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## Virtual Archives: An Ethnographic Perspective on Their Creation and Transmission

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It is still common to consider thought as an abstraction. Thought is assumed to hover, in the form of concepts, over a material substrate—one that is itself formed by thought without being inhabited by it.<sup>1</sup> Concepts are thus conventionally ascribed to things, to habits of doing that involve things, and occasionally to images signified by things, without ever being taken for the thing itself.<sup>2</sup> In accordance with this assumption about the referential nature of cultural representation, the task of arriving at an understanding of what such representations convey about events or biographical relations is generally taken to be supported by inscriptions. Textual sources of one kind or another have informed the way we have approached history and memory since the classical era,<sup>3</sup> leaving artifacts that do not make visual reference to texts methodologically inaccessible for analysis. Such artifacts, however, present us with another, quasi-magical, manner of making history, one in which memory binds together the

past and the present in a world of artifice.<sup>4</sup> Here, artifacts (including images), not texts, are the primary means of mapping the past and of enabling people to navigate paths into the future. These form an archive—but one that often is accessible only via memory and that is unstable not just because of the ephemeral or distributed nature of the artifacts themselves but also because of the complex biographically embedded intentions that inform access to this archive and the iterative reworking of its content. Rich in surface pattern and nonrandom stylistic variations between artifact and often existing in lacunae uncontrolled by institutions, such artifacts carry, in their material and technical properties, culturally salient understandings about the relational nature of iterative action. It is the recognition of these properties and of the patterns informing iteration that carry shared historical consciousness and that creates a propensity for access to virtual archives to be predictable and subject to proprietary rights.

This essay examines the vehicular capacity of virtual archives that are populated by artifacts stored in material or mnemonic collections; it compares two ethnographic case studies that allow us to ask what differences such archives make to the way biographical relations and events are transmitted and remembered in society. Using the excavation of the material and technical conditions that surround the production of artifacts for mnemonic archiving, I will argue for the methodological recovery of a long-forgotten sense of “the language of the object.” I describe this as *poiesis*, the production and formation of

algorithmic properties that inform both spoken language and artifactual style, enable the translation of one into the other, and make it possible for us to explore such archives in relation to the vocabularies and attitudes of mind that are active in the fashioning of historical consciousness.

Theoretically and comparatively, this essay thus invites a closer look at the difference that the way language relates to representation can make in the way people create and use archives. Antiquarianism offers a useful analytical framework for understanding how civilizations account for their present and future relations via relations set in the past, as it sensitizes us to the relevance of the nature of the archive in accounting for historical consciousness. Scholars have long assumed that, in societies that do not transmit information in text form, narratives alone sustain a shared identity with ways of seeing, thinking, and living. While we may argue that those scholars have failed to take seriously the role played by artifacts in capturing ideas vital to identity and in extending those ideas beyond a person's reach and lifespan, they also have, nevertheless, usefully drawn our attention to the cognitive potential of poetic language.<sup>5</sup> This essay confronts the question of the *poiesis* of artifacts and their virtual archiving as iterative images by pointing to the subtle differences in the way archives are fashioned in otherwise comparable ethnographic settings, as people strive to imagine and to realize their future. A notable inspiration for this essay has been the work of the ethnoarchaeologist Gary Urton on the Inca Khipu,<sup>6</sup> a knotted cordage device that enabled the regional integration of a vast economic and

political empire in the pre-contact Andes. Urton argues not only that the use of different knots and different colored strings of variable length encoded numerical information vital to the governance of the empire but also that this coding was akin to language itself. Urton convincingly showed that the Khipu functioned as an archive that enabled the translation of coded language into material artifact and back again, in ways that supported an empathy with the material and technical actions of translation and that arguably integrated the Inca empire more successfully than the archived information itself.

As modern societies move into a technical world characterized by prototyping, in which additive construction based on digitized coding produces artifacts, we are cognizant of a potential relation between language and thing that reaches beyond communication to the cognitive capacity for iteration. Archives held in code and translated into material form have suddenly become a realistic possibility, bringing a problem that must be confronted and solved: the knowledge of iteration requires preservation and transmission that is as dedicated as the digital archive and the technology capable of reading the code.

