MUNDANE OBJECTS

MATERIALITY AND NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

PIERRE LEMONNIER

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Materiality and Non-verbal Communication

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To the Memory of Serge Cleuziou
(1945–2009)

Illustrations

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—Pierre Lemonnier

Introduction

This book is about artefacts that aren't much to look at and yet are of crucial importance for those who make them, manipulate them, and also—but only "also"—look at them. It is about objects that would not find their way into museum cases and that are uninteresting to most anthropologists, sociologists, and historians, but nonetheless lie at the heart of the systems of thought and practices of their makers and users: they cement the ways people live together and, in several cases, their place in the cosmos and their ultimate fate. More specifically, the following chapters explore the role of objects and material actions in non-verbal communication, both in *non*-ritual and in ritual situations. They show that some objects, their physical properties, and their material implementation are not only wordless expressions of fundamental aspects of a way of living and thinking; they are sometimes the only means of rendering visible the pillars of social order that are otherwise blurred, if not hidden.

What these particular artefacts wordlessly evoke deals with basic rules, tensions, or unspeakable aspects of social relations that pervade people's everyday lives, their strategies, material practices, anxieties, and hopes.[1] At the core of this communication stand their material dimensions. It is the very physical characteristics of these particular things and the material way people fabricate them or have contact with them that bring various domains of culture together in a manner that renders tangible that which precisely links diverse aspects of people's shared representations and practices. There is no message to be deciphered in the shape of the decorations on these artefacts; rather, if it happens that some of their component aspects "stand for" something else, that piece of meaning can be perceived only because of what the actors have experienced of their fabrication and material utilisation, and not by merely looking at them.

This book shows why and how a few artefacts lead the actors to aggregate various aspects of their social life and thus enable them to seize nonpropositional clues underlying key social relations. It also aims to explore what role such particular, yet almost mundane, artefacts may play in the stability or mutation of cultural configurations. In line with my early engagement with *technologie culturelle* (cultural technology), my approach fits into Mauss' program (Mauss 2006). But this is not simply because I try to answer the old question he raised about techniques (in what respect are the means of action on the material world observed here and now specific to the group being studied?), or because the fashionable notion of "agency" goes back to "The Gift" (Mauss 1954[1923–24]), as Munn (1970) recalled 40 years ago. It is first and foremost because of his fundamental remark: "Technical actions, physical actions, magicoreligious actions are confused for the actor" (Mauss 1934[2006]:82). In other words, by studying such ordinary things as New Guinea garden fences, traps, and magical bundles, as well as European toy cars, I try to understand why material objects and actions lend themselves particularly well to blending thoughts, which in turn allows the actors to mentally grasp cardinal social relations and values underlying their daily life.

My general framework is therefore the widespread but not well-documented idea that things render tangible or actualise in a performative way important aspects of social organisation, culture, systems of thought, or actions. What the artefacts documented in this book "do"—in social relations, systems of thought, and practices—that words, or words alone, could not do (Tambiah 1968:202; Weiner1983), is quite similar to the communicative function of things that has recently been stressed by several scholars. They are definitely "material anchors for conceptual blends" (Hutchins 2005); one key feature of the mode of communication they participate in is that "meaning is encoded [in them] in different ways" (Campbell 2002:191); they are a "synthesis of very complex relationships" (Damon 2008:126); and they indeed refer to a "relationship of an existential or metaphysical order" (Tuzin 2002:2).

But their social function, efficiency, and workings differ from those stressed by most contemporary approaches to material culture because they cannot be reduced to deciphering symbols, discussing legitimacies or identities, or to delegating to the material world some aspect of political power, exchange, gender, colonialism, modernity, etc. In addition, and most important, the objects shown in this book to matter so much in people's lives and social organisation are nevertheless very similar, in their form and apparent function, to quite ordinary things of the same categories observed in comparable societies within a given region.

