ART AND AGENCY

An Anthropological Theory

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fertility of the Marquesan style in generating variant forms, each subtly distinct, coupled with its striking formal homogeneity simultaneously suggest an overwhelming need to establish difference and a recognition of the merely *relative* character of all differences.

In this sense, it is true to say that the relationships among motifs and figures in the Marquesan art style are akin to the relations which existed, on the social plane, between the Marquesans themselves. Artworks are like social agents, in that they are the outcome of social initiatives which reflect a specific, socially inculcated sensibility. This judgement coincides in essential respects with the view taken by the Marquesans themselves of their art. The motifs and figures I have discussed are all categorized, in their language, as *tiki*: 'images'. There are two other contexts in which this word has meaning. 'Tiki' (as the name of a mythological hero) is the Marquesan Adam. Humankind were originally created through the impregnation of a woman made of sand by the original ancestor (Tiki), who produced a human daughter, who was in turn incestuously impregnated by her father, who disguised himself by blackening his face in order to conceal his appearance. From this union humankind are supposed to spring (Steinen 1988). This maker and un-maker of appearances is Tiki, the first man. Here we observe the fundamental scheme-transfer between image-making and the making of persons.

The other meaning of *tiki* is 'portions' or 'shares' of some distributed object (Dordillon). If I cut a cake into twelve slices, each slice is a *tiki* of the cake. Human persons are *tiki* because their identities are defined in terms of the collectivities they participate in and divide from. At the same time, this usage adumbrates an idea which has been thematic throughout this chapter, namely that artworks are holographic fragments of the 'larger unities' to which they are united by stylistic linkages. The *tiki* (images/portions) which represent (or more precisely, constitute) *etua*, are holographic fragments, or refractions, of the imaginary totality of all *etua*. Artworks are shares or portions of a *distributed object* corresponding to all of the artworks in the Marquesan system, distributed in time and space. This idea will be explored in more detail in the next chapter.

9

Conclusion: The Extended Mind

9.1. *Distributed Objects*

The discussion of Marquesan graphic/plastic stylistics, just concluded, has been founded on the notion of a 'corpus' of artworks as a kind of spatio-temporally dispersed 'population'. Marquesan art, considered as a whole, can be conceptualized, macroscopically, as a 'distributed object' in time and space. Like the 216 separate items in a 24-place luxury set of china tea and dinnerware, all Marquesan artworks belong to a kind of 'set', though, of course, a more loosely integrated set than the sets of china which are presented to young couples as wedding presents by rich relatives. A china dinner-set is bound together, as a distributed object (an object having many spatially separated parts with different micro-histories) by prior design, that is, by the intentional actions of the design and manufacturing staff of Spode, or Wedgwood, or whoever. The corpus of Marquesan art, on the other hand, emanates from no such central executive organization, and has come into being only by historical accretion (and deletion) via a network of social relations, among Marquesans (artists and patrons) and outsiders (collectors, scholars, etc.) over the course of more than two centuries. Except, perhaps, from a stylistic point of view, Marquesan art has only a tenuous unity as a distributed object. It consists of no more than the detritus or exuviae of the once flourishing art-production and circulation system of the Marquesas now sundered and scattered, like the bones of the Marquesans whose living bodies bore the tattoos which so impressed visitors to the islands in the nineteenth century. All that remain are museum specimens, curiosities in private hands, sketches and drawings, and scholarly texts, such as Steinen's (and this one). None the less, despite this geographical scattering and contextual transformation Marquesan art retains an inner integrity of its own, as a macroscopic whole rather than as an aggregate of fragments. Each piece, each motif, each line or groove, speaks to every other one. It is as if they bore kinship to one another, and could be positioned within a common genealogy, just as their makers could be. Above all, each fragment of Marquesan art resonates with every other, because each has passed, uniquely, through a Marquesan mind, and each was directed towards a Marquesan mind.

Marquesan minds are and always were, of course, minds belonging to individual agents, different and distinct. I do not want to suggest that Marquesan art is the product of a 'group mind' or collective consciousness. But in the ensuing sections I do want to approach, with due caution, the problem of the

relationship between the macroscopic characteristics of distributed objects (such as 'the corpus of Marquesan art') and 'the mind' in both the individual and collective sense. The pith of my argument is that there is *isomorphy of structure* between the cognitive processes we know (from inside) as 'consciousness' and the spatio-temporal structures of distributed objects in the artefactual realm—such as the *œuvre* of one particular artist (Duchamp provides my example) or the historical corpus of types of artworks (e.g. Maori meeting houses, see below). In other words, the structures of art history demonstrate an externalized and collectivized cognitive process.

I must prepare my argument with care, for I recognize that I am traversing dangerous ground. Let me return to some of the ideas I introduced in earlier chapters, so that these may provide something by way of a stable platform from which to launch the ideas I want to develop now. These ideas, to reiterate, concern the structural isomorphy between something 'internal' (mind or consciousness) and something 'external'—aggregates of artworks as 'distributed objects' combining multiplicity and spatio-temporal dispersion with immanent coherence.

The contrast between 'internal' and 'external' will be familiar from preceding sections of this work—in particular sections 7.9–11, dealing with the externalist and internalist strategies for animating idols. One major upshot of that discussion, I hope, was that the contrast between 'inner' and 'outer' is always only a relative rather than absolute difference. The contrast between 'mind' (the internal person) and the external person, though real, is only relative. If we seek to delve inside the person all we seem to find are other persons—the homunculi of Dennett—and if, as sociologists rather than as cognitive psychologists, we try to give an account of the external aspect of persons, we find that any one social individual is the sum of their relations (distributed over biographical time and space) with other persons (M. Strathern 1988; Gell 'Strathernograms' 1998). Our inner personhood seems to consist of replications of what we are externally, as suggested in the parable of Peer Gynt and his famous onion. So, bearing this in mind, it may not be so aberrant to suggest that what persons are externally (and collectively) is a kind of enlarged replication of what they are internally. Especially if, as I shall be doing, we consider 'persons' not as bounded biological organisms, but use this label to apply to all the objects and/or events in the milieu from which agency or personhood can be abducted.

Seen in this light, a person and a person's mind are not confined to particular spatio-temporal coordinates, but consist of a spread of biographical events and memories of events, and a dispersed category of material objects, traces, and leavings, which can be attributed to a person and which, in aggregate, testify to agency and patienthood during a biographical career which may, indeed, prolong itself long after biological death. The person is thus understood as the sum total of the indexes which testify, in life and subsequently, to the biographical existence of this or that individual. Personal agency, as intervention in the causal milieu, generates one of these 'distributed objects', that is, all the material differences in 'the way things are' from which some particular agency can be abducted.

I recognize that this conception of personhood is both vague and abstruse. Fortunately it is not my task to describe personhood as such, but only to abstract certain themes which can be brought to bear on much more clearly demarcated 'distributed objects' than the notional 'object' which corresponds to the aggregate biographical effect wrought by the existence (rather than non-existence) of a particular agent or person. The relatively well-defined distributed objects testifying to agency that I have in mind, are, of course, categories of art objects.

The idea of personhood being spread around in time and space is a component of innumerable cultural institutions and practices. Ancestral shrines, tombs, memorials, ossuaries, sacred sites, etc. all have to do with the extension of personhood beyond the confines of biological life via indexes distributed in the milieu. The first example to which I shall devote detailed consideration belongs to this category, namely, the type of memorial carvings produced in northern New Ireland, and some adjoining islands, known as Malangan (Fig. 9.1/1), whose characteristics and significance have been analysed by Suzanne Küchler in a series of articles (Küchler 1985, 1988, 1992). I have a particular reason for highlighting these memorial carvings, because they instantiate, particularly clearly, not just the idea of 'distribution' (the object and/or person being distributed in time and space) but also the extraordinary, yet essential, notion that *images* of something (a prototype) are *parts* of that thing (as a distributed object). This is Yrjö Hirn's idea (see above, Sect. 7.4), traceable, as we saw, to Epicurus and Lucretius—the idea that sensible, perceptible objects, give off *parts* of themselves—rinds or skins or vapours—which diffuse out into the ambience and are incorporated by the onlooker in the process of perception. The purpose of Malangan, as we will see, is the transmission of ancestral social efficacy (social prestige, ritual privileges, land-rights, etc.) through the display of memorial sculptures which are incorporated into successors as *memories* (internalized visual images).

9.2. *Malangan*

There are some 5,000 carvings of the type known as Malangan in collections, which makes them among the commonest 'collectible' ethnographic art objects from any art-producing region of the globe. Yet Küchler tells us that, even though they are still produced in various forms, and are to the highest degree salient in contemporary political and ritual life in New Ireland, hardly a single one is actually to be seen *in situ* there – they are all in the hands of foreigners, and, as physical objects, of no concern to their erstwhile makers. Being sold off

FIG. 9.2/1. Malangan carving. *Source*: British Museum. New Ireland registration no. 1884, 7-28.1

for cash is the final 'death' of objects of this type, and has been since the latter decades of the nineteenth century. Conceptually, from the New Ireland point of view, a Malangan carving which has fulfilled its ritual role has rotted away and is no more, and its future as a museum piece is irrelevant. Malangan only 'exist' as socially salient objects, for a very short period, during the mortuary ceremonies for important persons, during which they are gradually imbued with life by being carved and painted, brought to perfection and displayed for a few hours at the culminating point of the mortuary ritual—only to be 'killed' with gifts of shell-money. Once they have been 'killed' they no longer exist as

ritual objects (which is why they may subsequently be sold to collectors). The gift of money which 'kills' the Malangan entitles the donor to *remember* the image on display, and it is this internalized memory of the image, parcelled out among the contributors to the ceremony, which constitutes the ceremonial asset—entitling the possessor to social privileges— which is transacted at the mortuary ceremony and transmitted from the senior to the junior generations.

The Malangan, as an object whose physical existence can thus be measured only in days, or even hours, is an index of agency of an explicitly temporary nature. During the brief duration of the ceremony, the carving objectifies a dense and enduring network of past and future relationships between members of the land-occupying matrilineal units which constitute northern New Ireland society. Social relationships between land-occupying units are legitimized on the basis of members' *previously purchased rights to remember Malangan carvings and motifs*, and thus to act as agents in perpetuating these motifs (in different combinations) in subsequent Malangan ceremonies, where these memories will again be briefly objectified in carvings (in varied combinations) and again transacted and parcelled out among participants, against ceremonial payments.

But let us consider the Malangan carving more closely. There are various kinds, but I shall discuss only the familiar painted wooden variety seen in Fig. 9.1/1, which take the form of ancestral figures accompanied by a variety of subsidiary motifs. Which particular forms and motifs occur on any given Malangan carving depends on the identities of the land-occupying units mounting the ceremony and the particular strategies of political alliance these units anticipate for the future, once these alliances have been ceremonially legitimized by parcelling out Malangan memories.