Krzysztof Pomian in his now-classic paper, "History: From Moral Science to the Computer," argues that a surprising parallel exists between the world of digital and virtual streaming of information and "other" (in his words, "nonliterate") worlds. In both worlds, archives are subject to living memory and passions, and thus they are inherently unstable.<sup>7</sup> Pomian suggests that one reason the gap between history and memory has narrowed in recent times—

today, biographies and events are revisited in the light of living memory – is increased longevity. This proximity of history and memory to personal experience of biographical relations has been assumed to be one of the defining factors of so-called nonliterate (that is, nontextual) societies because, in the absence of external, textual references supporting the canonization of social memory, effective representations are also subject to shifting and subjective interests and intentions.

If Pomian is correct, and a sense of history's proximity to personal memory pervades societies experiencing digital modes of transmission today as much as it does in the worlds of nontextual societies, the question emerges: What difference does the technical modality of virtual archives, based on iterative code, make to our understanding of historical consciousness? The anthropologist Marilyn Strathern has argued that "inhabiting technology" is vital for patenting "artifacts,"<sup>8</sup> drawing on Alfred Gell's work on the agentic capacities of epistemic objects.<sup>9</sup> In their analyses of epistemic artifacts, contemporary writers are building upon the ideas of Claude Levi-Strauss and Gilles Deleuze, who came closest in recognizing the significance of Alfred North Whitehead's invocation of the importance of the "conrescence" of thought: Levi-Strauss, by exposing the systematizing nature of thought made manifest in prototypical forms, and Deleuze, by uncovering the iterative capacity of concepts expending itself in the "fold" of repetition and event, both of them opposing the conception of repetition as mere habit or act of remembering in stressing the concretization

of iterative action in representations.<sup>10</sup> Their insights, however, were forgotten in a world dominated by virtual images that appeared to be unmoored from thinglike counterparts. Yet, as we surround ourselves with prototyped artifacts created from digital code, we are reminded not only that work in an iterative fashion leaves concrescences, like the folds in the drapery of a dress, but also that it might affect the way we conceive of our relation to one another as persons via the relations between potential artifacts issuing forth from the code. And if, alas, we are beginning to relate to history via virtual archives, the nature of which lies beyond text in the iterative capacity of language, what difference will this make to the articulation of historical consciousness and to the identity that it supports with culture and society?

Pomian's provocative allusion to the affinity that might lie between virtual archives based on digital code and archives that demand the repeated iteration of content in material "folds" is useful because it allows us to assume that the nature of the archive we are about to embrace and manage is not without precedent. There are many virtual archives, some of which have come down to us in the form of artifact collections; the Khipu, preserved and reconstructed through Spanish transcriptions, is one such archive. Turning from the Americas to Oceania, we can find others: societies that have made extraordinary usage of virtual archives in fashioning a distributed empathy extended across large-scale regional knowledge economies that have been sustained for centuries.

This essay examines two knowledge economies whose virtual archives are

invested in related yet different ways of “being in history.” In both case studies, sculptures and shrouds made as likenesses serve as doubles of the dead and take center stage in elaborate ceremonies involving secondary burials. Images—witnessed as castoffs and remains of social life—become capable of transcending biographical time and lend authority to their archiving as the social body par excellence. Those images testify to contractual relationships that underpin socioeconomic polities, geographic areas with corresponding structures of governance. The first case study, from the island of New Ireland in Papua New Guinea, considers a sculptural tradition known under the generic term as *Malanggan*. This term covers both the memory of proprietary rights contained in the formal properties of artifacts produced for biographical events as well as the gamut of material and technical knowledge required for the staging of the setting in which the images are produced, consumed, and recommitted to memory.<sup>11</sup> The visual and conceptual complexity and figural variation of *Malanggan* mirrors the complexity of regionally extended political and economic networks, which are historically validated through reference to the virtual archive of images seen during a person’s lifetime. As the relations it harbors are unseated with every act of recollection, the iteration of images conserved in memory is placed in the driver’s seat of social strategies that are explicitly directed to extending proprietary rights to land and other resources. We will see that no matter how many iterations we can access through the collections of *Malanggan* artifacts that have been assembled over the past century, the

potential recovery of history that might be possible via these material traces of the virtual archive is problematic, if not socially divisive, because the redistribution of entitlement and rights to land requires iterations of the archived imagery to correspond to present, not past, political and economic aspirations

The second case study, from the Cook Islands in Polynesia, involves a tradition of patchwork quilts, made as shrouds for the dead, which connect the deceased to a codified ancestral polity whose history is recounted in the stitches of each quilt. Here, genealogical knowledge of a scattered family unit, transfigured into a composite system of imagery, is reiterated and reassembled as layer upon layer of quilt is kept hidden in trunks and is wrapped around the body in the grave. Though subject to mnemonic transmission, the archive here is anchored and fixed—in contrast to the distributed and fluid archive in the first case study.