More or Less Mundane: Small Shifts Can Make Big Changes

This book is about what makes certain artefacts that the layperson or average anthropologist would hardly notice so different either for those who make and use them or for those anthropologists who take Mauss' program on techniques on board. These objects seem ordinary to us because we would not consider them on first sight to be "ritual" or "of art," or "markers" of some identity, nor would we guess that they contain embedded and encapsulated mighty powers. In all events, the idea that they are central to people sharing a particular worldview and bring them to act together is far from obvious. As we shall see, a Baruya fence is basically a Melanesian wooden barrier, an Ankave eel trap is definitely a New Guinea fish trap, and the most prominent sacred objects of the Anga male initiations are indistinguishable from the ordinary magical hunting pouches of the very same people. As for the model cars that occupy a large place in the everyday life of those enthusiastic baby boomer boys fascinated by "classic" racing cars, they may be exactly those commonplace 1:43 scale Dinky Toys models they already owned when they were young and which were produced by the tens of thousands.

In sum, for every extraordinary-yet-almost-mundane artefact described and analysed in this book, there exists a possibility to document that which makes it profoundly different from its similar ordinary counterpart and to understand in what respect their physical characteristics (components, fabrication, material use) give some of them a particular communicative function. This comparison, moreover, reveals the peculiarities of their makers' and users' social organisation, ritual life, system of thought, etc., that are intimately linked with the shift of category we observe, and which is often acknowledge in their own way by the people of whose material culture these things are a part. It is equally possible to understand why such pseudo-ordinary objects evoke what they refer to in the *material* way they do it.

Technologie Culturelle and Material Culture Studies: It's All the Same Thing

A big, thick book would not be enough to summarise the maze of approaches that have tried to articulate the whys and wherefores of the entanglement of material components of culture with social relations, shared representations, and practices. It is nevertheless worth taking a few paragraphs to stress how much the contemporary convergence of erstwhile disconnected researches is good for anthropology.

Artefacts are everywhere in anthropology. Anything dealing with production, exchange, compensation, offers, competition, "religion," "magic," "art," etc., offers objects and material action for study . . . at least in theory. However, so as not to belittle or forget the bulk of man's material productions, a particular field of research focused on techniques has grown up in anthropology, which has its own ambitions, questions, and methods (e.g., Cresswell 1972; Geslin 2002; Gosselain 2011; Ingold 1997; Latour 1993; Lemonnier 1983; Schiffer 1975; Schlanger 2005). It is a point of view which not only asks if an object is an element of a set of "political," "religious," "economic," "artistic," or other practices and representations, but *simultaneously* asks in what way its conception and its material production are characteristic of the human group that manufactures or uses it. Such an approach, however, implies hours and days of sometimes dull observation.

There are many ways of investigating the mutual relations between "technique," "culture," and "society," but they fit for the most part under two academic labels: "cultural technology" and "material culture studies." Developed by scholars directly influenced by Mauss and Leroi-Gourhan (1971[1943], 1973[1945], 1993[1964]), such as Balfet (1975, 1993) and Cresswell (1972, 1996), cultural technology has tried to continue Mauss's "almost utopic" (Schlanger 1991, 2006:147) program of research, paying particular attention to the way things are made and physically used; that is, by documenting and analysing "operational sequences" (*chaînes opératoires*) and their variations in space and time in an attempt to explain how particular aspects of a technical system are linked to some local characteristics of social organisation, ritual life, or systems of thought.[2] However, *technologie culturelle* has long struggled to link in a useful way, and not merely to juxtapose, very detailed descriptions of technical operations with a better understanding of particular aspects of systems of thought and action. As Cresswell recently commented,[3] "We should have been working more on the '&' of *Technique & Culture*" (Cresswell 2010, 2011). Indeed. Even Marxist-inspired economic anthropology (including my own attempts) failed to apprehend the more physical side of the relations between productive forces and social relations of production (Lemonnier 2011a, 2012a; see also this volume, Chapter 1). Not too good a beginning if one wants to discover the so-called "correspondences" between some techno-economic "structure" and other aspects of social life!