The purpose of a Malangan is to provide a 'body', or more precisely, a 'skin' for a recently deceased person of importance. On death, the agency of such a person is in a dispersed state. In our terms, indexes of their agency abound, but are not concentrated anywhere in particular. The gardens and plantations of the deceased, scattered here and there, are still in production, their wealth is held by various exchange-partners, their houses are still standing, their wives or husbands are still married to them, and so on. The process of making the carving coincides with the process of reorganization and adjustment through which local society adjusts to the subtraction of the deceased from active participation in political and productive life. The gardens are harvested, the houses decay and become, in turn, particularly productive fields, and so on. That is to say, all the dispersed 'social effectiveness' of the deceased, the difference they made to how things were, gradually becomes an objectifiable quantity, something to which a single material index may be attached, and from which this accumulated effectiveness may be abducted. This is what the Malangan is; a kind of body which accumulates, like a charged battery, the potential energy of the deceased dispersed in the life-world. Küchler (1992) speaks of the carving as a temporary repository for the 'life-force' of the deceased, but we should

perhaps observe that there is no difference between 'life' itself and this life-force; the life-force which accumulates in the Malangan carving is the net result or product of a lifetime's activity in the social world, not a species of mystical energy distinguishable categorically from ordinary life and activity.

The mechanism for the accumulation of dispersed life into the physical index of the Malangan carving is via the mechanism of fire. The process of making the image is conceptualized as the building up of a fire from ashes, to glowing embers, to the final blaze (1992: 104). The raw wood is charged with efficacy by a technique of heating and burning (this is connected to the technical use of fire to create the very numerous and complicated holes and cavities in the finished carving, especially in the epoch before metal tools were available). As the forms emerge (the carver, a hired specialist, is guided by dreams sent by the ancestors), the carving grows (conceptually) hotter and hotter. The culminating process is painting, at which time the carving is ready to redistribute its accumulated charge or 'heat' at the climactic ceremony during which it will be publicly displayed and remembered by those privileged to do so, and during which it will, itself, 'die' and become cold and rotten.

The carving, as I mentioned, is understood to be a 'skin' for the deceased. The concept of a skin is of the utmost importance here, for a number of reasons. In northern New Ireland, 'skin' stands for affinal relations. Political relationships (primarily, control over land) are founded on strategic affinal relationships created by ties of 'skin'—skin stands for the *transactable person*, the person divided up, recombined, and reconstituted. (For more on 'skin' cf. Gell 1993: 23 ff.) The carving, as Küchler implies, is both a three-dimensional, solid wooden 'container' for ancestral life-force, but at the same time, as an external surface (a two-dimensional field) it is a parchment on which participants in the Malangan ceremony inscribe their *anticipated* affinal alliances, in the form of specific painted decorations in red, white, and black. It is the transacted memory of the external, painted form of the carving which will legitimize future relationships between land-occupying units. As a carving/container, the Malangan is a repository of *past* 'social effectiveness' accumulated and contained, while as a spectacle, an exterior, the Malangan projects the future that these past relationships will produce, as a result of the legitimization of certain anticipated relationships (between affines) that the Malangan ceremony enables. The Malangan, in other words, mediates and transmits agency between past and future. Though the carving itself exists only within certain (restricted) time–space coordinates, conceptually, it is a *temporally dispersed object*, an object *at* no specific time or place, but moving through time and place, like a thunderstorm.

But the notion of 'skin' has an additional significance, which may not have escaped the reader. Let us proceed to the climactic moment, at which the participants in the ceremony witness the carving in its final form and register its memory. At this moment, the privileged ones (the ones who have made the

appropriate ritual payments) receive 'the knowledge of Malangan'—that is, the right to reproduce not just the visible form of Malangan but the social relations, including land-rights, which this visible form indexes. The word which is used to refer to this empowering knowledge is *mune*, which, among other things, means 'smoke'. Since the carving has, at this stage, a surface charged to bursting with fire and heat, it is in no way puzzling to find that the idiom used to describe the transmission of potency from the carving (index) to the recipient (spectator) is a fiery one. But we also find, irresistibly recalled to mind, the words of Lucretius cited earlier (Sect. 7.4) in which he associates the 'flying simulacra' of things, the 'idols' which are emitted from things and which enable us to perceive them, with '[little bodies] in a state of loose diffusion, like smoke which logs of oak, heat and fires emit'. The Epicurean model implies that images of things are diffusible parts of things, just as smoke is a diffusible part of burning logs. Lucretius' association between the emission of heat and smoke—formless, quasi-material diffusion from the object – and the more familiar 'idols' which have visible form is recapitulated, almost magically, in New Ireland thought. For *mune* (as powerful knowledge) is not just the 'smoke' which emanates from the fiery surface of the carving; equally it is 'likeness' (the simulacra) in visible form, the 'skin' of the carving which is internalized as a memory image.

The Malangan carving is a skin-idol, which like the 'gossamer coats of cicadas' is distributed in quasi-material form in the memories of the onlookers, who internalize the ancestral 'skin' as a new 'skin' of their own, a new skin which anticipates new 'skin' relationships with affinal partners. Memorizing the image is a way of growing a new skin *internally* and thus projecting a new identity into the future. Poor Peer Gynt (above, Sect. 7.11) could only acquire *his* new skins by undergoing all the manifold vicissitudes related in Ibsen's play, resulting in the biographical accumulation of memory-skins which he disassembles along with his onion. New Irelanders proceed differently, for they have elaborated the art of transacting 'memories' as a conscious, public, strategy; the accumulation of memories is institutionalized rather than being the product of happenstance, like Peer Gynt's. Their accumulated, interlocking memories consist of internal skins, mediated via the Malangan, which can be taken apart and reconfigured at will.

This happens at the climactic moment of transmission, as the surface of the Malangan, animated by fire, is dissipated in the form of Lucretian simulacra which are internalized, more or less as internal body parts, by the privileged onlookers, who, in this way, receive the substance—not just of the ancestral body, but the entire *agentive capacity* of the deceased—for future redeployment. This is, as it were, the supreme abduction of agency from the index, in that the other's agency is not just *suffered* via the index; it is also thereby perpetuated and reproduced. Thus memory becomes a socially engineered medium for the transmission of the power to change the world and shape the course of events, rather than a mere passive registration of the past. Once the

index has been witnessed in its 'charged' state, it is a mere corpse, drained of its power, because whatever memory images others may form of it (by witnessing it in its inert condition in a museum or a shop) they will not be *those* memories, the ones uniquely stipulated as potent and efficacious.

The example of Malangan art is useful in that it can start to undermine the distinction we commonly make between the material and the mental (or cognitive) with respect to material culture. The Malangan are indisputably material objects, but the *socially relevant* Malangan are internalized images which New Irelanders carry about inside their heads. Being a material object is merely a transitional phase in the biography of a Malangan, most of whose existence is as a memory trace, or, more idiomatically, as an internal 'skin'. The Malangans of northern New Ireland itself—rather than the Malangans in collections—are walking about, making gardens and political speeches, engaging in exchange transactions, marrying and having children, yet, paradoxically, they are not accessible to external ethnographic observation at all. Only an extended survey of past, present, and prospective Malangan ceremonies, and the associated kinship and land transactions—which Küchler is completing as I write—will reveal the ideal form of Malangan as a regional system of socially distributed memory images.

We, meanwhile, cannot pursue this fascinating prospect, but we can continue the general theme by turning our attention to similar systems of regionally distributed artworks (this time, consisting of enduring objects, rather than memory images) forming a dynamic whole, by referring to certain well-known studies by Nancy Munn (1977, 1986).

9.3. *Gawan Kula*

Nancy Munn's work is particularly salient in the context of this discussion, in that she has devoted particular attention in a series of studies, to the relationship between material indexes—Gawan canoes and Kula valuables—and (social) space-time. The argument on which I am embarking turns on this issue. My thesis is that 'cognition', or more precisely, consciousness, is a mental process through which subjective temporality is constituted via a process of *transformation* of conscious experience over time. In the next section I shall briefly present Husserl's model of the mind as a series of 'modifications' of perceptual/memory images. Concurrently, I am arguing that the 'indexes of agency' which exist and circulate in the external social world create, so to speak, an inter-indexical space-time field which bears an analogous structure, that is to say that it, too, consists of a series of transformations of contents (images) over time. This thesis will be instantiated later, with regard to the works of Marcel Duchamp and Maori meeting houses. But before we are in a position to embark on this argument, it would be helpful to consider further

the question of the relation between artworks (or other indexes of agency) and space-time. In this area Munn has made certain very important contributions.

Nancy Munn's article 'The Spatiotemporal Transformation of Gawa Canoes' (1977) traces the biography of Gawa canoes, which start life as trees growing on the land held by a particular clan and are fashioned into canoes by members of other clans (moving through exchange pathways internal to Gawa in the process). Once made into canoes, they enter further exchange pathways within Gawa. Here they are transacted against the yams which are transmitted from wife-giving matrilines to wife-receiving ones. So in a sense, the canoes are converted into yams on Gawa, while outside Gawa they are converted into shell valuables—which are exchanged for them by their eventual users, men from other islands in the so-called 'Kula Ring' who use them for carrying on overseas (inter-island) exchanges.

From the point of view of the Gawa matriline which has exchanged a seagoing canoe for certain shell valuables (valuables that will themselves be circulated in overseas exchanges) the canoe is still 'owned'; but it is owned in another form, as shell valuables rather than as a wooden canoe. Munn detects a consistent process of de-materialization here. The canoe that was, heretofore, a heavy, rooted, earthy thing, a massive tree, becomes, by degrees, something totally immaterial, or rather, material but unconfined. That is, the canoe is converted into a 'field of influence'. This field is generated by the magnetism exerted by the Kula-exchange valuables into which the canoe has been converted. By virtue of being the unencumbered property of the owning clan (a type of property designated as *kitoum*) these valuables have the power to move other valuables (of different origin and type) in the direction of Gawa, and reciprocally, as they travel outwards, carrying the name and fame of Gawa far and wide. Munn argues that they are converted ultimately into what she calls 'sociotemporal space-time'. This space-time is not so much a dimensional manifold as a field of forces (like an electromagnetic field) exerted by objects of value (indexes of agency) ultimately attached to powerful persons but circulating in the milieu. This field constitutes transactional space polarized by the multiple forces generated by objects in continuous motion and undergoing successive metamorphoses. Each of these *kitoum* (unencumbered valuables) is traceable to a member of the owning matriline, who constitutes its social point of attachment, where it ceases to be a liberated object and becomes a partible component of a person, its original hole, so to speak.