The case studies point to distinct, even opposed, conceptions of personhood and biography, turning one into many and many into one in ways that have left their difference in culture and society.<sup>12</sup> On a theoretical level, the case studies force us to consider the possibility that certain virtual archives accessed through artifacts may behave more like written texts (recording, ordering, drawing together, and anchoring) while other such traditions are more firmly ensconced in the project of Mnemosyne (dismantling and freeing information from its material trappings, embracing material translation and transformation as a way to multiply and distribute). The question that looms

large and yet cannot be answered in the space of this essay is: What relation might exist between language and the particular iterative property of the virtual archive, sustaining a mutually distinctive empathy with ways of world making?

### *Case Study 1: Images of Memory*

One of the Pacific's most elaborate and expansive exchange systems operated in Island Melanesia, in the vicinity of a chain of islands known, since the early days of European exploration in the nineteenth century, as the Bismarck Archipelago. New Ireland became the stage for one of the best described regional-exchange systems, itself composed of seven distinct language groups. The inhabitants of the northern part of the island responded to the pressure on land (which resulted when foreign-owned plantations began to spread along the island's shores during the early 1800s) by distributing its social effects in such a way as to create an extended and plastic network of land ownership. Carved and painted masks and sculptures, each made for a myriad of ceremonies that served to reissue relations over land in the aftermath of a death, began to fill Western museums soon after the European incursion into this part of the Pacific in 1850. More than twenty-five thousand artifacts, known colloquially as Malanggan (a term that also applies to the ceremonies with which they were associated) have been collected from New Ireland from 1870 to the present day. All of the collected artifacts are "obsolete"; that is, they had served their indigenous function, having officiated in ritual exchanges in which a reproducible image was separated from

its temporary host, and were sold to collectors as an alternative to being destroyed.

Collections of Malanggan invite probing questions about the conceptual separation of an image from a thing, in which an image, itself a composite, can be moved about independently from its physical instantiation, stored in memory. Malanggan figures are lent or sold to contract relations to land by conceptually or physically breaking the figure into its component parts and sharing it, with each part given to a group partaking in the exchanges in return for access to resources. At land tribunals—when access to the harvest of trees and the cultivation of land is defended against competing polities, all attempting to outdo each other by nurturing the most extensive landholding relations on the island— it is vital to remember the parts of a composite image and to recall the event at which it was acquired. Malanggan images are thus owned in many distributed parts in virtual archives that require perpetual reiteration to reactivate relations and to further extend existing ones. The collections that have come down to us result from these acts of deposition and the continuous reactivation of the virtual archive. Yet, precisely because each translation of image into artifact is subject to the memories of subjects imbued with complex intentions, they are unable to act as agents of history.

As a re-collection of images, Malanggan sculptures in fact capture what can only be recalled from memory—movements and transformations—as a kind of affective presence that has united an otherwise disparate population.

Systematizing patterns of movements and transformations run like a thread through the corpus of artifacts. Motivic themes of visual connectivity and material separation draw attention to their role in the emotional attachment that Malanggan as a ritual system and social practice has helped to produce—an attachment not to the island (whose nonindigenous name underscores the insignificance that islanders attribute to its role in life) but to a way of creating bonds between people. Against a backdrop characterized by fragile ties of blood relations, Malanggan cloaks and contains, enabling thought to trace the composition that punctuates the air like the beats of the giant slit drum. Malanggan serves memory in the strictest sense of the word: it makes thinking about thinking—and thus the projection of a system of memory rather than just acts of remembering—possible.

Sculptures encode the plastic nature of biographical relations in ways that draw explicitly on narrative. The first collected Malanggan artifact, which is now in a museum in Lausanne, depicts what appears to be a miniaturized figure emerging from a female form—clearly, an act of birth. The artifact makes reference to the story, still today a favorite tale, of the creation of extended polities (land-holding groups) known as *fabung* (those who gather). According to the myth, a woman was swallowed by a giant rock cod (a fish that is hermaphroditic with age, becoming female over time) and ejected onto the island of the dead, where she gave birth to the first polity. The nature of the polity is related in myth as being inseparable from the transformation effected by the

separation of body and soul at death. Malanggan sculptures allude to the potency of such separation both visually (by referencing containment and release) and materially (by presenting figures as fragile fretwork). It is this embedding of material and technical coding in narrative that allows sculptures to be recognized as iterations of named images that are shared empathetically, conjuring up notions of identity that have no other footing in social life.