"Material culture studies" was and still is the product of a blending of the anthropology of consumption, initiated by Douglas (Douglas and Isherwood 1979), with an interest in the "cultural biography of things" (Kopytoff 1986); but the approach was also a way to redirect the anthropology of objects towards the study of their consumption rather than

their production. This in turn was a consequence of the dead-end of sorts to which the painstaking descriptions of operational sequences had led in the 1970s.[4] In dealing with the "social life of things"—the title of a book by Appadurai (1986), which paid *no* attention to the materiality of things, in itself quite extraordinary—material culture studies have primarily looked at the way objects are involved in various social strategies, in identity, and in status issues both in nonindustrial societies in the context of modernity, and in the industrial world, often in connection with the consumption of goods (e.g., Keane 2006; Miller 1995, 2006). The approach features notably in the *Journal of Material Culture*, but various studies on "sociology of innovation" (or "sociology of controversies") have played a fundamental role by symmetrising (as Latour [1993] would say) the questions and findings of those scholars working in so-called exotic societies and applying them to objects found in industrialised societies.[5]

As is often the case, a radical change of perspective was necessary to show that in addition to the particular reciprocal "effects" or "reflection" of technical actions on particular domains of social life (production, consumption, gender, politics, identity, etc.), material actions and artefacts are irreplaceable key elements of practices and sets of shared representations that have nothing to do with the production of objects or their apparent main physical function: a "Berlin key" (Latour 2000) is not merely a key, but a way to have a hotel door closed by those who might not care to close it; variants in the use of cow dung in a particular Indian village are not merely ways to obtain fuel, but to participate in caste differentiation (Mahias 1994); a particular firearm is not only a means to hunt a given game in Haute-Provence, but a highly precise marker of status in the life-cycle (Govoroff 1993); a gas mask can kill those it is supposed to save because its designers involuntarily preferred the survival of the mask rather than that of its wearers (Schlanger 1993); washing machines must be heavy because the French consumers of the 1950s "believed" in the solidity of weighty things (Stourdzé 1980).

Each scholar finds his or her own way to approach techniques that somehow moves away from our (mine, anyway) previous interrogations about the effects (if not impact) of technical peculiarities on social systems and the reciprocal inscription of various aspects of cultures and societies in artefacts, and ways of producing or consuming them.[6] In my case, this shift in focus is consistent with my previous interest in technical "choices" (Lemonnier 1993b). After years of having difficulty connecting what was a part of so-called style with what was a part of the material functions of things (e.g., David and Kramer 2001; Gosselain 1992; Lemonnier 1992; Martinelli 2005; Sillar and Tite 2000), we now have evidence that the choices a society makes to adopt, reject,

or modify a technical component also entail elements that do not serve any material purpose at all. All in all, "technology produces more than things" (Dobres 2000:109).

Such nontechnical representations—of gender relations between the men and the women who are going to use the finished object, of the relationship between a given material and the cosmos or the gods, of local views on beauty, political considerations about the organisation of labour, etc.—weigh just as heavily on the way an object is thought about and manufactured (or on the way a technique is put to use), on its material effectiveness, and even on the fate of those who use it. This is of course consistent with the contemporary studies trying to flesh out some material dimension in the notion of what several anthropologists call "materiality."

Mundane Artefacts, Materiality, and the Quest for the Holy Agency

The term "materiality" is a fashionable catchall (e.g., Miller 2005), although the notion has a long history (Pels 2008). On the one hand, it leads us to ask—and rightly so—what it means to speak of the association of social relations and shared ideas with a material object. It also parallels a hackneyed although badly documented theme in anthropology: what does "objectification" mean (Descola 1994; Keane 2006; Munn 1970; Tilley 2006)? In the last decade, many scholars have proposed to explore how the materiality of things is involved in the thoughts and actions of people when they make or manipulate objects. For instance, what do people perceive of an object's physical characteristics, or "bundle" of qualities (Keane 2003)? However, as Ingold (2007) has remarked in a justifiably exasperated paper, understanding the materiality of things implies first and foremost a description of what happens to materials when they are transformed and experienced by those who manipulate them! Which means a "return to the messy terrain of ethnography" (Miller 2005:41), as a few noteworthy studies have recently done.[7] Needless to say, lack of detailed explanation also characterises the almost general reference to the "agency" of things.

