

*The fractal person*

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Wagner re-opens the Highlands material via his own Austronesian perspective from New Ireland. He poses a question about the different kinds of anthropological understanding that have been brought to the depiction of great men and big men. Big men have been seen as exemplars of sociological activity, as mobilising social forces, for they appear to change the scale of men's actions from an individual to a group dimension by virtue of the numbers they command. But great-men systems force us to comprehend a pre-existing sociality, and a pre-existing totality, of which any aggregate can be only a partial realisation. This totality is neither individual nor group but a 'fractal person', an entity whose (external) relationships with others are integral (internal) to it. However diminished or magnified, the fractal person, keeping its scale, reproduces only versions of itself. The great man thus represents the 'scale' of his culture rather than a scale-change to accommodate anthropological attempts to ground it in principles beyond itself. If we have here an indigenous social science, the question becomes how then to conceive big men from the point of view of understandings of this kind that great-men systems are able to elicit from the western social scientists.

We are indebted to the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci for the notion of hegemonic ideas (1971), of concepts that have come to be taken so much for granted that they seem to be the voice of reason itself. Such ideas are not subconscious or out-of-awareness for the same reason that their validity is not subject to question; they are the very form taken by our consciousness of a problem or issue. Hegemonic ideas, then, are no more subject to proof or disproof than are Kuhnian paradigms, for in both cases entering the discourse is tantamount to replacing the question of *whether* things work that way with one of *how* they work that way. Hence anthropologists with an investment of research interest in the hegemonic motif, say, of the necessarily social dynamics of human thought, might be expected to fault and misunderstand a challenge to the motif in terms of its failure to provide a convincing 'how', without perceiving the irrelevance of their objections.

The opposition of individual and society, a product of western jurisprudence and political ideology, is not merely coincidental to the hegemony of 'social' thinking, but identical with it. It is based on the necessarily ideal, and practically unrealisable, notion of the 'social concept', and the necessarily substantive, physical and material, notion of the person as object.

Thus the ideal of 'corporateness', an ostensible merging of individuals into a single social 'body', becomes, in its failure to achieve complete realisation, a substantive *group* of individuals. And the notion of a totally integrated 'culture' of collective representation within the individual becomes, in its failure of realisation, a mere 'culture-concept', an ideal. The point is not simply that a flawed and unrealistic opposition of thought and substance reproduces itself as measurable social fact, that social groups and idealised cultures are mass-produced as a map of socio-cultural variation and problematics. It is, more importantly, that a naively hegemonic dependence upon individuality and plurality underlies and articulates the manner in which idealised concept and substantive object are brought into play. This dependence makes the fact-and-problem-producing failures of concept to be fully realised, of substantive object to the conceptually tractable, seem like stubborn fact, seem to be the very fabric of social reality.

Thus to make a statement such as 'no society works perfectly', or even 'the reason no society works perfectly is just that its members expect it to do so' is to describe the expectations of anthropologists themselves rather than those of their subjects. For what is described is the manner in which social scientists work to make their subjects interesting, statistically variable and problematic. It is by no means clear that the subjects think of themselves in this way, or think of their social interactions as interesting because they can be mapped into paradigms of social groupings and individual variability.

The idea of a social mechanism or that of the individual as its natural resistance did not grow indigenously in Melanesia; it was brought there together with other mechanisms by self-conscious 'individuals'. And so the proposition that a society might work or not work is the same sort of surprise in indigenous terms as that an automobile engine should work or that it might not work. But the failure of an automobile engine, or of the society of western construction, does not entail a complete overhaul of our assumptions about mechanics; it entails an overhaul of the engine, the model, before the mechanics get to work. A hegemonic of individual/society mechanics, with its underpinnings of the particular/general, shifts automatically from questions of 'why?' into questions of 'how?'.

Hence a discovery that, at least for some Melanesians, the part/whole distinction and its systematic entailment is inapplicable, does not automatically imply that those Melanesians belong to a race of mathematical wizards. If such a discovery suggests that the individual problem- and person-producing failure of social concept, and the system-producing failure of individual autonomy, are wrongheaded constructions of the

wrong 'engine', this may simply mean that Melanesian thinking is too elegantly simple, rather than too complex, for western expectations. An engine with no moving parts at least avoids the nemesis of friction. And friction may well be the effect that social scientists have mistaken for social leverage.