A comparison can be made with the role of effigies in medieval political theology, in which the body politic is fashioned by severing the immortal office from the mortal titleholder (as described in historian Ernst Kantorowicz's famous study). This comparison enables us to recognize the possible connection between the creation of "artificial," image-based archives and the emergence of expansive and suprahuman sociality that is independent of and yet intertwined with the lives of persons—effecting relations that can be extended beyond individual people and yet remain subject to the intervention of their living memory, with people challenging and "editing" testimony on the basis of their own knowledge.<sup>13</sup>

In New Ireland, the system of Malanggan proved effective in liberating the possession of land and access to relations of labor and loyalty from any prior social frameworks, placing their articulation and distribution effectively into the hands of "members of Malanggan" (identified as those who have a stake in the virtual archive of images). Members of Malanggan use living memory alone as testimony of transactions that seal the sharing or lending of rights to land and its

products. A named and codified image of Malanggan is reproduced for every such exchange, denoting in its subtle variation both the existing identity of relationships and their capacity to be extended. For this image system to function as a knowledge-driven economy, every image has to be iterative and thus recognizable as part of a coded system, declaring the artifacts themselves to be inconsequential beyond the act of sealing a contractual relationship.

As it transcends the biographical framing of its potential iterations, the image thus make reference not to a named polity but to the temporal, sequential processes that mirror the sequence of ritual action that trace the transformation of a deceased into a named ancestor and Malanggan image. There are three distinct phases to the ritual cycle following a person's death: The first traces the soul's release from the body and the eradication of memories associated with the deceased as a person. The second secures the released soul by containing it in cement gravestones. The third reabsorbs the soul into the temporary abode of a sculpture, made as a likeness (*malang*) of the social body for whose endurance it comes to stand. This last phase is known as the event of Malanggan, and is itself structured into three stages that invert the order of the sequence, by activating absorption, containment, and release as distinct phases of the sculpting, presentation, and destruction of an effigy.

Malanggan sculptures invoke an intuitive and shared identification with a mode of being and a way of thinking that places iteration and transformation—and thus re-collection—at the center of society. While the manner of assemblage

of an image's parts in a sculpture identifies the image by its name and associates it with emotionally charged narratives that reflect on the sequence of ritual action outlined above, the scale and dimensionality of the sculpture records the relative complexity of the nexus of land-holding relations contracted through Malanggan. There are vertical effigies, usually 3 or more meters tall, associated linguistically with the stem of a tree and composed of assemblages of two or more individual figures (fig. 1). Some artifacts project horizontally composite parts and are associated linguistically with branches (fig. 2). Others produce a visualization of a composition that, like a leaf-bearing branch, has interconnected and yet independent parts (fig. 3). The examples given here are not connected to one another but merely serve to underscore the simultaneously abstract and concrete nature of images that are collected and reiterated from memory, flowing loosely from the structure of a tree. The tree is metaphor for maps, allowing people to navigate biographical relations in mutually constituted yet quintessentially divergent ways. This recalls Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the rhizome: a map that must be produced and constructed; that is always detachable, connectable, reversible, and modifiable; and that has multiple entrances and exits.<sup>14</sup>

Land-holding disputes involve the detailed reiteration of the form given to sculptures in exchanges that occurred during the lifetime of persons with a vested interest in the contested area of land. By virtue of remembering and thus "owning" even the smallest part of an image—one that may never have been

seen in its entirety but is merely alluded to by the part – members can, to varying degrees, make claims to land and its spoils. Those who might be able to make shared claims to a more-encompassing image can assert the right to work on each other's land. Those who make claims to a less-encompassing image must settle for lesser rights: to harvest only each other's fruit trees and nut trees. Members of Malanggan who recollect an image for reproduction can attempt to reassemble a previously fragmented and scattered image, if they believe that no living memory will be able to contest their rights to image and land. As a result of such acts of segmenting and recombining image parts in acts of recollection, the virtual archive of images committed to memory trace the history of exchange and the waxing and waning of polities whose political and economic influence is only as durable as the memories held by individuals

Given the iterative and mnemonic potential of the relational corpus of Malanggan artifacts, it is understandable that modernist artists such as Serge Brignoni, Alberto Giacometti, and Henry Moore, who were concerned with making art that would unleash empathy and intuitive recognition, would acquire Malanggan figures for their workshops. However, it is only today – as Westerners begin to embrace the potential of a knowledge-driven economy – that we can realize the extraordinary capacity of images of memory, circulating as virtual tokens of past actions, to create expansive, dynamic, and sustainable social networks untrammelled by institutions..