Following Gell's (1998) book, *Art and Agency*, the "agency" of objects has become a familiar notion, an obsession even, in anthropology today. In fact, though, to say that objects have some sort of agency is simply another way of reminding ourselves that material culture can be the object of anthropological investigation. Yet, Gell's proposition to blur the border between art objects and utilitarian objects (Gell 1996) was a new incentive to ask crucial questions about the very nature of objects. Once this agency is acknowledged, however, we are obliged to

document it, to attempt to understand the relationships tying human beings to material objects. I would add that not only artefacts but also actions on the material world in general should be studied: how they are constructed and included in a wider set of things, how they are manipulated, activated, put into play. This needs to be done for several reasons.

On the one hand, it is hardly necessary to recall that an object is nothing without the gesture that makes it efficient (Leroi-Gourhan 1993 [1964]). In passing, with very few exceptions (Rowlands and Fuller 2009), we still have no idea of possible irregular cultural distributions of the "elementary means of action on the material world" (Audouze 2002:283; Leroi-Gourhan 1971[1943]:18–19); that is, of the choices that may apply to them. On the other hand, although body techniques have long been the least-developed area in the anthropology of objects and techniques, attention is now being paid to the partial embodiment or internalisation of particular aspects of local culture via subjects' interactions with their cultural environment, notably through the engagement of the self and of the body in technical action (Ingold 2000; Warnier 2000, 2007). Much remains to be done in that domain, too, in particular because of the difficulty of linking individual psychological phenomena with collective sociological ones (Devereux 1980). Nonetheless, it is highly promising that the actor is being reintroduced into the study of techniques.

In sum, anthropologists, too, have their magical tool kit, composed of questions, supposedly solid previous results, and some poorly documented yet reliable beacons in the form of words or expressions. Unfortunately, it is one thing to develop theoretical arguments pointing to the importance of the agency of objects, the local ins and outs of materiality, or the crucial interaction of bodies with the material world. It is another thing to document these theoretical intuitions in real life, in a real human group. The good news of these last two decades is that a series of scholars has successfully bridged the gap between material culture studies and cultural technology.[8] By taking into account the interactions of the actors with the things they touch, fabricate, manipulate, and are in contact with—and not only with the eyes—they have demonstrated once and for all that the anthropology of objects and techniques allows us to understand aspects of social organisations, cultures, and systems of thought that would be impossible to grasp without studying the most material dimensions of human action.

In particular, operational sequences, materiality, agency, an individual's self, body actions, etc., are all good to think about and to put together if we are to understand the propensity of human beings to associate material actions and physical objects with the production and rendering visible of social relations.

This book tackles the same need to look into the black box of "agency," which it will attempt to do by documenting how things intervene in social relations because of their most basic material characteristics. It describes wooden barriers that communicate the nonspoken ultimate interest of the Baruya of New Guinea in cooperation. It shows how a simple fish trap made of a cylinder of bark refers simultaneously to primordial violent sexuality, patrilineal rights, and mortuary rituals. It explains why a few ordinary-looking magical bundles are considered the link between the Anga's formidable past and the present, and are the basis for their gender relations, collective force, and ultimate fate. It describes how toy cars can become things that prompt aging baby boomers to talk about their personal passion to people they did not know a moment before.

I begin with the ethnography of a mundane-looking, solid New Guinea artefact made of planks and knots, which in one of my previous theoretical agendas was presented as *only* a piece in a system of production of staple food. I now see it as one of those artefacts that play a crucial role in social organisation, on which people spend a lot of time and attention, and which bring them to share ideas and to undertake activities together.

