sculptures. The sharing of the same imagery and name among people of these distant locations institutes a relatedness that is periodically transformed into kinship ties through marriages. Relationships of this kind are analogous to clan-based relationships, but can be turned into affinal

relationships and thus potentially serve to expand the network of ceremonial activity available to a localised community.

The second order name given to a sculpture refers to its mnemonic position. The sharing of the right to reproduce imagery reflecting a particular second order name attests to a politically effective unit based on existing ties of ceremonial cooperation. There are different names for vertical, horizontal and figurative sculptures produced out of the template *Mendis*. One of these positional names is *Mandassonga*, one of several names given to a horizontal manifestation of the template. The sharing of imagery referred to as *Mandasonga* obligates people of distinctive linguistic and geographical localities to co-operate in each other's ceremonial occasions and exchanges.

While the second order name unites people of different localised communities on the basis of co-operation in ceremonial work, third order names are shared by a territorially and politically restricted unit. Both, however, evoke a relatedness analogous to, yet independent of, relationships established through marriage and birth.

The differentiation and relation established between names allows for the integration of a person and community in ever more expanding networks of ceremonial activity. The boom in the production of sculptures for ceremonial exchange during this and the past century is visible in the museum collections. It is also evident in the number of third order names associated with particular motif combinations that are utilised at present for the reproduction of sculptures of specific mnemonic position and template. The capacity for recombination of imagery in the course of its transmission has developed in the context of the dissolution of the clan as an entity whose unity can be experienced. The mnemonic technique and articulation in the naming and visual system constitutes an alternative mode of social integration, which enables the transformation of the process of fragmentation and dissemination into a process of progressive incorporation.

Patterns of social organisation are not just articulated in art, but constructed through it. The alteration of names, for example, effects significant changes in the reproduction of visual imagery from memory which, in turn, evokes complementary changes in social relationships (Bartlett 1932: 185). Because of the embeddedness of art in the memory process, explorations of this dynamic relation between naming, imagery and social relations are possible.

NOTES

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¹ Beaumont 1972.

² New Ireland has been the subject of a number of ethnographic studies. *Malangan*-art and ceremonial exchange is recognised by all studies to be a social institution of great centrality. *Malangan*-art is transacted in the last ceremony of the mortuary cycle and is produced specifically for the purpose of being displayed on the grave of a deceased person. The transactions of *Malangan*-art

are carried out predominantly by the population of the northern part, yet researches in central and southern New Ireland indicate the gradual expansion of the ceremonial exchange system (Brouwer 1980). The three areas of the island are nevertheless distinct culturally, ecologically and in terms of social organisation.

³ The relation between exchange and the production of sculptures is analysed by Lewis in 'the social context of art in northern New Ireland' (1969). The relation between spheres of exchange, kinship and the classification of sculptures is the theme of my Ph.D. thesis based on material collected during fieldwork in north-west New Ireland.

⁴ All indigenous terms used in this article are taken from the Kara language spoken in the centre of northern New Ireland. The concepts articulated in these terms do not vary within the region in which *Malangan*-art is produced in the manner described in this article.

⁵ Gerbrands 1967; Leenhardt 1979. The use of sculptures as replacements for the body appears to be a phenomenon of Austronesian speaking populations, while the decoration of the body and notions concerning skin seem to be more dominant in non-Austronesian speaking areas (Strathern 1972).

⁶ This argument is developed by Sperber 1985.

⁷ Kramer 1925; Groves 1933; Lewis 1969; Billings 1972; Lomas 1973. These are only some of the main works produced over the last sixty years on northern New Ireland. In all one can find reference to a number of sculptures which are reported to have been produced at the time of the research. How sculptures are related to social units became an issue in the late 1970's when enough evidence existed for the use of sculptures in land disputes and political processes (Billings 1972; Lomas 1973; 1979; Wilkinson 1978).

⁸ See Neisser: 'The higher mental processes are primarily social phenomena, made possible by cognitive tools and characteristic situations that have evolved in the course of history' (1976: 137).

⁹ Bateson 1958.

¹⁰ Bateson 1958: 223.

¹¹ See also Bateson: 'processes of recall and processes of thought seem to have contributed to the maintenance and development of complexity in the Iatmul culture' (1958: 222).

¹² Rubin 1984: 516. For insights into the relation between this work by Giacometti and *Malangan*-art I have to thank Dr A. Grieve of the University of East Anglia.

¹³ The use of imagery in political discourse has been discussed recently by Wagner for the Barok of southern New Ireland (1986). The Barok are not participating in the ceremonial exchange of *Malangan*-art, but practise *Tumbuan* which is a masking and dance tradition generic to southern New Ireland and New Britain. In 1983, however, it came to my notice that one village had acquired rights over the reproduction of a *Malangan*-image as a result of a marriage between a woman from the North and a man from Siar.

¹⁴ For the requirement of order in mnemonic processing see Neisser 1967.

¹⁵ The escalation of ceremonial exchange systems appears to have been a widespread phenomenon in post-colonial Papua New Guinea (Gregory 1982). Not in all areas which have experienced such an efflorescence of traditional economy, however, can one trace the development of forms of social organisation which are distinctively regional.

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