A Kula operator, one who participates in the inter-island and internal exchanges in Kula valuables (arm-shells and necklaces) is a spatio-temporally extended person. The actual mechanics of the Kula system have been discussed so often since Malinowski's original description (1922) that it is hardly necessary to provide a detailed account here. Suffice it to say that men who participate in the system do so because they can lay claim to ownership of *kitoum*, that is, Kula valuables which are their own unencumbered ritual property, not

valuables which they may be holding as intermediaries between one *kitoum*-holder and another. The relationship between *kitoum*-owner and the valuable which is held is indissociable, as if the *kitoum* were a body-part, but at the same time the *kitoum* is an object that can be transmitted abroad as an exchange item, that can circulate freely in space and time, and that can be converted into another object. The attachment to the original owner persists, however, because important *kitoum* are individually named, recognized, objects, and wherever the *kitoum* travels from island to island, the name of its owner will travel with it as well. The *kitoum*-holder inserts his *kitoum* into one of the exchange 'pathways' (*keda*) to which he has access, in exchange for return gifts which do not match the *kitoum* itself, but which are a sort of rent, paid by the recipient, for the privilege of being the one to serve as intermediary in the forwarding of this prestigious *kitoum* to its ultimate destination. Thus a flow of wealth is generated in the opposite direction to the passage of the *kitoum*. Eventually, though, after passing through many hands, in different Kula communities, the *kitoum* will encounter another valuable in the system which matches it, being equal in renown. This will be another *kitoum*, the unencumbered property of an equally important man on some distant island. When this happens, the original *kitoum* (an arm-shell, let us say) will 'marry' its opposite-number *kitoum* (which would be a necklace, because an arm-shell can only be exchanged for a necklace and vice versa) and the necklace, will begin to travel back towards the original *kitoum*-holder, again passing through many intermediaries along the way and setting up further countervailing flows of wealth. The aim of Kula operators is to gain control of numerous *kitoum*, manipulating the pathways of exchange so as to contrive that their 'names'—attached to prestigious valuables—travel far and wide. A man whose name is known in distant communities as one who controls the pathways along which renowned valuables are transferred, can influence the calculations of Kula operators in faraway places. He is, so to speak, more than a merely incarnate man. He is an expanded and disseminated being, present here, there, and everywhere because his name is attached to circulating objects, and still more because the movements of these objects are influenced, at long range, by his intentional agency, his calculativeness, and (magically assisted) persuasion (Munn 1986).

The Kula valuables which are associated with a Kula operator's name are conceptualized as indexes of his bodily presence as a person of commanding powers; from them, distant recipients abduct not just his power but his bodily beauty, for these Kula valuables are, after all, body-decorations as well as body-parts, and they are regarded as beautiful as well as ancient and prestigious. As a distributed person, the Kula operator attracts wealth as a young man attracts lovers; other's minds are swayed by his long-range allure and tokens of this love, in the form of valuables, speed towards him. Munn (1983) tells us that the ranking system of Kula valuables corresponds to the ranking system of Kula operators. The ranking scheme applied to valuables opposes new-ish, non-prestigious, items with little of the golden patina that comes from years of polishing and handling, and which have yet to be associated with the names of many famous men, to ancient, treasured items, which powerfully evoke the identities of men who, through Kula, have transcended time and space, who are timelessly potent, attractive, and influential. An important arm-shell or necklace does not 'stand for' someone important, in a symbolic way; to all intents and purposes it *is* an important person in that age, influence, and something like 'wisdom' inheres in its physical substance, in its smooth and patinated surfaces, just as they do in the mind and body of the man of renown to whom it was attached, and from whom it has flown away as an idol of distributed personhood. (Once again, we can draw an analogy between the Kula valuable as a migratory bodily index and the flying simulacra of Lucretius.)

But we cannot place the whole weight of the discussion on the 'distributedness' of distributed personhood, at the expense of the core of agency which lies at its heart. How does one, in practice, become a great Kula operator, a man able to 'move minds' at great distances and dominate an expended region of social space and time? How does one become so enchantingly attractive, so irresistibly persuasive, that the paths of inter-island exchange converge ineluctably in the desired direction? Only through knowledge, intelligence, and calculation. For success to accrue, the Kula operator must possess a superior capacity to engage in strategic action, which necessitates a comprehensive *internal model* of the external field within which Kula valuables move about (cf. Gell 1992*a*: 280–5). The operator must be able to comprehend the manifold and inordinately complex field of exchanges, must be able to remember innumerable past histories of exchanges, and evaluate their outcomes. He must construct 'what if' scenarios that anticipate the future with precision, guiding strategic intervention. His mind, in other words, must work as a simulation device—and this indeed is what all minds do, more or less—presenting a synoptic view of the totality of Kula transactions, past, present, and to come.

In his own person, the operator must reconstruct a working simulacrum—a dynamic space-time map of the maze of Kula transactions, so that, with somnambulistic dexterity, he knows which delicate strings to pull. Everything depends on the coherence of inner strategic intentions grounded in accumulated experience and memory, and the historically produced world 'out there'—the real world in which minds, objectified in exchange objects, expand, meet, and contend. The successful Kula operator controls the world of Kula because his mind has become coextensive with that world. He has internalized its causal texture as part of his being as a person and as an independent agent. 'Internal' (mental processes) and 'outside' (transactions in objectified personhood) have fused together; mind and reality are one, and—not to put too fine a point on it—something like godhead is achievable. This (relative) divinization through the fusing together of an expanded, objectified agency, and the myriad causal texture of the real world seems to me to be the ultimate objective of Kula. It

suggests, to me at any rate, pathways towards transcendence which are as accessible to us, secular souls and die-hard materialists, as to the inhabitants of the Melanesian islands which participate in Kula transactions, but that is only by the by. The point that I wish to extract from all this is more limited. It is simply that when we come to consider the expanded, transactable, 'persons' and personhood on which the Kula system is founded, we are brought to recognize that 'mind' can exist objectively as well as subjectively; that is, as a pattern of transactable objects—indexes of personhood, in this instance, arm-shells, and necklaces—as well as a fleeting succession of 'thoughts', 'intentions', 'mental states', etc. The Kula system as a whole is a *form of cognition*, which takes place outside the body, which is diffused in space and time, and which is carried on through the medium of physical indexes and transactions involving them.

9.4. *The Artist's* Œuvre *as a Distributed Object*

Let us turn from the consideration of Oceanic instances of 'distributed objects' and 'distributed personhood' to an example closer to home. We, in the West, are familiar with one form of 'distributed object' (indexing a distributed person) above all—the *œuvre* or 'complete works' of famous artists. Any artist of renown is represented by numerous works, disseminated in various collections, and also capable of being reassembled for retrospective exhibitions, or published in a de luxe edition with a complete *catalogue raisonné*.

Let us consider the characteristic make-up of an artist's *œuvre*, an artist of the kind with which we are most familiar, a post-Renaissance professional artist with a distinctive personal style and a personal critical following. The artist's *œuvre* consists primarily of a series of finished works, produced, it may be, at different places, and subsequently distributed in numerous collections. These finished works are usually dated or datable, and can be assigned to a chronological sequence, early works, middle-period works, late works, and so on. So the artist's *œuvre* is both spatially dispersed and temporally dispersed. After the artist's death, once the *œuvre* is complete, it constitutes, as it were, an independent chunk of space-time, which can be accessed via each work individually, each standing, indexically, for all of them and the historical-biographical context of their production.

But the artist's *œuvre* does not consist exclusively of finished works each one of which stands as an independent entity. If we study the output of many famous artists (e.g. Leonardo, Michelangelo, Constable) we find that numerically speaking the greater part consists of 'preparatory studies' for finished works, rather than finished works themselves. Moreover, the *historical value* placed on these ostensibly 'provisional' technical studies, not produced for the art public but for private use in the studio, is as great, or even greater, than the value placed on the finished works (saleroom prices are another matter). From an historical point of view, these preparatory sketches are invaluable, because they inform us about the cognitive processes of generation of the finished works produced for public exhibition. Moreover, they are often crucial pointers to the underlying trend of development of the artist's style, and indeed the development of wider historical trends in art (e.g. the relationship between Constable's sketches and later nineteenth-century art, including Impressionism, etc.). The availability of sketches and provisional versions of works allows us insight into artistic activity as a process unfolding over (cognitive and biographical) time.

Meanwhile, the distinction I have just drawn between 'preparatory studies' and 'finished works' is not absolute. Because we know the dates of finished works, we are also able to see these finished works as being, simultaneously, 'preparatory studies' for later works. Thus, Cézanne's earlier 'bathers', and certain of his landscapes, while conceived independently, actually serve as preparatory studies for *Les Grandes Baigneuses*—a work in which Cézanne tries to epitomize, and further develop, a long series of previous experiments over twenty or thirty years.

Many artists produce works in recognizable series, consciously evolving a distinctive treatment of a particular motif over the course of their career. Braque, for instance, started painting pictures on the theme 'the artist's studio' (featuring a canvas on an easel) from the 1930s onwards; this series culminates in the 1950s and 1960s in a number of unforgettable masterpieces which synthesize Braque's mature style. We also have famous 'series' from Picasso, Bacon, Monet, Matisse, etc. In other words, it is frequently the case that works of art form 'moments' of temporal series, not just because they are datable objects (originating at certain space-time coordinates) but because they form *lineages*; they are ancestral to, and descended from, other works in the *œuvre*. Taken together, they form a macro-object, or temporal object, which evolves over time.

Finally, we may notice that the constituents of an artist's *œuvre* do not just point 'forwards' in time, as the 'preparatory sketch' points upstream towards the finished work, or Bacon's first 'Pope' points towards his later 'Popes'. Artists also 'remember' previous works in making new ones, 'quote' themselves, and even produce downright copies and replicas of previous work. We do not know which of the two versions of *The Virgin of the Rocks* by Leonardo (the one in London or the one in Paris) is the original and which is the copy; all that can be said for sure is that both display the same degree of technical excellence, and both equally are 'Leonardos'. Artists are nowadays reprimanded by critics for 'repeating themselves' since this is considered short-changing the public who demand continuous innovation. But actually all artistic practice is inevitably dependent on wholesale repetition, otherwise the concept of 'style' (which depends on some degree of resemblance between all the works in an *œuvre*) would be impossible to apply. Without repetition, art would lose its memory. Indeed, the concept of a 'preparatory study' implies, in itself, that

the artist will subsequently 'copy' his own previous work (in private, 'study' format) so as to produce the subsequent 'public' work. So the mesh of temporal connections between the works in an artist's *œuvre* points in both directions. Any given work of art, in gross terms, considered in the context of its maker's *œuvre*, is likely to be both a 'preparation' for later works, and a 'recapitulation' of previous works.

However, where both artistic projection and artistic retrospection are at issue, we are able to render this thought a little more precise. There is a distinction to be drawn between, say, a 'preparatory study' which is produced in the process of designing a subsequent work which is envisaged in concrete terms, and the rather weaker relationship between a 'precursory' work which, undertaken as an end in itself, subsequently turns out to be ancestral to some later work, which was not *specifically* envisaged at the time of its production. While, in practice, there may be a shading-off between the 'preparatory sketch' and the 'precursor' of a subsequent work, they may, none the less, be opposed as ideal types. Similarly, we may oppose the 'artist's replica' (like the later version of the *Virgin of the Rocks*) which is produced with the idea of specifically replicating a previous work, with the unintentional replication of previous works which is a necessary feature of the origination of new works; that is, the painter, intending to produce new work, reproduces his previous work because stylistic coherence and painterly praxis (deeply ingrained artistic habits) demand it. Once again, in reality, there is a shading-off between intentional replication and unintentional recapitulation, but the ideal-typical distinction may be allowed to stand.

Thus, we may distinguish two relatively 'strong' temporal relationships between works and two relatively 'weak' ones. The 'strong' relationship subsists, in the future, or prospective, orientation, between the 'preparatory sketch' and the finished work, while, in this orientation, the 'weak' relation is between the 'precursory' work (the first in a series which was not *planned in advance* as a series) and subsequent works in the same series. Conversely, in the past, or retrospective orientation, the 'strong' relationship subsists between the (past) original and the subsequent copy, which is intended to *replicate* this past work, while the 'weak' relationship subsists between the 'original' work which — through a process of stylistic evolution in which not everything changes all at once — is *partially recapitulated* in subsequent work which returns to it, modifies it, and develops it further.