### *Case Study 2: Artifacts as History*

Thousands of miles east of New Ireland, in Polynesia, ritual systems were similarly disrupted and transformed by the arrival of Europeans during the early nineteenth century. In the Cook Islands, an archipelago of fifteen tiny islands, islanders began converting to Christianity in 1821. As a result, they eventually abandoned rituals surrounding the secondary burial of the dead,<sup>15</sup> which had climaxed in the production of wooden effigies that were wrapped in layers of tapa cloth and sennit cordage and unwrapped at the height of the ceremony to send the souls of the dead to their abode in the world beyond the horizon.<sup>16</sup> By the early twentieth century, patchwork quilts, created by stitching pieces of cloth into large rectangular sheets, were being made across the whole of eastern Polynesia as substitute for the now-abandoned agents of exchange. The most flamboyant patchworks, and the ones with the largest patterns, are still made in the Cook Islands, stitched by women for exchanges that today connect households and island groups and integrate them into land-controlling polities.

The patterns of patchworks made in the Cook Islands can encode memories of life-changing events just as effectively as they map out complex genealogies. The dispersed family is drawn together materially and symbolically through the quilts, which are sent out by the female head of a household during her lifetime and are returned to her upon her death and placed in her grave. Unlike the Malanggan system in New Ireland, which works via the remembrance

of an image-based archive and its piecemeal reiteration for dispersal, quilts in the Cook Islands work in reverse: they gather up dispersed memories associated with family and anchor them in a single memorable place. The graves in the Cook Islands, standing like miniature houses next to the temporary abode of the head of the family house (fig. 4), are the only fixed points in an otherwise changing social landscape in which migration has been the norm rather than the exception, even in precolonial times, when marriages were conducted between island groups. Assembled as they are inside the grave, the patchwork quilts invoke the unity of the dispersed family and assert its identity with a singular apical ancestor by drawing together all pasts into a common burial place of memory. Thus, although quilts activate thinking and talking about genealogies and events in the history of a family, their archiving results in an atemporal account of biography in which the many members of a family that have received and returned quilts during their lives are assimilated into one.

Given the nature of the quilt as a record of the a-chronic history of a family, the pattern on the quilts is the result not of a random assemblage of scraps of cloth but of a consciously executed plan initiated prior to the purchase of the material. It is a pattern, moreover, whose complex process of creation transcends the quilt's functionality as a decorative cover, situating it squarely within the recording and transmitting of genealogical knowledge. Patchwork (*tivaivai*) does more, however, than simply document something that may be verified externally by history, oral narrative, or written or remembered

genealogies. It is the means by which such discourses about history and biographical memory are made possible: through recourse to an abstract and iterative map of biographical relations configured in fractal, replicative, and self-similar patterns. For example, the appliqué quilt in figure 5 uses a passion-flower pattern; it is destined to be given by a resident of Atiu Island to her son who lives overseas.

Overtly, it is the biography of the maker that is traced in the stitched patterns of the large and elaborate appliqué and piecework quilt patterns.<sup>17</sup> Folded and stored in treasure boxes during a woman's lifetime, quilts in the Cook Islands and elsewhere in eastern Polynesia are tangible reminders of relationships thought to be integral to a person's identity. It is symptomatic of this biographical aspect of patchwork that most women start sewing around the time that their first child is born, when they begin to be active in the numerous exchanges that will connect their own household to as many others as possible in the course of their life. Because every quilt is made to be gifted and is often sewn with a specific occasion, and even a specific recipient, in mind, such relations are externalized into patterns that become characteristic of specific events and relationships.

