Marilyn Strathern. 1991. PARTIAL CONNECTIONS. Savage, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

P. 2. COMPARISONS

P.1 Units for Comparative Analysis. Also in 1987, the **Annual Review of Anthropology** published an article on cross-cultural surveys. Its concern is recent refinements in statistical sensitivity to complex data, and notes for instance the revolutionary proliferation of methods for multivariate analysis (Burton and White 1987:148). The problem of comparing like units

is disposed by reference to Murdock's early solution. Societies — Tikopia and China are their examples — may be at 'different levels of complexity or scale', but sampling from 'cultural provinces' or 'particular communities' apparently overcomes this.[36] The authors dwell at length on Galton's problem, however, one that also preoccupied an earlier review (J.Jorgensen 1979). The brief history of this classic problem is worth repeating.

It concerns a paper that Edward Tylor read to the [Royal] Anthropological Institute in 1888, which attempted to explain the development of a cluster of institutions to do with marriage and kinship by organizing data from a worldwide sample of 350 societies. Francis Galton, the then President, heard Tylor give his paper, and asked him about the independence of each unit: "the degree in which the customs of the tribes and races which are compared together are independent, instead of duplicate copies of the same original" (quoted in Stocking 1987:318). As Joseph Jorgensen succinctly puts it, Tylor could not answer Galton's question.

> Tylor had not produced maps locating each society in his sample or locating the distribution of each variable . . . The mapping of variables would have allowed Tylor to determine the propinquity at least of similar practices and hence provide a means to assess the likelihood, say, that the descent customs of some societies influenced the descent customs of other societies . . . [H]e failed to distinguish which of the institutional similarities possessed by groups of tribes in his sample had been inherited from a protoculture (two or more societies speaking sister languages and sharing cultural features that they inherited from a mother society from which they splintered), or had been acquired through borrowing, and which of the institutional similarities among tribes had been independently invented (J. Jorgensen 1979:313).

The author himself is one of those scholars who, on Burton and White's account, has made the issue of 'intersocietal connections' a part of his research programme.

I have no familiarity with the statistical modelling of these problems, but for discursive interest reproduce the terms in which Michael Burton and Douglas White argue (1987:146-7, my emphasis, references omitted).

> Galton's problem pertains to the non-independence of sampling units . . . The problem is not unique to cross-cultural comparisons but occurs in any study where there are **linkages** of kinship, interaction, or common heritage

> **among units of study**, including biological heritage . . . The problem goes beyond mere regional clustering of traits. Regional clustering per se can be the result of independent adaptations of societies to geographically clustered environmental features. Only if the values of a trait for a group of societies are significantly different from those predicted by functional adaptations, and if these deviations can be explained by the position of societies in a regionally or historically based network, do we have an instance of Galton's problem . . . The network autocorrelation solution to Galton's problem ... explicitly measures the effects of **linkages between societies** upon their traits. This procedure has the advantage of bringing history, and the world system, back into cross-cultural analysis, rather than trying to make these important phenomena disappear from the sample. The first stage of a network autocorrelation analysis is **to compute the network of observed relationships among societies**... Historical relatedness... is usually measured by relationships among languages. This is a defensible approach, since . . . language similarity provides a good index of shared culture history, including migration from a common origin.

Statistical analysis provides, in a sense, its own scale. The correlations in question are, it would seem, correlations between entities modelled **on the image of** 'linkages between societies.' Societies are not necessarily being taken as independent and discrete units — the whole point of the sophisticated correlation techniques is to show their interdependence — but their attributes can be plotted by the position they occupy on common scales. Different 'levels' of phenomena provide different ranges of points. Societies, communities, regions thus form one such scale, while a range of behavioral traits such as harsh and affectionate socialization or of social institutions such as patriliny and warfare presumably form others. At any one level (scale), enumeration seems possible. Thus if "[bridewealth and patrilineal inheritance are predicted by polygyny" (1987:153), these constitute a comparable order of phenomena whose relative occurrence can be enumerated. I have no debate with the methods. What is of interest is the language that the practitioners, at certain points, seem to share in common with others in their approach to cross-cultural comparison. To take one example, Burton and White (1987:152) quote a study by Paige and Paige (1981) [I have not consulted it independently] whose

> primary hypothesis is that 'ritual is a form of political

> bargaining that takes place in the absence of more formal mechanisms for asserting claims and adjudicating disputes. . .' [1981:69]. In this analysis, reproductive rituals such as monarchal rites, male circumcision, couvade and menstrual restrictions are varying ways men assert claims over women and children. Variation in the form of control by men is dependent upon the quality of the society's resource base and the size of the fraternal interest groups.

Although they go on to say that authors of the study find strong relationships between their two independent variables and four kinds of reproductive rituals, it is clear that the comparative intention could have been phrased in either statistical or discursive language. The examples touch

on just the kinds of factors that Melanesianists, for instance, discuss. Now I infer that while it is socio-cultural attributes (such as presence or absence of male circumcision) that are being compared, incidence is implied by virtue of the location of these elements 'in' this or that society/culture or community (cf. J. Jorgensen 1979:311-12). Different variables will, of course, differentially locate the social unit from which they come. But while there is no final sum, crudely put, the outcome must be that societies and cultures are at some moment being counted too. However overlap is computed, the question is 'where' the attributes are found. This is also a habit of some discursive practice. It is not necessary to be interested in probablistic or correlational computation in order to think of societies and/or customs in terms of the numerical occurrence of instances.

P.2. Partial Connections. Various positions jumped or traversed earlier have indicated some of the questions that lie in the path of discursive approaches to comparison. Reflections on the form of narration and the otherness of one's subject matter are also reflections on the kinds of connections these concepts make possible.[37] Correlations are not social relations, but perhaps social relations do indeed provide a model of sorts for the connecting of phenomena. Hence the humanoid figure who has run through the account adopts a posture, a kind of presence, that both is and is not the anthropologist.

To draw a comparison, or make an analogy, is not necessarily to impute connection: it may indicate a resemblance, rather than a relation, and the resemblance may be fantastic, rather than real, 'magical' (Jackson 1987). Yet the very act of comparing also constitutes a making of connections, and evokes a metaphorical relationship. Michael Jackson (1987:21) notes: "[T]he fact that things are used on the basis of magical similitudes does not preclude their having intellectual and therapeutic value." Conversely, using the similitudes gives things a value: comparison — intellectual, therapeutic — creates their multiplicity.