Or so at least the received conception of the big man would suggest: an emperor of social friction who uses society against itself to reinstate the essential individual at the top of the heap. In his identification of the phenomenon of the great man, Godelier posed a profound challenge to our understanding of Melanesian societies. Introduced as a type or another kind of leader, the great man provides a counter-example to the big man that familiarity and overuse have inflated far beyond Sahlins's (1972) sophisticated characterisation. But typology alone can only trivialise the challenge, which takes its weight and authority largely from the context of Baruya ethnography. For *The Making of Great Men* proposes a vivid antithesis to the self-excusing notion of 'loosely structured' societies that has entertained ethnographic speculation for many years. The larger challenge is that of a more holistic manner of thought than that implied in structure, and the great man is its holistic counterpart.

Is the big man his equivalent in another kind of society, a more open, competitive and loosely organised one? Or is this type-casting of the big man itself the error of another way of approaching society, and therefore not a typological contrast at all? Let us consider an ethnographic *locus classicus*.

### Neither individual nor group

The anthropologist has often been obliged, even pleased, to construct social forces out of the evidence of a big man assembling, say, his resources for a *moka*. As long as he can be seen to be making a kind of solidarity, helping the group to happen, the imputed sociology has an immediate and obvious realisation. The question posed by the idea of the great man is that of what to do when society and its solidarity are already in place. Then, of course, the big man's efforts have to be reconsidered or re-entitled; he is not enacting the answer to a sociological question, because that question has already been answered. But if we should suggest that he is realising his own individual aspirations, the projection of western political economy has another easy answer. Sociology is then seen to emerge from the conjoint effects of individual competition.

Anyone who has ever tried to determine the definitive *locus* of

'individual' and 'corporate group' in the planning and making of these competitive exchanges, fairly soon realises that individual and group are false alternatives, doubly so implicated because each implies the other. It is, after all, difficult or impossible to define the successful (or unsuccessful) maker of *moka* as either individual or group, because the big man aspires to something that is both at once. One might say that the Hagen big man aspires to the status of great man – that the *moka* produces variant examples, equally valid however successful or unsuccessful, of the great man. It is a matter of the realisation of something that is already there, as the pigs and shells are already there.

Would it make any difference, then, to argue that the status and the society are never really there, that the image is always realised for the first time, or even that it may never be realised at all? None whatsoever. Hagen society is there or not there whether or not the *moka* is realised, the big man remains a big man regardless of the form of his achievement. If this were a matter of 'making' society, then the failure of a *moka* would make a difference.

I have borrowed an illustration from Hagen society (cf. chapter 11), and purposely made our normal projection of motivation and agency into its actors oblique and difficult for a very specific purpose. This is to develop, in the course of this essay, Marilyn Strathern's concept of the person who is neither singular nor plural. In introducing her idea, Strathern (1990) borrowed from Haraway (1985) a most ingenious application of the classic science-fiction term 'cyborg' – the integral being who is part human and part machine. For my purposes, and for reasons that shall become apparent presently, I shall re-entitle the concept as that of the fractal person, following the mathematical notion of a dimensionality that cannot be expressed in whole numbers. I shall not be concerned with the degree of fractality here, the terms of the ratio or fraction, but simply define the concept of a fractal person in contrast to singularity and plurality.

Although the idea of fractality may appear abstract, it is in fact no more so than singularity or plurality, or statistical analysis. Its effects are altogether familiar to the fieldworker – as the problem, for instance, of the big man's aspirations being at once individual and corporate. It is that problem, apprehended as a solution. It lies at the root, too, of what is commonly misconstrued as the 'extension' of kin-terms, exemplified in the Siane usage (Salisbury 1964) whereby any daughter of a unit to which the class of 'father' had given a bride becomes a *hovorafo* ('father's sister's daughter'), a potential spouse. As Salisbury correctly deduced, father is not necessarily identified with a so-called primary kin term here, and is neither

singular nor plural. The term has a fractal implication, equally applicable to both situations.

A fractal person is never a unit standing in relation to an aggregate, or an aggregate standing in relation to a unit, but always an entity with relationship integrally implied. Perhaps the most concrete illustration of integral relationship comes from the generalised notion of reproduction and genealogy. People exist reproductively by being 'carried' as part of another, and 'carry' or engender others by making themselves genealogical or reproductive 'factors' of these others. A genealogy is thus an enchainment of people, as indeed persons would be seen to 'bud' out of one another in a speeded-up cinematic depiction of human life. Person as human being and person as lineage or clan are equally arbitrary sectionings or identifications of this enchainment, different projections of its fractality. But then enchainment through bodily reproduction is itself merely one of a number of instantiations of integral relationship, which is also manifest, for instance, in the commonality of shared language.