We now have the technical concepts in place to essay a general model of the artist's *œuvre* as a distributed object — in particular, as a distributed object in *time*, since the distribution of the artist's *œuvre* in space, though an interesting historical question, is beside the point here. The elements of our model are the separate components of the artist's total *œuvre*, that is, the 'complete works' as individual items, which are mutually related via the four relations just described.

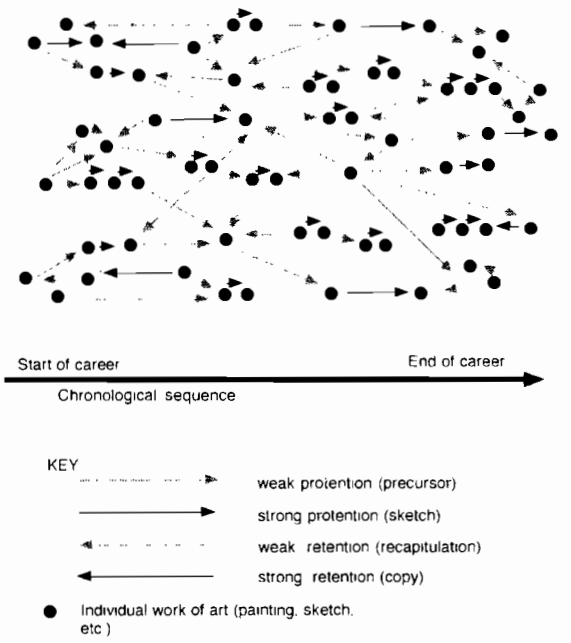

FIG. 9.4/1. The artist's *œuvre* as a distributed object

These relations, from now on, will be called strong and weak *protentions* for 'prospective' or future-orientated relations, and strong and weak *retentions* for 'retrospective' or past-orientated relations. The reason for using these particular terms will become clear once I introduce Husserl's model of time-consciousness, which I intend to do in a moment.

Before I do that, though, let me present an ideal model, in summary form, of the artist's *œuvre* (as a distributed object) as a temporal-relational diagram or map (Fig. 9.4/1). What we have are a spread of individual, dated, works which form the nodal points in a network of temporal relationships of protention and retention. Since all these relationships are temporal ones, we could have displayed the individual works in Fig. 9.4/1 simply as a linear sequence:

. . . . . .

with the protention/retention arrows looping over and under the row of chronologically arranged works (dots), but that would have resulted in rather an illegible diagram. The point of this diagram is simply to communicate the idea that we can imagine the artist's *œuvre*, at the macro-scale, as one indivisible work, consisting of many physical indexes (works) but amounting to a single

temporal entity, like a persistent thunderstorm which is made up of many, quasi-instantaneous, flashes of lightning. The artist's *œuvre* is an object which, so to speak, is *made out of time*; not the tenuous, dimensional time of physics (which I have discussed, and indeed defended, elsewhere; cf. Gell 1992*a*) but the kind of substantialized time which Bergson named *durée*. Bergsonian *durée*, a model for which is provided by biological evolution regarded as a teleonomic process rather than as a random accumulation of chance mutations, has no significance for the physicist, but that is not to say that *durée* has no psychological or cognitive validity as a concept. Indeed, there is every reason to think that personhood, understood cognitively, is coextensive with subjective temporal experience. To refer to a person as a possessor of 'consciousness' is to refer to a series of cognitions arranged temporally along an axis of *durée*. But here we reach the crux of the matter. The chronologically arranged set of works which comprise an artist's *œuvre* are a set of material objects; they are not a person or a set of subjective experiences (cognitive states). They comprise a set of indexes from which the artist's personhood and agency can be abducted, as was described earlier (Sect. 9.2). But at the same time we can easily conceive that 'remembering' something which happened in the past is *very like* 'copying' a picture that one has painted in the past, or that 'making a preliminary sketch for a picture' is *very like* mentally anticipating some future happening or course of action.

In other words, the arrangement of individual works in an artist's *œuvre*, each of which is partly a recapitulation of previous works and partly an anticipation of works as yet uncommenced, seems to generate the same kind of relationships between *indexes* (which are objects in the external world) as exist between *mental states* in the cognitive process we recognize as consciousness. In other words, the temporal structure of index-to-index relations in the artist's *œuvre* externalizes or objectifies the same type of relations as exist between the artist's internal states of mind as a being endowed with consciousness. The artist's *œuvre* is artistic consciousness (personhood in the cognitive, temporal sense) writ large and rendered public and accessible.

But where does 'cognition' take place? –in the artist's head, or on his canvases? Mostly, of course, the cognitive processes of any mind, especially over a whole biographical career, are inaccessible private experiences which leave only the most indecipherable traces. And we could hardly aggregate an artist's *œuvre* as an unified 'temporal object' unless each of the individual works had, at one stage, originated as an *intention* in the artist's mind to produce such and such an index (i.e. a state of mind giving rise to artistic agency). But the generate-and-test model of creative agency, which we briefly examined earlier on, reveals most clearly that 'thinking' takes place outside us as well as inside us. The poet writes down his lines, and then scratches them out, altering and improving his verses in ways that crucially depend on the existence of physical traces of his previous (mental) activity. And this is still truer of the graphic artist, who continually uses his own past production as a spur to his future production, altering and modifying freely as he goes along. And in more general terms, the artist lives surrounded by his own works, completed or half-completed, which litter the studio and provide him with an ever-present record of his activity over many years (maybe *all* his activity in the case of artists whose works find no buyers).

The artist's *œuvre* can be understood like this; each separate work is a modification, a recension, of previous ones, the leftovers of a particular cycle in a career-long generate-and-test sequence. To be sure, this model is somewhat idealized, and much of art consists of routine output rather than the results of strivings after perfection. But the more inventive and historically important artists do develop in this way, and their work can be read as a cumulative process of discovery rather than the mere exploitation of technical procedures learnt early, never forgotten, and never surpassed.

The concept that I want to draw out further from the 'generate-and-test' model of creativity is that of *modification*. For one versed in the philosophical literature of cognition this word rings bells, because it is a word used (in English translations) by Husserl, who assigns the concept of 'modification' (of images, perceptions, i.e. the objects of thought) a central role in his model of consciousness as a temporal process. I have provided an account of Husserl's model of 'internal time-consciousness' in a previous work, and I propose to recapitulate some of my comments on Husserl's model here. My reason for doing so is that Husserl's model can help us to clarify certain features of the model of the artist's *œuvre* as a temporal object (or perhaps one should say, as a 'trans-temporal object') that has been presented in the preceding pages. In particular, it will help us to escape from a serious contradiction that I have not yet brought to light.

Suppose we have two works, X and Y, such that X is a 'weak protention' towards Y, that is that X can be seen as a precursor of Y but not as a definite 'study for' Y. Now, while X is in the process of being painted, Y is unimagined by the painter or by anybody else, in concrete terms. All that one can say is that the painter, while engaged on X, 'hopes' to paint future paintings, which will probably be related, technically and thematically, to X, but he only has a vague intuition as to what his 'next' picture will be. Y is still (and only) a 'future' painting, nothing in the world corresponds to it. Eventually, the painter will get round to painting his next picture (let us say, the next in a series) and it turns out to be Y. Now we have both X and Y whereas before we only had X. On inspecting Y we (and the painter) are able to see that Y was prefigured in X in very many respects, and, on this basis, we are inclined to say that Y recapitulates X, that Y is a 'weak retention' of X in that X is retained in Y as a 'preliminary version' of Y. But wait, there is a problem here, because we have already supposed that (in vague, if not specific, terms) Y has been *protended from* X, that is, Y is visibly what X *portends* in terms of the artist's development.

How can it be simultaneously the case that Y is protended from X (as a not-yet-realized 'future' painting) and simultaneously that Y 'retains' X as a kind of memory-trace now that Y has actually come into existence. How can we identify the 'Y' which was a *protention from* X and the Y which *is a retention of* X, when it would appear that these two Ys have contradictory properties; that is, can Y be a protention from X *and* a retention of X, at one and the same moment? This seems to involve some kind of logical conflict, yet, when we think about the relations between works of art in an artist's *œuvre*, we want to have it both ways; we want to see later pictures 'prefigured' in earlier ones, and we want to see 'traces' or memories of earlier pictures in later ones. These two types of relation between temporally separated pictures are clearly not the same, yet when we place them together they seem to collapse into one another in a most confusing way.

This, if you like, is the art-historical version of a familiar dilemma in the philosophy of time—the problem of events and tenses. Let me explain this by means of an example. Tomorrow I have a doctor's appointment. I portend this event, today, as a future event which will (probably) transpire, but I do not know, for instance, what the doctor will say or what treatment he will recommend. By the day after tomorrow, tomorrow's doctor's appointment will be a past event (of which I will have a memory, or retention) having transiently been a 'present' event (tomorrow). Obviously, this event (the appointment) is the 'same event' whether today is 'today' (15 October 1996), or yesterday, or last week, or tomorrow, or the day after tomorrow, or whatever day you please. Yet this unique event, on these various days, has the contradictory properties of presentness, pastness, or futurity; and how can 'one event' be past and present and future, without contradiction arising?

The answer to this puzzle is obviously that events like doctors' appointments, which are anticipated in advance, become present, and fall away into the past, do not possess attributes of pastness, presentness, and futurity in a once-and-for-all way, but only transiently, depending on the 'point of view' we have on the event in question from a certain 'now' moment, which continually shifts. The 'future' quality of a future event certainly colours our attitude to it (it has an *irrealis* shading, to use the grammarians' term), but even so we have no difficulty in identifying a future event which was only 'anticipated' with the event corresponding to our anticipations (more or less) which actually does happen, and the memory of that event which becomes *irrealis* in a rather different way as it slips back into the past and becomes a 'mere memory'. The same event, as a possible future event, as a present event which is being experienced, and as a past event which can be recalled, remains one event, but as our temporal perspective on this event shifts, the event undergoes a series of *modifications* from the standpoint of the cognitive subject. It is seen through various thicknesses of future and past time, which alter its appearance, its temporal patination, so to speak.

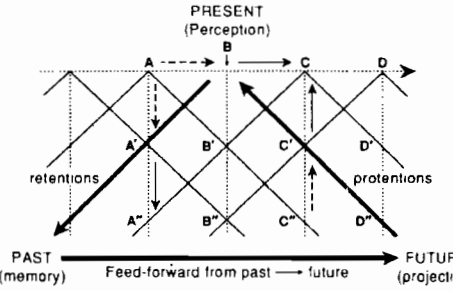

FIG. 9.4/2. A version of Husserl's diagram of time-consciousness from Gell, *The Anthropology of Time*. *Source*: A. Gell 1992*a*

Husserl, working on this problem towards the beginning of his career, when he was interested in describing cognitive processes in general so as to be able (eventually) to separate 'psychological' facts about cognition from transcendental philosophical certainties, put forward a most useful model of 'time-consciousness'. This is designed to depict the systematic modification of the 'noemata' (the objects of cognition) as a function of the passage of successive 'now' moments, that is, shifts in the subject's time-perspective.