[AU: (1) Please clarify the identification of quilts in fig. 6, discussed below. There are 3 1/2 quilts visible hanging up in the background, and numerous ones laying horizontally in the foreground, so it's hard to know what you mean by "center" or "at right." (2) Okay to reproduce fig. 6 in color as well as fig. 5? They

will be in a separate “plates” section.]

There are three distinct types of patchwork in the Cook Islands, each distinguished by a particular technical construction and articulation of pattern that translate the biographical distance between the quilt’s maker and its intended recipient into a topological frame. The first type of patchwork should more correctly be called “piecework” (*taorei*), to emphasize that it is constructed from several thousand tiny pieces of cloth joined together into a regular, symmetrical, and self-replicating pattern (fig. 6, quilt hanging in center at the back of assemblage). It is the most arduous of all quilts to create, involving months of work, and it is usually gifted across two generations. The second type of quilt, *ta taura* [AU confirm spelling, not tatura (as in caption)] (see fig. 5; see fig. 6, quilt hanging on the left ) involves appliqué construction and is renowned for its embroidery. It consists of large assemblages of floral blossoms and leaves, and it is embellished with embroidery that indicates shadings as well as the flowers, stems, and pollen, all of which are replicated at least four times and then patched together in a specific and symmetrical arrangement (usually clockwise and rotational) on a large rectangular sheet of uniform color. This kind of quilt generally takes weeks rather than months to complete and is considered appropriate as a wedding gift for a daughter or son; it is reciprocated by gifts from someone who is in the same generation as the maker. The third type of quilt is the simplest of all: the cutout, or *manu*, uses the well-known snowflake construction to arrive at a pattern that deceives the eye into seeing the

background as foreground [see fig. 6, quilts on right). Usually, a light material is sewn as a cutout pattern onto a darker background; its fine lines give the impression that the pattern resides in the darker spaces of the quilt. This quilt takes days to complete, and keeping a straight and fine line that can clearly be traced on the back of the quilt requires the skills of an experienced seamstress. Such a quilt is appropriate as a gift for someone of the same generation or for a friend taking the place of brother or sister.

Patterns that express memorable events in a woman's life may be repeated in quilts made later on in life; the maker recalls the pattern from memory, replicating it in terms of the flower depicted, in terms of the symmetry used, and, in the case of a piecework quilt (*taorei*), in terms of the number of colored pieces of cloth joined to one another to make up the nucleus (*pu*) of the design that is repeated in the quilt. Quilt patterns that have been gifted to, and sometimes buried with, deceased relatives are particularly strongly remembered; in anticipation of her own death, a woman might remake a such a quilt and give it to her eldest child for use in the quilt maker's burial.

While it is certainly true that the particular type of stitch used indicates the identity of the maker in ways that are clearly recognized by contemporaries in the competitive inter-island community, and while the pattern may serve as a memento of an event or a relationship specific to the biography of the maker and can thus be shared by the relatives who come into possession of the quilt at some point, it is also true that the pattern transcends the personal space of biography:

guided by a fractal logic, each pattern gives material expression to a decentered and an a-temporal vision of social relations that surpasses and encompasses the life course of individuals.

The quilts' distinct symmetries visually represent the aggregate and transitive nature of relationships, as they are able to embody multiple points of view. In the repeated and nonrandomly distributed flowers that decorate a quilt, there is a logic of affinity that sustains relationships over time, like a molecule that encodes the outcome of a chemical reaction. Assembled and collected up at the end of life, quilts transform the relations associated with individual persons into the social body of the polity. A woman's patterns are said to be like the flowers in her garden: they are unique to her, and yet, like offshoots of garden plants, they resemble all patterns that have ever been made and recall all pasts as equally present. Inaccessible to subsequent generations, the past archived in the shrouds and placed into the graves is condemned to be repeated, evoking in its iterative, fractal structure the topology of kinship which people use to negotiate and 'gather' relations in a world where the social effects of persons life are dispersed.

Quilts should not be regarded as leftovers of a Pacific colonial past. Their enduring popularity rests in their ability to archive fractal and aggregate imagery in ways that are productive of biographical relations that "are" history; [AU: what does preceding phrase mean? that they produce histories of biographic relations? Why is "are" in quotes?] they accomplish this by topologically

mapping temporal concepts in spatial renderings that turn the singular and unique into iterative, “gatherable” geometries. Indeed, when patchwork techniques and the resulting symmetries are seen as time maps, it becomes apparent why patching has emerged, among peoples of the Pacific, as one of the most effective modes of asserting and sustaining identity in the face of a necessarily diasporic life.