Is this not, then, a mere generic, a mathematical fiction like the 'modal personality'? It would be indeed if I were concerned either to generalise or particularise the relation between general and particular. But integral relationship is not a matter of general and particular, nor of how one of these might be made over into the other. The argument is not one of comparative reality or practicality, but rather one of how one's realities or practical issues are situated with respect to relationship. The only issue that need detain us is that of how Melanesians themselves would seem to situate them.

The issue requires evidence, and the best evidence I can think of pertains to the way in which Melanesians indigenously speak of, order and conceptualise existence as identity. This entitlement of existence is quite simply that of naming, for it is after all names, rather than individuals or groups, that 'go on high' in the *moka*, that command awe, attention and responsibility in the Kula, that serve, as 'big' or 'small', for the identities of what we are predisposed to call groups – lineages, clans or whatever. Regardless of their range of denomination, whether personal or collective, names are but names, but it is a name that is at once the individual and collective aspiration of the big men. A Daribi friend once observed, 'When you see a man, he is small; when you say his name, he is big'.

The example I shall use is that of Daribi naming. A Daribi name, *nogi*, is always an instantiation, and also a simplification, of the relation designated by the participle, *poai*, of the verb *poie*, 'to be congruent with'. Two persons, or a person and a thing, that share a name are *tedeli nogi poai*, 'one name congruent'. Two beings that share the same kind of skin are *tedeli tigi*

*ware poai*, 'one epidermis congruent'. Anything designatable by a word stands in a *poai* relation through any conceivable point of resemblance. Furthermore any two persons or objects that each share any conceivable point of resemblance with a third, are related as *poai* through that third. *Poai* is universally commutative, and because a *poai* relation can simply be bestowed, through the giving of a name for whatever reason, it is also universally applicable. *Poai* eats the world, and it also eats itself. For when an infant goes unnamed for an intolerable period of time after birth, usually out of fear for undesirable consequences of naming, it will acquire the designation *poziawai*, 'unnamed'. The infant acquires an immediate *poai* relation with all things unnamed (non-congruent), but, of course, since *poziawai* is a name, it acquires another with all things named.

The infant, in short, becomes an embodied hinge between the world of names and that of unnamed things. And though *poziawai* is by no means uncommon as a name at Karimui, this is no reason to accede to one patrol officer's private musings that the Daribi are a prime example of negative thought. For it turns out that the designation *poai* is virtually as popular as a personal name. Unhinging as these examples may prove, they serve to direct our attention to the *social* recognition of the name, the only real grip afforded the Daribi on an otherwise frictionless surface.

Essentially, any recognition or bestowal of a name is always the fixing of a point of reference within a potentially infinite range of relations, a designation that is inherently relational. As an instantiation of *poai*, it always implies, through that relation, something that is both less (one of many potential relations) and more (a class, a range of objects or beings) than the person designated. A man, for instance, named for the cassowary, can claim such words as *tori*, *kebi* and *ebi* as his names, since they are all equally names for the cassowary. Also, since the cassowary is poetically and colloquially the *ebi-haza*, the 'cassowary-animal' through its non-avian proclivities, the man could well claim *haza*, 'animal', as a *pagerubo nogi*, a (somewhat droll) basing-name or nickname. And if, as is usually the case, the man was named for someone else, or someone else is named for him, the name is always a section, like the conceptual person or body, taken from a genealogical chain and implicating that chain.

Hence the particular points of convergence that other Melanesian regimes of naming may share, or may not share, with Daribi naming are somewhat beside the point. As long as words are polysemic (and naming, of course, makes them so), and people relate by reproduction, any system of identities developed by sectioning and referencing such a relational field is intrinsically fractal – apparent differentiation developed upon universal congruence and interchangeability. And since denomination is our surest

map or model for the apprehension of identity, the case for the indigenous conceptualisation of fractal units is manifest. It is 'individual' and 'group' that are arbitrary, imposed and artificial.

The concept of currency, money that demands accounting in terms of singularity and plurality, is likewise a non-fractal imposition upon a regime of exchange based on sectionings taken from human productivity and reproductivity. Pigs, pearl shells, axes, bark cloaks are already relational and implicated in the congruence that underlies the remaking of human form, feeling and relationship. Shells and shell wealth (which Daribi think of as 'eggs' through which human beings reproduce) are engaged in the reciprocity of subjectives involved in display and concealment, just as axes, meat and other adjuncts of production and reproduction place human sustenance and replication in reciprocal exchange. When such relational points are treated as representational, as commodity-aggregates on the model of currency, or when the currency substituted for them is taken literally, integral relationship is denied and distorted. Minus the congruence that keeps the scale of their essential unity through all permutations of categorisation, names become merely representational categories of social designation and classification. And minus the sense of their essential unity with body and life-process (in their subjective as well as objective enhancement), items exchanged become the mere 'wealth objects' of a like categorisation – a 'representation' of human values through utility, a 'classification' of utilities through human value.