In order to expound his ideas, Husserl makes use of a diagram, of which Fig. 9.4/2 (from Gell 1992*a*) is a version. The horizontal line A ⟶ B ⟶ C ⟶ D corresponds to the succession of events or 'states of affairs' occurring at 'now' moments strung out between the past and the future. Suppose we are at B: our perceptions up to date at B. The temporal landscape at B consists of the now-present perceptual experience of the state of affairs at B plus retentions of A, as A′, shading away into pastness. A′ (A seen from B) is a *modification* of the original A—what A 'looks like' from B, that is, attenuated or diminished, but still connected to the present. Perhaps one can think of the 'modification' of A as it sinks (diagonally to the left on Fig. 9.4/2) down into the past (A ⟶ A′ ⟶ A″ ⟶ A‴ . . .) as a gradual *loss of verisimilitude* affecting the perceptions entertained at A as these are superseded by the perceptions entertained at B, C, D, etc. Our perceptions of the state of affairs as it is at any one 'now' moment do not become inapplicable immediately, but only gradually, because the world does not change all at once and in all respects. We can no longer, at B, say that the state of affairs at A is 'now' the case, because of the change of temporal perspective; but many of the features of A have counterparts at B, and features of B have counterparts at C, and so on.

Retentions can thus be construed as the background of out-of-date perceptions against which more up-to-date perceptions are projected, and significant trends and changes are calibrated. As perceptions become more seriously out of date, they diminish in salience and are lost to view. We thus perceive the present not as a knife-edge 'now' but as a temporally extended field within

which trends emerge out of the patterns we discern in the successive updatings of perceptions relating to the proximate past, the next more proximate past, and the next, and so on. This trend is projected into the future in the form of protentions, that is, anticipations of the pattern of updating of current perceptions which will be necessitated in the proximate future, the next most proximate future, and the next, in a manner symmetric with the past, but in inverse temporal order.

Let us continue with Husserl's own explanation of his model. At B, A is retained as A′ (A seen through a certain thickness of time) and C is protended as C′, the favoured candidate as successor to B. Time passes, and C′ comes about as C (presumably not quite as anticipated, but approximately so). B is now retained in consciousness as B′, related to (current) C as A′ was to B when B was current. But how is A related to C? From the standpoint of C, A is no longer retained as A′, because this is to put A′ and B′ on a par with one another, and fails to reflect the fact that when B (currently B′) was current, A was *even then* only a retention (A′). Consequently, from the standpoint of C, A has to be retained *as a retention* of A′, which is itself a retention of A: that is, as A″.

Husserl says that as A sinks to A′ at B, A″ at C, A‴ at D, and so on, a perception becomes a retention, then a retention of a retention, then a retention of a retention of a retention, and so on, until reaching the stage of final attenuation and sinking beneath the temporal horizon. The effect of this argument is to abolish the hard-and-fast distinction between the dynamic present and the fixed and unchanging past. Past, present, and future are all of a piece, and all equally dynamic in the Husserl model (embodying an important cognitive truth) because any modification, anywhere in the system, sets up correlative modifications everywhere else in the system. Thus the modification in the present which converts C into C′ automatically entrains corresponding modifications everywhere (B′ ⟶ B″, A″⟶ A‴, D′ ⟶ D, etc.). 'The whole past sinks in a mass, taking all its arranged contents with it' (Findlay 1975: 11). But the past does not just 'sink' as the present progresses; it changes its significance, is evaluated in different ways, and sets up different patterns of protentions, according to the way in which the present evolves. This dynamic past, and the future which continually alters in complexion, cannot be accommodated in 'physical' time, but only in cognitive time. In providing his model of retentions, portentions, modifications, etc., Husserl is not describing an arcane physical process which occurs to events as they loom out of the future, actualize themselves in the present, and sink into the past, but is describing the changing spectrum of intentionalities linking the experiencing subject and the present-focused world which he experiences. 'Modification' is not a change in A itself, but a change in our view of A as the result of subsequent accretions of experience.

Husserl summarizes his view of internal time-consciousness in the following passage:

> Every actual Now of consciousness is subject to the law of modification. It changes into the retention of a retention and does so continuously. There accordingly arises a regular continuum of retention such that every later point is the retention of every earlier one. Each retention is already a continuum. A tone begins and goes on steadily: its now-phase changes into a was-phase, and our impressional consciousness constantly flows over into an ever new retentional consciousness. Going down the stream, we encounter a continuous series of retentions harking back to the starting point. To each of such retentions a continuum of retentional modifications is added, and this continuum is itself a point in the actuality that is being retentionally projected . . . Each retention is intrinsically a continuous modification, which so to say carries the heritage of its past in itself. It is not merely the case, that, going downstream, each earlier retention is continuously replaced by a new one. Each later retention is not merely a continuous modification stemming from an original impression: it is also a continuous modification of all previous continuous modifications of the same starting point. (1928: 390, cited in Findlay 1975: 10)

Similarly, future events, do not really 'change' as a result of the fact that, from our point of view, they are becoming less indefinite, more imminent, and can be anticipated with increasing degrees of precision as they approach. But we have a strong compulsion to view them in such a light. Husserl's model treats this via a continuum of continua of protentional modifications. Protentions are continuations of the present in the light of the kind of temporal whole the present seems to belong to: 'To be aware of a developing whole incompletely, and as it develops, is yet always to be aware of it as a whole: what is not yet written in, is written in as yet to be written in' (Findlay 1975: 9).

The As and Bs and Cs in Husserl's model correspond to 'events' or states of affairs. What I want to suggest is that they can be replaced by individual works of art as constituents of an artist's *œuvre*. These are physical objects rather than 'events', but, all the same, they are *traces* or indexes of events, that is, the events or performances which brought them physically into being. What I am arguing is that if one seeks to construct the artist's *œuvre* as a unified temporal object, the same basic 'law of modifications' applies. What this means is that we cannot see the artist's *œuvre* as a temporal object except on condition that we select one particular work as corresponding to a 'now' moment, and see all the other works in the *œuvre* as either 'past' or 'future' works in relation to the 'now' defined by the particular work that we have selected as our temporal vantage-point.

Thus, to return to our previous discussion, we can only see an earlier painting, X, as a 'precursor' of Y (protention of Y from X) by situating ourselves at a vantage-point in time *at which Y does not yet exist*, and conversely, we can only see Y as a recapitulation of X (a retention of X) by shifting our point of vantage to a later 'now' at which Y has come into existence, and X is a 'past' work. We cannot occupy both of these vantage-points at the same time. This is the same as saying that we cannot totalize an artist's *œuvre* as a temporal

object which can be regarded *sub specie aeternitatis*. All we can do is compile a 'file' of different temporal perspectives on the *œuvre* as a whole.

Suppose an artist creates, in the course of his career, 500 works which we can number Op. 1 through to Op. 500. We can construct the artist's *œuvre* 'from the standpoint of Op. 1' (i.e. as a very vague set of protentions from Op. 1), or from mid-career (protentions and retentions from Op. 250), or from 'last works' (retentions from Op. 500 and protentions towards works which we can only imagine, which the artist might have completed had he lived longer). Depending on which opus number we take as our point of vantage, I would argue, we obtain a different, unique, patterning of protentional and retentional relationships between works, and thus a different interpretation of the artist's *œuvre*. There is no absolute sense in which any given work can be seen, either as a recapitulation of a previous work, or as a precursor of a future one; the ensemble of an artist's works, strung out in time, constitutes a dynamic, unstable, entity; not a mere accumulation of datable artefacts. We can only appreciate it by participating in its unfolding life.

The reader may object at this point; 'this is all very well, but try as I may I find it hard to connect what you are saying to the actual *œuvre* of any artist whose works I know—Canaletto for instance'. And I would be obliged to admit that Canaletto's cityscapes, admirable though they are, hardly seem amenable to interpretation as psychological documents, as opposed to topographical ones. The model I have been advancing best applies to artists whose *œuvre* embodies a high degree of conscious self-reference and coherent development. I am far from claiming that the model just advanced would be particularly useful in all art-historical contexts. However, the model can easily be made to apply in at least some historical contexts, and it is to one of these I shall now turn.

9.5. *The* Œuvre *of Marcel Duchamp*

In a sense, I am going to cheat. Husserl's model of time-consciousness dates from a period in which problems of space-time, continuity, and the relation between physical reality and mental states were very much 'in the air'. His treatment of the subject shows, markedly, the influence of William James, while another contemporary philosopher who tackled these problems—and who may have exercised some direct influence on the course of art history—was Henri Bergson. The birth of analytical Cubism, the appearance of Husserl's *Psychology of Internal Time Consciousness*, and the publication of Bergson's most widely read work *Creative Evolution* were almost simultaneous events (between 1906 and 1907). The artist whose work I am going to use to illustrate my thesis, Marcel Duchamp, underwent his formative intellectual experiences during precisely this period. Though Duchamp never studied philosophy or mathematics systematically, he readily picked up the ideas that were doing the rounds in intellectual circles in his youth. Moreover, he read and mastered a number of texts (notably by Poincaré and Jouffret; see Adcock 1984) which popularized advanced mathematical and scientific thinking. Consequently, although the actual diffusion of ideas might never be documentable—and I certainly do not intend to document it—the fact is that Duchamp was probably to some extent aware, even if only indirectly, via the Cubists (and their in-house philosopher, Princet) of the James–Bergson–Husserl conception of temporal flux or the 'stream of consciousness'. So there might be an element of tautology involved in using Duchamp to illustrate a 'Husserlian' model of art history, when, in fact, Duchamp may actually have *set out* to illustrate it.

However that may be, Duchamp certainly provides by far the most perspicuous instance of an important artist whose total *œuvre* repays study as a network of protentions and retentions fanning out from particular works (particularly from his masterpiece *La Mariée mise à nu par les célibataires, même*—otherwise known as *The Large Glass* (1913–25)). I cannot, obviously, do more than hint at the richness of Duchamp's *œuvre* here—that would require a monograph to add to the many that already exist on this artist, certain of which copiously document the basic idea I am exploring here (see, especially, the work of C. E. Adcock 1984).

Duchamp's work is, essentially, *about* the notion of the continuum, in that it is based on the exploitation of the idea of the 'fourth dimension'. This dimension, I should immediately say, is not 'time' in the ordinary sense, especially not time as a mere measure of duration, or physicists' time. The 'fourth dimension' for Duchamp—as for certain of his contemporaries—was essentially the 'real' but strictly *unrepresentable* domain beyond, or encompassing, the 'ordinary' world we live in and perceive in the normal way. Duchamp's work originates in a mathematician's parable. A two-dimensional object (in the plane, e.g. in Abbot's famous *Flatland*) casts a one-dimensional shadow. A three-dimensional object (the kind of object we are familiar with in our 3-d world) casts a two-dimensional shadow. So what kind of object would cast a three-dimensional shadow?—obviously, that would have to be a 'fourth-dimensional object'; which is thus something which one can conceive of, but not represent, because to do so requires more dimensions than we have at our disposal, here in three-dimensional land. Duchamp's art, to simplify radically, consists of a series of essentially comic attempts to produce 'shadows' of fourth-dimensional entities, or at least to suggest procedures for obtaining these shadows of fourth-dimensional objects by extrapolating the shadows of three-dimensional ones.