### *Conclusion*

The two case studies introduced in this essay demonstrate similar yet very distinct ways of bringing memory into conference with history in a manner that subjects the narration of history “to the destiny and arbitrary will of an individual.”<sup>18</sup> In both cases, an artifact constitutes an artificial, second body that recalls the biography of the person it displaces and that, because of this displacement, creates the social body as a burial place of memory, as a virtual archive capable of legislative powers in which all pasts are equally present. However, this is where the similarities between the two case studies end.

In the case of the Malanggan, images “left over” from such acts of displacement are repeatedly recalled from memory to reactivate the past in the present, but this is done with an eye to the future: new social relations whose political and economic impact is merely anticipated in the shared knowledge of Malanggan are brought into the frame as remembered images and are reissued and dispersed through exchange. The artifacts themselves are not saved or

stored; they are discarded (burned, traded, or sold) after their ritual use. In the absence of external referents or physical collections of these ephemeral artifacts, no one is able to draw together the dispersed archive, at least not from within the biographically situated vantage point that is subjective and particular at all times.

To understand what “being in history” means in the society where Malanggan reigns, it is necessary to acknowledge the shallowness of the past as a time construct: it is present only as memory, is always illusive, and is subject to the passions of living people. Unstable and dependent upon iteration, the archived memory of images offer up an identity that is at once scarce and ever present, allowing relations between persons to be understood in terms of the perpetual iteration of composite images that punctuate their biographies. Confined to the present and the local, it is this *poiesis* of an archive located solely in memory that has fashioned an empathy with actions that relate people to one another. Perhaps, however, it is for this reason that Malanggan has been the greatest asset to its people in trying times.

Patchwork quilts in the Cook Islands, created as a labor of love, appear to similarly extend the household beyond its physical reach as they are dispersed through kinship networks. Where Malanggan touches down as image, it remains dispersed and accessed only via memory. In contrast, Cook Islands’ *tivaivai* recollect dispersed memories associated with family connections in archives that are material and yet inaccessible to memory, by assembling and locating

memories thus re-collected into a singular physical landmark. It is this removal of the biographical memory of particular lives from the passions of the memory of its subjects that enables *tivaivai* to act as generic testimonials of a genealogy that is known to exist, independent of memory, as history.

Perhaps a lesson to be drawn from this comparison between ways of managing archives in these societies is that generalizations about virtual archives and the kinds of material and technical solutions required to ensure continuing access would be misplaced. In the face of our own realization of the virtues and problems of digital archives, antiquarianism's concern with the nature of the archive itself offers a timely reminder to at last turn to the study of the most neglected of archives, the offshoots of which have we have collected and preserved and yet have often neglected to analyze.

## **AUTHOR BIO**

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**Fig. 1.**

Malanggan frieze, ca. 1930.

New Ireland, Papua New Guinea, wood, pigment, L: 362 cm (142 1/2 in.).

Basel, Museum der Kulturen, Alfred Bühler Coll., 1931–32 (Vb10583).

[\[With permission from the Museum der Kulturen, Basel.\]](#)

**Fig. 2.**

Malanggan figure, ca. 1930.

New Ireland, Papua New Guinea, wood, pigment, L: 180 cm (70 7/8 in.).

Basel, Museum der Kulturen, Alfred Bühler Coll., 1931–32 (Vb 10557).

[\[With permission from the Museum der Kulturen, Basel.\]](#)

**Fig. 3.**

Malanggan figure, ca. 1930.

New Ireland, Papua New Guinea, wood, pigment, L: 130 cm (51 1/4 in.)

Basel, Museum der Kulturen, Alfred Bühler Coll., 1931–32 (Vb10579).

[\[With permission from the Museum der Kulturen, Basel.\]](#)

**Fig. 4. [Drop?]**

Gravesite in front of house on the island of Aitutaki (Cook Islands), 2008.

Photo: Susanne Kuchler, 2008.

**Fig. 5.**

Cook Islands *tivaivai ta taura* being stitched by Ake Mingi on Atiu Island, Cook Islands, 2004.

Photo: Susanne Kuchler, 2004.

**Fig. 6.**

*Tivaivai* (Cook Islands patchwork quilts) displayed at village competition, Rarotonga, Cook Islands, 2003.

Photo: Susanne Kuchler

**Notes**

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