Money, as the cutting edge of the world-system, entails the counting of a resource-base. Where the resource is itself relational, the commodity, so to speak, of relation, it will exert its own reflexive effect upon the terms of assessment. Hence bridewealth and childwealth inflate prodigiously in the attempt to make assessment into a form of relating, spending representational literalism in the service of what is fundamentally a rhetoric of assertion.

Is the 'economic' image of the big man merely the effect of this rhetoric when magnified via the literalising commensuration of objects and their assessment? Thus our very image of the big man inflates him through the imputation of his own inflation, whereas his distinctive indigenous attribution is as a rhetorician (Reay 1959: 113–30). For ultimately the final arbiter of money as well as law and court cases, ethnography as well as indigenous status, is talk. And talk, a concept that is generally inclusive of language for Melanesians, is by no means the same thing as description, assessment, information or language itself. It is the medium of their fractality, that which expands or contracts the scale of recognition and articulation to fit all exigencies, making language equal to all occasions by

making those occasions over into talk. Hence talk is like a *poai* relation intrinsic to thought. Law and money, singular and plural, individual and group, even ethnography, are supposed to be the places where it comes to rest, but talk about law and money, even ethnography, never rests, and talk itself, as Goldman's recent study of Huli rhetoric exemplifies (1983), never dies. This is the fractality of the Melanesian person: the talk formed through the person that is the person formed through the talk.

### Neither singular nor plural

When the arbitrary sectionings cut from the whole cloth of universal congruence are taken literally as data, they become the social categories that we identify as names, individuals, groups, wealth-objects and information-bearing sentences or statements. Taken at face value this way they lose any sense of fractality and merge with the western hegemonic of social orders constructed of substantive elements, cultural systems made of representational categories. This does not mean that the fractal possibilities of scale retention are not there, for they are evidenced by the *poai* relation and its many equivalents. But it does carry a strong guarantee that the indigenous awareness and use of these possibilities will be discounted, overlooked or misread as rustic attempts at social construction.

To put it into the structuralist terms that have become an argot of the social anthropologist's craft, the possibility remains that social and cultural phenomena might be collapsed along a number of axes to yield scale-retaining understandings of unsuspected elegance and force, the generalising forms of concept and person that are neither singular nor plural. This would implicate Benoit Mandelbrot's fractal dimensionality, perhaps the general case of holography, as a 'fractional dimension' or dimensional 'remainder' that replicates its figuration as part of the fabric of the field, through all changes of scale. Fractality, then, relates to, converts to and reproduces the whole, something as different from a sum as it is from an individual part. A holographic or self-scaling form thus differs from a 'social organisation' or a cultural ideology in that it is not imposed so as to order and organise, explain or interpret, a set of disparate elements. It is an instantiation of the elements themselves.

The phenomenality of meaning provides an apt parallel; there is no such thing as 'part' of a meaning. Though we may well persuade ourselves, through grammars, sign-systems, deconstructive ploys and the like, that the means by which we elicit meaning can be eminently partible, the meanings so elicited do not and cannot have parts. It is not simply a matter of the cliché about wholes being greater than the sums of their parts, for if a mean-

ing has no parts, there is no sum to compare with the totality. One might as well conclude that the whole is less than the sum, for it is only one. When a whole is subdivided in this way it is split into holographs of itself; though neither the splitting nor its opposite amount to an 'ordering' function. What we call an 'order' belongs to the world of partibility and construction.

This calls to mind a more extended Melanesian example, that of Mimica's remarkable study of the conceptual mathematic of the Iqwaye, an Angan-speaking people who live near Menyamya. Mimica (1988) describes an essentially recursive counting system, which includes only two numbers, one and two, and is computed on the digits of the hands and feet. A crucial facet of the mathematic is that digits are understood to be assimilated to the final number reached, a holistic sense of sum or totality for which Mimica borrows the German term *Anzahl* (1988: 102). Thus, for instance, the five digits of the hand become 'one', in the sense of 'one hand', because they are assimilated to the final 'one' in the series 'one-two-one-two-one'. 'Ten', the 'one' at the end of the second hand, is also, of course, 'one', except that this is hand number two. The feet are likewise differentiated ('one foot', 'two feet'), except that the unity at the conclusion of the second foot becomes, oddly enough for an even number, one: 'two hands, two feet: one man'. Then we start again with the first finger of the first hand, counting it as 'twenty', or 'one man' instead of 'one finger'. When we have counted twenty of these twenties, or 400, the *Anzahl* is once again 'one', as is 8,000 and so forth.