To begin with, Duchamp merely identified the fourth dimension vaguely with a Symbolist never-never land. In 1910–11 he produced 'Symbolist' works which culminate in the *Young Man and Girl in Spring* (1911), which we will encounter in a different guise later. From mid-1911 onwards, he fell under the influence of the Cubists. The Cubists were interested in the fourth dimension, not as a symbolic myth but as a fact of subjective experience, and under Cubist influence Duchamp's notion of the fourth dimension became aligned, more and more, with Bergsonian *durée*. The underlying intention behind the 'classic' phase of Cubism was to create images which were 'realistic' in showing the

spectator what the object *really was like*, rather than merely what the object 'looked' like. The earlier nineteenth-century artists admired by the Cubists were the 'realists', notably Courbet and Corot. The philistine public was bemused by Cubist claims to the effect that superior 'realism' was their goal, but the Cubists could cite copious philosophical precedents for their project. It is not philosophically unprecedented to suggest that there could be more to guitars and bottles than their visible appearance, viewed instantaneously and from a fixed point of view. Translating this insight into artistic practice was more difficult. Cézanne had shown the way, for example in some of his late depictions of Mont Sainte-Victoire, which—as later photographic researches at the spots at which Cézanne set up his easel were to prove—showed more of Mont Sainte-Victoire than could ever actually be seen from any *one* of these vantage-points. These landscapes depict, not any fixed appearance of Mont Sainte-Victoire, but Cézanne's interaction with this object over time, as he moved about in its vicinity and absorbed each of its varied aspects. Or, in other words, Mont Sainte-Victoire is revealed as a *process*, a movement of *durée*, rather than as a 'thing'. The weak point of Cubist 'multiple perspective' was that it could easily degenerate into a kind of painted cinema, in which successive 'frames' of a moving object, or an object seen by a moving camera, were simply pasted one on top of another. Cubist theoreticians, such as Gleizes and Metzinger, sedulously sought to emphasize the idealistic element in Cubism, its search for the pictorial equivalent of 'the absolute' rather than the facile evocation of dynamic motion and change. The Italian Futurists, on the other hand, embraced 'cinematism' heartily, since, unlike their Parisian Cubist colleagues, they were specifically interested in movement and dynamic phenomena (e.g. Boccioni).

Duchamp became a Cubist rather late in the day, just as 'classical' Cubist aspirations were beginning to unravel, and, being of a saturnine disposition, he joined the movement in order to indulge his increasing predilection for mockery, rather than because he was a true believer. (There were personal reasons for Duchamp's misanthropy, which have been extensively disinterred by his biographers.) Luckily for him, one of his 'satirical' Cubist works, the famous *Nude Descending a Staircase* of 1912, established his name as a leading avant-garde artist in the United States, where he subsequently secured lifelong patronage, though it resulted in his expulsion from the 'official' Cubist movement (for 'Futurist' deviationism). The *Nude* transparently employed 'cinematic' methods and was, in fact, based directly on stop-motion photographs by E. Marey and others. Duchamp's intentionally comic picture was designed to demonstrate the fact that while 'realism' remained the ultimate objective, the 'fourth dimension' could only, in the end, be physical time, and 'realistic' images (Cubist realist images, that is to say) would always reduce to chopped-up partial images of the object pasted onto one another or strewn over the canvas, as in the notorious *Nude*.

Duchamp was more ambitious; he still wanted to represent the unrepresentable flux of 'being' (to employ the Heideggerian term) but without simply reducing the multiplicity and fullness of experience to a series of partial snapshots. He

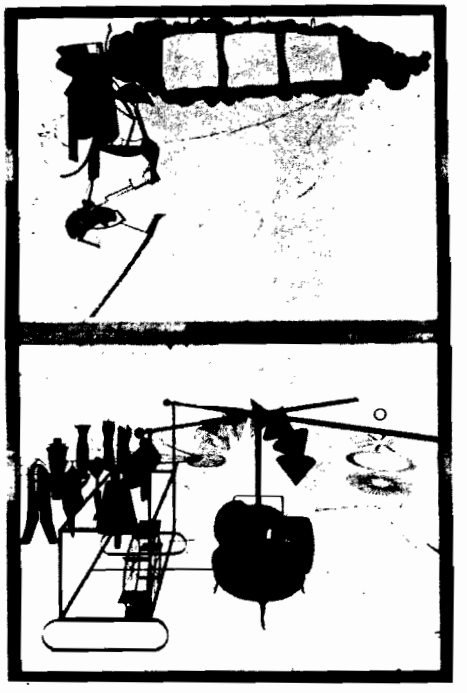

FIG 9.5/1. *The Large Glass* or *The Bride stripped bare by her Bachelors even* by Marcel Duchamp. Philadelphia Museum of Art

consequently embarked, from 1913, on a long series of preparatory studies of a work which could, truly, adumbrate the fourth dimension. Because almost all of Duchamp's work, from 1913, is part of a single, coherent project, which subsequently, after the (semi-)completion of the *Large Glass* in 1925, extended itself until the close of his career, his *œuvre* is particularly interesting from our point of view. It is literally the case that Duchamp's *œuvre* consists of a single distributed object, in that each of Duchamp's separate works is a preparation for, or a development of, other works of his, and all may be traced, by direct or circuitous pathways, to all the others. This was intentional and explicit, since Duchamp's basic objective was to create a fourth-dimensional entity, and an *œuvre* such as his is perhaps as close as we will ever get to possessing such an entity.

Considerations of space—and the patience of my readers—oblige me to confine the demonstration of the characteristics of Duchamp's *œuvre* as a temporal object to a discussion of just one work, or rather, the *œuvre* 'seen from' just one work. The work I have chosen is one of the numerous studies for the *Large Glass* (see Fig. 9.5/1). In fact, it is a study for the 'Capillary Tubes' which draw

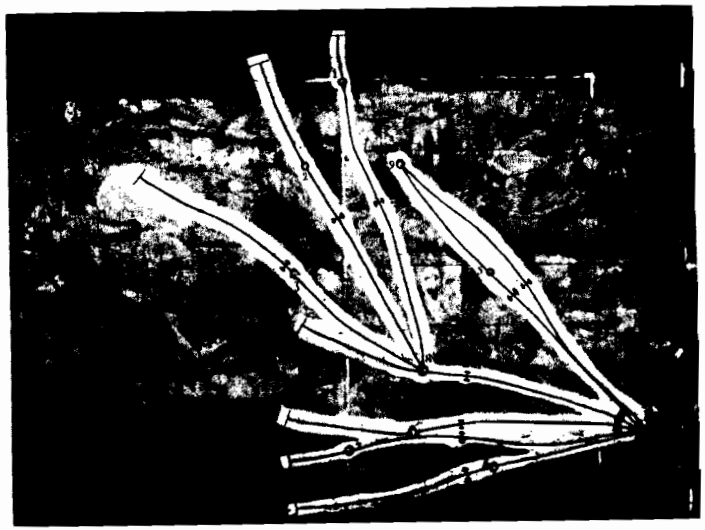

FIG. 9.5/2. *The Network of Stoppages* by Marcel Duchamp. © Succession Marcel Duchamp, ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London 1998.

off 'Love Gasoline' from the 'Cemetery of Uniforms and Liveries' on the left-hand side of the lower half of the *Large Glass* and feed it into the conical 'Sieves' in the centre. These tubes are no more than a minor detail of the *Large Glass* itself, yet Duchamp devotes an important study to them, indeed, more than one.

The work I shall discuss is known as *The Network of Stoppages* (no. 214 in Schwarz's complete catalogue; Fig. 9.5/2). It is both an independent work and a preparatory study for the *Large Glass*. At first glance, it looks rather like a map of some railway-system, the main depot (at the lower right, or south-east) serving a number of branch-lines fanning out to the west and branching again to the north. One sees little numbered symbols on the lines (which may be stations) and other symbols which might, possibly, be bridges or tunnels. Each 'branch' seems to come to an end in a 'terminus' of some kind. If one looks at this 'transport system' sideways on, from the lower right, one can perceive its relation to the Capillary Tubes in the *Large Glass*, for here the system is reproduced in 'perspective' projection (from this point of view), rather than 'map' projection. In the *Large Glass* the two-dimensional map shown in the *Network* has become a three-dimensional perspective view of the Capillary Tubes (hinting at the transition from a 3-d to a 4-d world by providing an instance of the transition from a 2-d world to a 3-d one).

The *Network of Stoppages* is therefore a protention towards (part of) the *Large Glass*, even though the *Network* only appears there in transformed perspective. At the same time the *Network* is a retention of certain earlier works. In particular it recapitulates directly a piece called *The Three Standard Stoppages* which consists of three curved wooden templates which were used to draw the curved 'tracks' shown in the *Network*.

One idea Duchamp was working on was that in the 'fourth dimension' events which seem to us like 'pure chance' would correspond to *necessity*. An 'arbitrary' length, or a 'random' curve would, in the fourth dimension, be something really basic like 'one metre' or 'a perfectly straight line'. Accordingly, Duchamp took three one-metre lengths of string, allowed these to drop freely onto sticky varnished boards, and from these arbitrary curves he cut templates, called the *Three Standard Stoppages*, which would be the basic geometrical forms and units of measurement for 'fourth dimensional' use. The network is obviously a 'strong retention' of these templates, just as it is a 'strong protention' towards the Capillary Tubes.

But there is much more to it than this. If we inspect the *Network* more carefully, we observe that it is painted over something else. Duchamp has not used a fresh, pristine canvas, but has done his design-work for the Capillary Tubes on a reused canvas on which more than one image has already been inscribed. In fact, the canvas has already been used twice, for apparently different purposes: Counting from the 'top' layer downwards, the *Network of Stoppages* consists of:

1. The 'map' of the *Network*;
2. A (quite faint) preliminary line-sketch for the *entire layout* of the *Large Glass*, as Duchamp conceived it in 1913, before many details had been worked out;
3. A version of *Young Man and Girl in Spring* – Duchamp's 'Symbolist' canvas of 1911, his first major painting, dealing with the theme of 'initiation' and (possibly) incestuous longing (for his sister, Suzanne, to whom he gave it as a wedding present); cf. Fig. 9.5/3.

Now obviously, Duchamp could perfectly well have afforded to use a fresh canvas (or simply a large sheet of paper) for both 1 and 2, if all he required was something drawable-upon to do his design-work; especially if he intended to sell his sketches to patrons once they had served their purpose, as most artists do and as he himself subsequently did. Instead, he produced what amounts to a *series* of works while using only *one* canvas; self-defeating parsimony one would have thought – which he made up for later by producing, or having others produce for him, many identical replicas of his earlier works.