In fact, infinity is also 'one', not so much through some privileged access of the numeration, but simply because it is always counted on the body, which always closes on one. But the reason for this also closes with cosmology, and with the kind of universal congruence or integral relationship evidenced in the *poai* relation and in genealogy. According to Mimica (1981), the Iqwaye cosmos was originally embodied as a single man, Omalyce, folded in on himself, with his fingers interdigitated between his toes and a penis/umbilicus connecting abdomen and mouth. Only when the ligament was cut, and Omalyce unfolded, did plurality/reproduction, as well as the fingers and toes on which to count plurality, come into existence. It should not be a surprise, then, to learn that numeration and genealogy have the same congruent basis for Iqwaye, that they characteristically name their offspring (in order) for the digits of the hand.

Now suppose that a western demographer came to make an accurate census of the Iqwaye. No matter what number might be reached, and no matter how painstakingly and accurately the census is carried out, it will invariably be deficient by Iqwaye standards. For the Iqwaye totality, the

*Anzahl* instantiated by Omalyce, includes also all the Iqwaye who have lived in the past, and all those to be born as well (Mimica 1988: 74). However high the number, it will always be less than the number embodied by Omalyce, which is, of course, one. Each Iqwaye person, then, is a totality, Omalyce instantiated, but any *number* of them is less than that. For Iqwaye, in other words, counting/reproduction keeps its human scale, which is by no means comparable to the abstraction of western number.

The holography of reproduction grounds another extended example, that of the Gimi of the Eastern Highlands described in chapter 10. Initially Gillison delineates this holography through a kind of metonymic conflation of the contained foetus with the penis contained in copulation. Like the penis, the foetus has an opening at the top, the unclosed fontanel, whereas the mouth is covered by a membrane (Gillison 1987: 177); the foetus 'grows' in the womb as the penis swells and erects in the sexual act, and it 'eats' the proffered semen through the fontanel (Gillison 1987: 178). But the substance it eats flows from the head of the father, himself a matured 'foetus' and thus a penis, down through his urethra, so that the 'head' of the foetus eats the metonymic 'head' of the father. Gimi note that the entire male body becomes flaccid, penis-like, after intercourse.

A man is, then, a penis with a penis; but so is a woman, according to Gillison, save that her penis is *within* her body, even before impregnation. For Gimi understand that a female foetus is impregnated by its father as it is formed, that 'the means by which the Gimi female is conceived and made to grow inside the womb are the same as her "impregnation" . . . [s]he is congenitally pregnant with her father's dead child' (Gillison 1987: 186). This incestuous miscarriage is her internal penis, to be displaced by the monthly visits of the moon's giant penis, causing a bloody discharge of the miscarried substance, and then by that of the husband or lover, instantiating itself metonymically as another foetus.

The set of substitutions constituting a woman's internal penis, from the holographic foetus within a foetus to menarche to that of impregnation and pregnancy, is also the coming into being of legitimate procreation and kin relationship out of its incestuous opposite. Its social legitimization in marriage has a familiar ring, for along with the bride and her implicit internal penis, her father secretly bestows an 'external' penis. This takes the form of a hollow bamboo tube filled with cooked meat, with an outlined but uncut 'mouth hole' that is decorated with a pattern also tattooed around the bride's mouth before marriage (chapter 10). The groom must remove the cooked meat and give it to his wife to eat, then excise the mouth-hole and play the tube as a flute. A 'penis' that is a female 'foetus' already pregnant with substance from the bride's father, the tube has been 'fed' through

its 'fontanel', the hole in its end, whereas its embryonic mouth is still covered by a membrane. And it is identified with the bride when cut, vagina for mouth-hole, and was made by the bride's father as a replica of his own flute, its 'mother', which he plays in his own men's house.