Clearly, there must be more to this than mere economy. By creating a palimpsest of three works to serve as a preparatory study for a fourth (and indeed many more) Duchamp is approaching the fourth dimension in yet

FIG. 9.5[3]. *The Young Man and Girl on Spring* by Marcel Duchamp (1911)

another way—and a very perspicuous way from an anthropological perspective. Just recall the title of this work again: *The Network of Stoppages*. For us anthropologists, those words ring certain bells, because we have Durkheim's *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, engraved on our memories. And if not, then at least we have all read Lévi-Strauss's *Totemism* (1964) where Durkheim's words are quoted. The original source is a Dakota Indian, discussing metaphysics:

> Everything as it moves, now and then, here and there, makes stops. The bird as it flies stops in one place to make its nest, and in another to rest in its flight. A man when he goes forth stops when he wills. So the god has stopped. The sun, which is so bright and beautiful, is one place where he has stopped. The moon, the stars, the winds, he has been with. The trees, the animals, are all where he has stopped, and the Indian thinks of these places and sends his prayers there to reach the place where the god has stopped and win help and a blessing. (Durkheim, quoted in Lévi-Strauss, *Totemism*: 98)

Lévi-Strauss quotes this passage in the course of a discussion of Bergson, who, he says, propounded remarkably similar views in *Creative Evolution*, and who was undoubtedly familiar with the passage in Durkheim in which they are quoted. Lévi-Strauss goes on to remark:

> The better to underline the comparison, let us quote without break from the paragraph in *Les Deux Sources* [*The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*] where Bergson sums up his metaphysics:
>
> > A great current of creative energy gushes forth through matter, to obtain from it what it can. At most points it is stopped; these stops are transmuted, in our eyes, into the appearances of so many living species, i.e., of organisms in which our perception, being essentially analytical and synthetic, distinguishes a multitude of elements combining to fulfil a multitude of functions; but the process of organisation was only the stop itself, a simple act analogous to the impress of a foot which instantaneously causes thousands of grains of sand to contrive to form a pattern.
>
> The two accounts agree so exactly that it may seem less risky, after reading them, to claim that Bergson was able to understand what lay behind totemism because his own thought, unbeknownst to him, was in sympathy with that of totemic peoples. What is it, then, that they have in common? It seems that the relationship results from one and the same desire to apprehend in a total fashion the two aspects of reality which the philosopher terms *continuous* and *discontinuous*; from the same refusal to choose between the two; and from the same effort to see them as complementary perspectives giving on to the same truth. (Lévi-Strauss 1964: 98; for refs. see original)

It is surely not difficult to grasp the connection, now, between the subject-matter of Duchamp's *Network of Stoppages*, and the peculiar manner in which it has been presented, as a layer-cake of artworks placed one over the other. The 'Net-work', both shows us a Network of Stoppages, *and also is a network of stoppages*, i.e. a series of 'perchings' at which Duchamp, in his 'flight' becomes visible in the form of an index of his agency, a particular work of art. *The Network* looks like a 'map' because it is part of a 'map' of *time*. But this can only be a four-dimensional map. Like Bergson, Duchamp downplays the 'merely' visible, or its illusionistic representation. Like Bergson, he distrusts our perception 'which is merely analytic and synthetic', and seeks instead the 'current of creative energy' (i.e. *durée*, or Heideggerian 'being') which 'gushes forth through matter'. This is the fourth dimension.

In Husserlian terms, there is a most startling analogy between the transparent layering of *The Network of Stoppages*, and the concept of *durée* constituted out of retentions, retentions of retentions, and so on. *The Network* is a protention towards the *Large Glass*, which is a rétention, first, of the original abstract layout for that work (before its content was finalized) and secondly a retention, from this retention, of Duchamp's Symbolist beginnings, the thirst for tran-

scendence and release from incestuous longing ('initiation') which set him on the path he subsequently followed. Duchamp allows us to see his 'sinking' past as a transformable component of his present, retained as something already superseded in the course of his intervening life. And indeed, there are ample art-historical reasons for interpreting *The Large Glass* as a transformed version, a distant memory, of *The Young Man and Girl in Spring* (see e.g. Golding 1973: ch. 3).

What I am proposing, therefore, may be called a 'Dakota' model of the artist's *œuvre*; each artwork, as Duchamp's picture so strikingly reveals to us, is a place where agency 'stops' and assumes visible form. *The Large Glass* itself was subtitled, by its creator, as a 'delay in glass' (*retard en verre*), suggesting precisely this idea (the glass, like a photographic plate) delays the passage of the shadows of the fourth dimension, and captures their visible traces. In later works the procedure is repeated more explicitly: for instance, in *Tu m'* (1918), which features *trompe-l'œil* 'shadows' of Duchamp's previous 'ready-made' works (the *Bicycle-Wheel* (1913), the *Hat-rack* (1914), etc.).

Each Duchamp work, in other words, invites us to adopt a particular perspective on all Duchamp's works, often by providing explicit quotations or references to past and future works, though also adumbrating retentions and protentions in a more elliptical fashion. The sum total of the infinitely transformable network of internal references (protentions and retentions) uniting the *œuvre* from *all* of these temporal 'perches'—which we can only, in fact, adopt serially, is the unrepresentable but very *conceptualizable* and by no means 'mystic' fourth dimension. In this way Duchamp triumphantly vindicates himself as a comic, secularist, psychopomp.

At this point, without having done more than scratch the surface, I curtail further discussion of Duchamp's *œuvre*, though I hope that I have said enough to encourage any interested readers to pursue the subject further, since the literature and documentation available is unusually extensive and revealing. My purpose is only to establish the point that Duchamp's subjectivity, his inner *durée* is concretely instantiated, as a series of moments, or 'delays' or 'perchings', in the objective traces of his agency, that is, his artworks and the texts he produced to go with them. Here we have, in public, accessible, form, the 'continuum of continua of protentional and retentional modifications' described by Husserl for the purposes of elucidating the purely *subjective* process of cognition, or consciousness. In other words, as a distributed object, Duchamp's consciousness, the very flux of his being as an agent, is not just 'accessible to us' but has assumed this form. Duchamp has simply *turned into* this object, and now rattles around the world, in innumerable forms, as these detached person-parts, or idols, or skins, or cherished valuables. So we return to our starting-point. But there is one more step to be taken. Duchamp is (or was) an individual mind, one particular person exercising one particular agency. What about the art produced, not by individuals over a lifetime, but by collectivities over longer periods of time; what, in other words, can we say about collective 'traditions'. Can we, so to speak, expand the model that we have just constructed of 'the artist's *œuvre*' to encompass something wider, something corresponding to a 'cultural tradition' so that we can see that, too, as a distributed object structurally isomorphous to consciousness as a temporal process, or *durée*?

This is the final problem to which I will turn, in concluding the present work.

9.6. *The Maori Meeting House*

Copious data relevant to the question just raised have recently been provided by Roger Neich (1996). He has completed a detailed study of all the extant or photographically documented meeting houses constructed by the Maori of North Island between *c.*1850 and 1930, which were, in turn, a development of chiefly houses (large structures erected with magnificence in mind) of the earlier nineteenth century and the pre-European period (Fig 9.6./1 from Neich, fig. 68). The present-day Maori 'meeting house' came into its own during the latter half of the nineteenth century, especially from 1870 onwards, a period during which the Maori found themselves unable to compete with one another (or Europeans) via the traditional warlike means. Their competitive spirit focused more and more on the construction of large, elaborately carved and painted meeting houses, each Maori community trying, so far as lay within its power, to outdo its neighbours and rivals in this respect. The totality of Maori meeting houses, therefore, constitutes a particular genre of art production, over a particular historical phase in the course of Maori history (in many ways, a glorious period, which contemporary Maoris rightly recall with pride), which can be considered 'coherent' in the sense we require. All Maori meeting houses, that is to say, followed a common 'ground plan', all were designed with a common purpose, namely, to serve as an objectification of the wealth, sophistication, technical skill, and ancestral endowment of the community responsible for the construction, and as a means to ensure that persons not of this community, who might be entertained there, would be consumed with jealousy and thoroughly intimidated. As Nick Thomas has written, apropos of Maori art:

> houses . . . were *not* 'symbols' . . . but vehicles of a collectivity's power. They simultaneously indexed a group's own vitality and ideally or effectively disempowered others. Distinctions between function and meaning, use and expression, instrumentality and symbolism obscure what was integrated and processual in these collective presentations of tribal efficacy . . . (Thomas 1995: 103)[1]

[1] The reader would not be mistaken in thinking that these comments by Thomas played an important part in shaping the views expressed in Ch.1 of the present work.

FIG. 9.6/1. The Maori meeting house as a collective index of communal power. *Source*: Nga Tau-e-Waru, te Ore Ore Marae, Masterton. Auckland Public Library.

Maori meeting houses may have been the collective production of many separate artists and builders, working in separate communities at different times, each striving to produce something distinctive, yet all are expressions of a common historical trajectory, a common cultural system, a common ideological and political purpose. We are entitled, therefore, to group them together, as Neich does, since they constituted the 'final common pathway' for the physical expression of 'Maoridom' as a collective experience, during the relevant period.

Because these collective 'indexes of agency' were *houses*—artefacts with very special characteristics all their own (cf. Hugh-Jones and Carstens 1996) – they possess features which render them especially suited to the projection of collective agency. First of all, houses are 'collective' in the simplest sense of all, that people collect in them, and are joined together by them; this applies to any house and is the reason why so many social groups are referred to as 'houses' (Lévi-Strauss; cf. Hugh-Jones and Carstens, op. cit.). Secondly, houses are complex artefacts consisting of many separate, standard, parts; they are thus organized, or 'organic' entities, unlike, say, a bowl or a spear, however wonderfully wrought. Their organic plan and capacity for disassembly and reassembly, remodelling and redecoration allows them to objectify the organic connectedness of historical processes. And finally—and above all—they are bodies. The house is a body *for* the body. Houses are bodies because they are containers which, like the body, have entrances and exits. Houses are cavities filled with living contents. Houses are bodies because they have strong bones and armoured shells, because they have gaudy, mesmerizing skins which

beguile and terrify; and because they have organs of sense and expression—eyes which peer out through windows and spyholes, voices which reverberate through the night. To enter a house is to enter a mind, a sensibility; especially if it is such a house as the Maori were accustomed to make. Like many traditional psychologists, the Maori located mind and intention in the viscera. To enter a house is to enter the belly of the ancestor and to be overwhelmed by the encompassing ancestral presence; overhead are the ribs of the ancestor, in the form of the superbly decorated rafters which converge towards the ancestral backbone, the ridge-pole—the fountainhead of ancestral continuity. On all sides, idols of ancestral beings gaze down hypnotically, entrapping the onlooker in their thought-processes (cf. above, Ch. 7 on idols). The flying simulacra of the ancestors criss-cross this interior space with unbelievable rapidity and profusion; all merely private, independent, thought is overwhelmed and only those cognitions which actually emanate from the house, those cognitions which are part of the house's very structure, are attainable.

Neich provides a very comprehensive discussion of the cosmological 'symbolism' of Maori meeting houses. He shows in great detail how each such house was explicitly conceptualized as the body of the eponymous ancestor of the community, who was not so much 'memorialized' in the house which bore his name, as reinstated in this form. The house was not a surviving trace of the ancestor's existence and agency at some other, distant, coordinates, but was the body which he possessed in the here and now, and through which his agency was exercised in the immediate present (to describe this as 'symbolic' is obviously a misnomer). At the same time the house was a multiplicity of connected bodies, a bodily 'fractal' in Wagner's sense (1994; cf. Sect. 7.11), since it consisted of the bodies of the ancestor's descendants, by genealogical succession, both living and deceased. The ridge-pole objectifies the genealogical continuity of the chiefly line (notionally by male primogeniture) while the descending rafters indicate the proliferation of cadet lines on either side. These were decorated with captivating patterns of the type called *kowhaiwhai* (Fig. 9.6/2 from Neich, fig. 17), which evoked the tendrils and runners of the ever-productive, ever proliferating *kumara*, the sweet potato plant which provided the Maori with their staple diet. Body, genealogy, gardens, were all copresent and synergically active. The living members of the community, gathered in the house, were, so to speak, only 'furnishings'. They were mobile appurtenances of its solid, enduring structure, into which they would eventually be absorbed as 'fixtures'.

But the point of this section is not to discuss the cultural significance of the Maori meeting house, which would be redundant given the excellent work that has already been published on this subject by Neich and his colleagues. The preceding remarks only reiterate the thesis, argued in earlier parts of this work, that artefacts like Maori meeting houses are not 'symbols' but indexes of agency. In this instance, the agency is collective, ancestral, and essentially political in tone.

Fig. 9.6/2. Kowhaiwhai patterns: part of the verandah or porch of the large house of the Ngati-Porou at Wai-o-Matatini, East Cape. *Source*: Plate XIII from Augustus Hamilton, *Maori Art* (1896).

My aim in introducing this material is to explore the theme of 'traditions'. To what extent can we study the whole gamut of Maori meeting houses, distributed in space and time, as a single, coherent, object, distributed in space and time, which, in a certain sense, recapitulates, on the historical and collective scale, the processes of cognition or consciousness? Fortunately, through the very meticulous studies undertaken by Neich, we can indeed make progress in this direction. In order to show this, I need do little more than reproduce a table, devised by Neich himself, which appears on page 220 of his book (Fig. 9.6/3). Neich's table 'The Transmission of Selected Figurative Painting Traditions' is organized in the following way. The left-to-right axis of the table corresponds to the axis of historical time (between 1870 and 1930) while the top-to-bottom axis, which is unlabelled, corresponds, implicitly, to geographical space; that is, meeting houses (the large black spots with numbers and letters in them) which lie on a horizontal axis are or were spatially contiguous. The numbers denote particular meeting houses in Neich's comprehensive catalogue of the same, and the letters correspond to 'tràditions' of Maori figurative painting, which began to develop and proliferate from 1870 onwards—before which time only Maori carving was 'figurative' and painting (on meeting houses) was in the *kowhaiwhai* style and developments therefrom. We do not actually need to discuss Neich's material in any depth, since it is very detailed and contextual. All that I primarily wish to do is to underline and explore an observation that must have inevitably occurred to the reader already, that there is a great deal of similarity between Neich's diagram and the

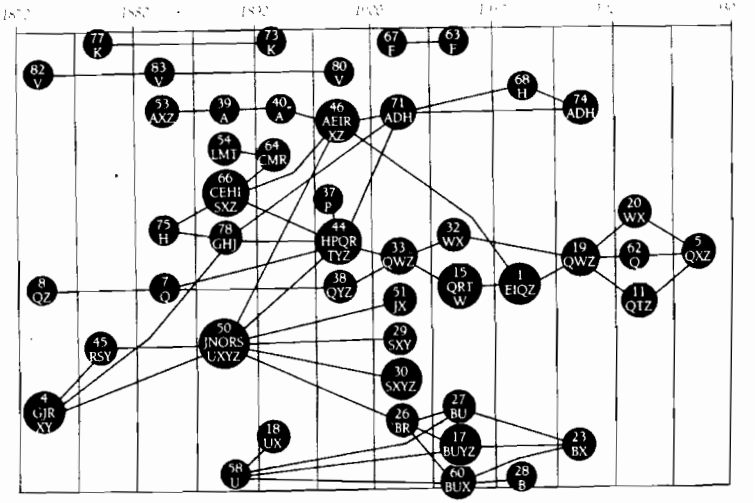

Fig. 9.6/3. The Maori meeting house as an object distributed in space and time. *Source*: Neich 1996: table titled 'The Transmission of Selected Figurative Painting Traditions'. Reproduced courtesy of Roger Neich and Auckland University Press.

diagram I presented as Fig. 9.4./1—the spot-and-arrow diagram in which I sought to provide an abstract model of the 'artist's *œuvre*'.

Instead of arrows, Neich joins the nodal points in his historico-geographical network by simple lines; he is not thinking in terms of protentions and retentions which, from any given 'now' moment, or from the temporal standpoint of any given work of art at the moment of its completion, always have a definite directionality, towards the past (memory, recapitulation) or towards the future (project, preliminary sketch). Meanwhile, Neich is thinking, as most art historians do, in terms of 'progress'; from the past and towards the future, because his whole book is premised, not unjustifiably, on the idea of the 'development' of a distinctive Maori art. So I guess that had he used arrows instead of lines on his table, his arrows would all have been rightwards-pointing ones. But this is not really logical, in that the concept of 'the transmission of traditions' really involves, primarily, the artist, commissioned to decorate a house at time 'T-zero' 'remembering' an exemplar that he witnessed, somewhere else, on some previous building, at 'T-minus-one'. The transmission of a 'tradition', the recapitulation of a model, is the objectification of memory, and thus inherently retrospective. So the arrows ought, most logically, point not from left to right, but from right to left. But this will not do either, because whatever the artists who made the Maori meeting houses had in mind, it certainly was not to

reproduce, tamely, the houses that had been constructed, by other communities, sometime in the immediate or more distant past. The whole point of these houses, as was emphasized earlier, was to bring about the crushing of the (architectural) self-esteem of members of rival communities, to exalt the ancestors of the house-building community over everybody else's ancestors, by objectifying them with superior magnificence and sophistication (which meant, *inter alia*, incorporating references to *pakeha*—'white'—art into the décor, alongside 'traditional' art forms). It is not just that Maori meeting houses incorporated 'innovations' (i.e. non-traditional elements which, later, being imitated, became 'traditions' in themselves), each house was totally an 'innovation' (cf. Wagner 1977) in that the house was orientated towards the future, the political triumph which would be the *anticipated* outcome of the effort invested in its construction. The building of the house was a collective, intentional, action, and 'action' is intrinsically future-orientated. The 'agency of the ancestor' of which the house is an index, is equally future-orientated; the ancestor's body/house is not a corpse or a memorial to the departed. So once again, it seems that we should make our arrows point from left to right, towards the future. After all this, it may seem that Neich has done well to refrain from using arrows at all, in that doing so results in paradoxes; as 'traditional' artefacts, Maori meeting houses are undeniably retrospective, as political gestures they are prospective. Yet how can meeting houses be both prospective and retrospective at the same time?

But we have encountered, and (I hope) surmounted this difficulty already. An artefact or event is never either traditional or innovatory in any absolute sense, or, as time-philosophers are inclined to put it, *sub specie aeternitatis*. A 'traditional' artefact (or event) is only 'traditional' when viewed from a latter-day perspective, and as a screen, or transparency, through which its precursors are adumbrated. The traditional object is grasped as a retention, a retention of retentions, and so on. Conversely, an 'innovatory' object (or event) is innovatory only on condition that we situate ourselves anterior to it in time (i.e. at a moment in time at which it has not yet, or is just about to, come into existence)—so that we can likewise see it as a screen through which still later objects may be protended, as a protention, protention of protentions, etc. The temporal object constituted by the totality of the meeting houses displayed on Neich's diagram consists therefore, not of a network of temporal relations which can be totalized in a single synoptic mapping; but only as a 'file' consisting of a whole series of such mappings corresponding to different temporal (and spatial) points of vantage; each one of which generates a distinctive distribution of retentional and protentional relations between any given meeting house and its spatio-temporal neighbours. The logically mandatory nature of such a continuously shifting perspective on tradition and innovation in an historical assemblage of artefacts means that the process of understanding art history is essentially akin to the processes of consciousness itself, which is marked, likewise, by a continuous perspectival flux.

To express this more concretely, we can interpret any given meeting house, viewed from the latter-day perspective, as a 'memory' in objectified form, of meeting houses anterior to this one. Indeed, in terms of the cognitive processes of the Maori builders, 'memory' is the faculty responsible for the transmission of the lore, the skills—the 'tradition' in other words—which the house embodies. But this would not be 'tradition' unless the memory-antecedents of the house constructed 'from memory' were remembered as having antecedents of their own, of which they, in turn, were memories, back into the past. Each house embodies not just the memory of its immediate exemplar, but a cumulative series of memories, memories of memories, and so on. That is to say, it carries with it the whole thickness of *durée*, and belongs not just to a 'now'—the temporal coordinates of its dates of construction—but to an extended temporal field which reaches back into the past and which is drawn up into the present again.

Conversely, each meeting house is a project for future houses, a 'sketch' towards a series of as yet unbuilt houses. We are inclined to see artefacts, especially rather splendid artefacts like these, as if they embodied the final intentions of their makers. But anyone who has ever had anything to do with building anything (even an extension to a suburban home) will instantly recognize that this is hardly the case. What gets built is whatever seems the best possible compromise in the light of all the practical difficulties and constraints entering into the situation; given that the decision to build 'something or other' has already been taken. We may think that our house-extension is vastly superior to our neighbours', but that does not mean that we would not like to tear the whole thing down and start again, were that a practicable option. We are certainly entitled to suppose that the same disparity between aspiration and actuality entered into the process of building Maori meeting houses. These, it will be recalled, were erected in an overt spirit of competition, in order to indexicalize the superiority of one community, and its legions of ancestors, over other, neighbouring, communities. No meeting house could, in this context, be too large, too sophisticated, too expensive and magnificent. But the nineteenth-century Maori were, as a matter of fact, impoverished, oppressed, and diminishing in numbers, while the assistance afforded them by their ancestors was, in the end, finite. The houses that were built were far, probably, from being the houses the Maori would have liked to build; they were, perhaps, superior to the houses which preceded them, they might, arguably, be superior to the meeting houses of rival communities (though this would probably not be conceded in public)—but they could hardly be superior, or even equal, to what they were *intended* to be. There were only 'sketches' or 'protentions towards' the ultimate meeting house, which, for practical reasons, would always remain unrealizable. The meeting house as a 'sketch' embodied, the promise, some time in the future, to build the meeting house to beat all meeting houses; and it was this 'threat' to build, once circumstances became *really* favourable, the

'ultimate' meeting house, which was aimed at the neighbours, as much as the 'realized' house itself.

Thus we are enabled to see the totality of Maori meeting houses as a cognitive process writ large, a movement of inner *durée* as well as a collection of existing objects, and documents appertaining to objects which time has obliterated. The Maori meeting house (in its totalized form) is an object which we are able to trace as a movement of thought, a movement of memory reaching down into the past and a movement of aspiration, probing towards an unrealized, and perhaps unrealizable futurity. Through the study of these artefacts, we are able to grasp 'mind' as an external (and eternal) disposition of public acts of objectification, and simultaneously as the evolving consciousness of a collectivity, transcending the individual *cogito* and the coordinates of any particular here and now.

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