The appropriate recompense for this externalised pregnant foetus is a return payment made upon the birth of a child, for the child's head. This is, returning to the beginning of the example, the metonymic 'head' of the father again, though like the bamboo tube it carried a number of equipotent analogic strains, all divergent facets of a single motif. In Gillison's words:

Gimi kinship is created, in other words, by an arduous process of differentiating *one* life-giving thing. This 'thing' is either alive and moving upward as seminal fluid or killed and flowing downward as menstrual blood, but it is always derived from and synonymous with the Father's penis. (1987: 198)

It is important to keep in mind that the arduous process of differentiation is as much a part of the holography – like the penis that makes itself a foetus to replace another foetus *within* an enlarged 'foetus' – as the motif itself. This can be seen in a third example, taken from my work among the Usen Barok of Central New Ireland (1986). Barok constitute each of their exogamous matrimoieties in terms of the relation between them: a moiety contains the nurturance of fatherhood proffered by the other, and begets, penetrates and nurtures the containment of the other. It is this relation, rather than the moiety themselves as social bodies, permutated through the transformation of the feasting cycle, that gives legitimacy to all transfers of status or property.

Barok *orong*, traditional feasting leaders, say that two things are replicated over and over in everything they do, *kolume* and *gala*. *Kolume* is containment, as the womb contains a foetus or the earth a corpse, and is concretised ritually in the stone-walled enclosure of the *taun* or men's house. *Gala* is the elicitation of inception and nurturance, as the penis penetrates to fertilise or the knife to distribute, and is realised ritually as a rooted tree. But this imagery itself, an iconography that Barok call *iri lolos*, 'finished power', is the *kolume*, containment, of the whole, as feasting, the elicitory process by which its meanings are realised, as its *gala*. The Barok term for feasting is 'cutting pig'.

It is the relation between *kolume* and *gala*, then, that both constitutes the moiety and relates them. Understood in the broadest sense, *kolume* as a containing iconography, *gala* as the elicitory protocol of feasting, however, it is clear that each of these modes is in turn constituted by the relation between them. For the iconography contains images of both *kolume* and *gala*, each of which is, through the action of the other, further resolvable



into *kolume/gala*. Thus the ground within the *taun* enclosure is cut by a tree-trunk (the threshold log of the men's house) into feasting and burial spaces, whereas the upright tree-trunk is cut by the ground into a subterranean (burial) and an above-ground, fruit-bearing (nurturant) half. And the protocol of feasting begins with a *kolume* of feasters surrounding the food, and proceeds to the *gala* of cutting the pigs and consumption – a basic format to be enacted in either a *kolume* (closed) or *gala* (open) variant.

The relation *kolume/gala* 'keeps its scale', as the mathematics of fractals would have it, regardless of the level of magnification. *Kolume* and *gala* are fractal motifs that, very much like genders, stand between whole and part so that each can equally encompass the total relation. The clinching demonstration comes in the transformational final mortuary feast, the *Una Ya* ('base of the tree') *Kaba*. The tree-image of *gala* is inverted, the pigs for the feast arrayed atop the burial section, the roots; atop the pigs, in the position of the tap-root (the tree's 'apical ancestress'), the *winawu*, or neophyte *orong* stands. *Kolume* and *gala* are shown to be equally effective if their roles are reversed, and thus identical; a single image is made of the apical ancestress's encompassment of the people from the past and the *winawu*'s encompassment of them in his future potential. In a sense, the *winawu* is a great man, an encompassing rather than a statistical leader, who outflanks memory from a future position.

The three examples of holography are drawn from different language families and represent different geographical locations in Papua New Guinea. There is considerable evidence that the phenomenon is widespread. A notable instance is Mosko's study of the Bush Mekeo (1985); chapter 5 shows that for them, as among the Barok, a single relation replicates itself throughout a ritual format. But if holography has a significance in this discussion, it is not as an ethnographic phenomenon but rather as a mode of understanding.

### Neither part nor sum

In no case is the holography a matter of direct presentation; it is not perceived in the material so much as it is re-perceived as the sense of indigenous intention to show phenomena in their self-constitution. Thus the Iqwaye 'make people' in counting, and likewise for them making people is a counting-out, or instantiation or re-numbering of Omalyce. The Gimi female embryo is already pregnant with a holograph of her father's penis, with the transitivity of replication that, via its transformations, becomes continuity. The *gala* of Barok ritual feasting elicits and nurtures the containment of its own relation to *kolume*, and hence of the moiety relation-

ship, which becomes the simultaneity of memory and reproduction. Nothing is built up and nothing dissected in these examples; they are neither construction nor deconstruction, but simply a further replication of fractality in the ethnographer's understanding. One might say that the indigenous holography is re-interpreting the anthropologist's ideas, and in the process re-interpreting interpretation itself.

Reperception implies that the holography will not be apparent in the kind of organic thought that distinguishes kin terminology as 'social' (or 'cognitive'), factionalism as 'political', horticulture as 'technological', or that postulates an integration of groups, functions or categories into a larger social fabric. The crucial element is the fractality that prevents the differentiation of part from whole, that keeps the imageries of understanding from collapsing into the individuals, groups and categories that constructionism bundles into wholes greater than the sums of their parts. Thus it matters very much that we follow the indigenous modalities here, the analogic cross-sections through which the whole grows itself. Without the instantiation of the *Anzahl*, and a special sense of the body, Iqwayan counting is but a mathematical mistake; ignoring the transitivity of its impregnation and the transformations worked upon it, Gimi reproduction is just a neat set of native categories, and missing the exacting protocols of feasting, Barok *kastam* is merely a Durkheimian solidarity-feast, a happening that could take any number of other forms.

The holographic totalisation of the conceptual world evidenced in these three examples amounts to a recognition of personal fractality through the realisation of its relational implications. As such, it is not a 'construction' or even an 'interpretation' on the plane of explanation, for it is not mobilised as a forced uniting of disparate elements, a realisation of meaning via the unaccountable methodological magic of scale-changing.

A big man, in the standard and inflated anthropological cliché, becomes the organiser of sociological 'force' in his agglomeration of others' debts as status, whether this status is seen as that of an integrator or simply a power-broker. He undergoes a personal magnification when he changes from an individual to a sociological scale. What is often termed the sociology of small-scale societies produces its object as well as its solutions through the means of scale-change, the successive grouping of individuals and individuation of groups. Each facet of the assumed social structure or organisation involves such a shift – from individual or household to lineage or village, from lineage to phratry or society, region to areal integrate. And once this principle is established as basic, as an analytical strategy, with the big man as indigenous integrator and scale-shifter, a rationale for change of scale as legitimate theoretical strategy is fixed in place. Special terminologies are

pressed into service to focus attention on the form of reduction or scale-change intended – behavioural, psychological, symbolic, economic or ecological. The result is that as many forms of heuristic ‘order’ are attached to the subject as scale-changing heuristics can be imagined: that once system and order are assumed to be what society is doing, the anthropologist is given *carte blanche* to propose alternative heuristics.

Indigenous forms of thought and action thereby cease to be their own subjects in the process of becoming many subjects, a virtual kaleidoscope of scale-shifts. At the core of this strategy is the hegemonic dogma of the disparate and distinctive quality of the individual in relation to any form of generalisation or grouping, any system, that might be applied. It underwrites and guarantees systematising as the basic task for anthropologist as well as subject.

But the evidence presented here indicates that for some Melanesian peoples at least the forms of social and cultural conceptualisation keep their scale through all ritual and pragmatic permutations. For in such a fractal or scale-retaining conceptualisation the concept itself merges with the space of its conceiving, and there is nothing to be gained by remapping the data onto artificial and introduced scalings. If most social and cultural problems depend upon the western hegemonic for their very imagining, this suggests that the exigencies of living and thinking in many Melanesian cultures are rather different than social scientists have understood them to be.

The task of the great man, then, would not be one of upscaling individuals to aggregate groupings but of keeping a scale that is person and aggregate at once, solidifying a totality into happening. Social form is not emergent but immanent. If this calls to mind Louis Dumont’s powerful evocation of holism in the Hindu caste system, with its fractality of Brahmanic unity, it also resonates with Marriott’s concept of the ‘dividual’ person – the person, like the society, that is whole and part at once.

In the end we come down to a question of pieces that are cut differently from the fabric of experience than we might expect them to be. Fractality deals with wholes no matter how fine the cutting, and it is for this reason that I have insisted on the themes of scale-change and magnification. For the issue of great men and big men is ultimately one of magnification. The big man as a product of ethnographic inflation is the result of statistical and sociological magnification, an apparent gatherer and disperser of persons. But the fractal conception of a great man begins with the premise that the person is a totality, of which any aggregation is but a partial realisation. The totality is, in other words, conceptual rather than statistical. The great

man, non gender-specific, is great as a particular instantiation or configuration of a conceptual totality; one can have *kinds* of great men as one can have variants of a myth.

Godelier’s study of the Baruya has given us a number of eloquent exemplifications of this point. But I should like to close with a final example from the Usen Barok of New Ireland. The Barok *orong*, beginning as a neophyte *winawu*, is a leader of feasting, articulator of the cycle through which the holographic totality of *iri lolos* is made manifest for all to witness. Indeed, the *Kaba* feast, in which the manifestation is realised, can only be held ‘because the *orong* wishes it, and for no other reason’. Put more simply, the *orong* ‘kills pigs’ for the cutting-of-pig that defines feasting. The *umri*, the traditional Barok war leader, ‘kills men’ for another kind of feasting, that of the *ararum taun*, a ‘closed’ or *kolume* variant of the public feasting cycle. *Ararum* feasts, held in a space defined by the convergence of feasting and burial functions, are restricted to *salup*, men formally defined as already deceased by having undergone their mortuary feasts while still alive. They are already ancestors, great men like *orong* and *umri*, and thereby variants of a single myth or holography.



"marry their sister, commit incest, and have no need of any other woman in order to reproduce life" (Godelier 1986a: 158). The Gimi 'law of equivalence' and rules of marriage allow men and women to achieve this desired impossibility, I suggest, to 'get back' or 'keep' the Parts of Themselves they 'exchange away', to renounce a Sister or Brother yet to acquire a "sister" or "brother", 'overturning' the mythic Past but 'reinstating' it in new terms. In Gimi social life as I describe it, reciprocity is the most immediate form not only of 'integrating the opposition between the self and others' (Lévi-Strauss 1969: 84) but also of *creating that opposition* as if it did not, or need not, exist; as if "the joys, eternally denied to social man, of a world in which one might *keep to oneself*" (1969: 497; original emphasis) could be attained as the very essence of the social contract.

## NOTES

- 1 Throughout the text, inverted double commas are used around words or phrases actually uttered by the Gimi or another author. Inverted single commas indicate that a word or phrase is meant symbolically rather than literally, as part of my interpretation of the Gimi meaning. *Gimi say* appears in the text only when it is followed by the actual words of an informant which aptly summarise the views of others or by my summary of direct quotes from several informants. The same literalness is invested in phrases such as *one man explains* or *one woman compares*. My own interpretations are indicated to be such.

In recording and discussing Gimi myths and informants' exegeses, I capitalise mythic characters, key objects and organs as a way to distinguish them from ordinary kin categories, ritual actors or artefacts. By capitalising the mythic personae, I represent them not merely as 'ideal types' but as condensations or abstractions of the incestuous fantasies that Gimi attach to primary relations and that, according to my interpretation, they enact and 'undo' through ritual.

- 2 The following account of events inside a men's house is a compilation of reports by Gimi men of four initiations that occurred during the period of my fieldwork. Many informants' comments and explanations were inspired by tape recordings made by David Gillison, a photographer and ornithologist.

## CHAPTER 11

*One man and many men*

## MARILYN STRATHERN

If Gimi substitute parts of themselves for other parts at different moments in time, we should be looking more generally at how people substitute one set of relations for another. And if it is persons who embody relations, it follows that 'persons' can appear as substitutes for or as though they were composed of other 'persons'. This is true equally of great men and big men, but to different organisational effect. Baruya initiation sequences and Hagen marriage arrangements provide a cross-societal contrast that enable us to see these persons figured as the outcome of different perspectival strategies. Each is a focus for the way people think about themselves, but where (Baruya) great men present an external world as it appears from within a body of men, (Hagen) big men present an image of how such a body might look from the outside. This chapter also suggests that it is perspective which makes the difference between perceptions of equivalence and non-equivalence in transactions. There are consequences for competition (chapter 1) and increment (chapter 4): great men in a non-equivalent relation to a body of men add their powers to those internally equivalent among themselves, whereas the big man, equivalent to a clan, adds non-equivalent external wealth to it.

In taking big men or great men as a focus for analysis, Melanesian ethnographers are not simply pinpointing a phenomenon of interest. They have been *presented* with a phenomenon of interest, so that their interest in turn must include the focusing activity of their Melanesian subjects. For prominence is the chief characteristic of the two figures. Each seems an epitome, a concentration of characteristics, making visible what other men might be; he therefore stands out. At the same time, in the sense in which all men might think of themselves as big men, all men stand out; whereas great men seem to distribute specialist functions between themselves, and individually stand out by virtue of a particular competence.

Ethnographic description regularly gives certain 'institutions' or social conditions prominence. Whether we embark from the perspective of overseas trade or inland garden magic, analysis then proceeds by demonstrating the 'principles' that govern the interconnections between them. This was, of course, Godelier's procedure in elucidating the making of great men. The conduct of male collective life and marriage arrangements form the basis for his own comparative interest in the presence or absence of a principle of equivalence in exchange transactions. The institutions that enable big men