Chapter 1

Too Sturdy To Be Mundane: A Baruya Garden Fence

Wooden posts are such a common sight in the New Guinea Highlands that only three days after I first arrived in a Baruya village (Eastern Highlands Province, Papua New Guinea [PNG]), I was already looking at some rough-hewn planks being transformed into the wall of a so-called "beehive-shaped Anga traditional house." At the same time, I was hectically recording the operational sequences (*chaînes opératoires*) of people making a bamboo floor nearby, of women carrying bundles of thatch, and of young men going into the forest to find and cut long rattan vines to be used for whatever lashing needed to be done (floor, house-frame, walls, scaffoldings, ladders). Many ordinary technical actions were going on at the same time in Wuyabo, high above the Wonenara Valley. I already no longer knew which way to look; I was late in making neat copies of my notes, and the rolls of film I had taken were becoming hard to manage. On my fourth day however, I had no choice but to add one more "technique" to my "technologist's" menu because some men were cutting down the secondary forest a minute's walk from Maurice Godelier's house.

As both Maurice's former student and his host, I could not ignore that, in the late 1960s, he had spent almost a year mapping hundreds of Baruya gardens[1] as groundwork for his research in economic anthropology. But even a newcomer would have immediately realised that gardens literally shape the Baruya landscape. I was not yet able to say three words in Tok Pisin (Melanesian pidgin) and even less in the Baruya language; however, I had the feeling that I would be able to get the names of the parts of a fence and of the different woods being used. And here I was rapidly observing other posts being sharpened on both ends to build the physical device that delimits and protects the cultivated plots.

Figure 1. Baruya garden (Wuyabo, 1978). (All photos by Pierre Lemonnier unless otherwise indicated.)

Prior studies have emphasised the diversity of the Baruya agricultural system, as well as the important circulation of taro cuttings, both from irrigated "nurseries" to high gardens, and from one family to another (Lory 1982). Baruya cultivation is also unique in the world, for the flat areas used to plant and irrigate fields of *Coïx gigantea*, the ashes of which are processed to make a particular vegetal salt formerly used as a local money and means of intertribal exchange (Godelier 1969; Lemonnier 1984b).

Sweet potato, which makes up around three-quarters of the daily diet, and taro are the two main garden crops, but a large portion of the sweet potato production is used to feed domesticated pigs, which also eat everything they can forage in old gardens or in the nearby forest. However, the agricultural system the Baruya people have developed is semi-intensive by New Guinea standards. They do not spade their gardens, make compost, or use manure or mounding, practices which in some other areas of the island are used to produce the large quantities of tubers necessary to the organisation of ceremonial exchanges (Feil 1984; Lemonnier 1990, 1991; Strathern 1971; Wiessner and Tumu 1998).

Contrary to many other Melanesian peoples, the Baruya's pigs play no role in homicide compensations, in particular peacemaking ceremonies, and they are almost entirely absent at marriages, hence the relatively low pig-human ratio (0.6 per capita in 1985; i.e., 3.3 pigs per square kilometre). Strangely enough, pigs are rarely killed, due no doubt

to the absence of "Big Men" or any kind of leader whose power and prestige is based on the organisation of ceremonial exchanges or "pig kills" (Lemonnier 1991). A mass butchering would mean killing 10 to 15 pigs, and would only happen in the event people feared an enemy attack (as in 1983 and 1985), or when it was felt that there were too many pigs around and not enough food in the gardens to feed them.

Pigs are nevertheless part of the Baruya universe. In particular, the damage a single pig can do in one night when rooting for tubers is amazing. Most of the gardens are therefore enclosed to prevent pigs from getting in and ravaging the crops. Most pigs are domesticated, but feral males roam near the gardens. All domesticated pigs are castrated, and reproduction relies exclusively on encounters of the sows with feral boars wandering in the vicinity of the village and gardens. These animals do not like raw taros, but they love sweet potatoes and try to sneak into every garden, even though all Baruya gardens are fenced. As a result, together with adultery and pig stealing, damaging a garden or a fence is one of the main reasons for feuding. In the case of pig damage to a garden, the owner of the garden complains about the manners of a badly raised or unwatched pig, while the owner of the accused pig deplores the scandalous state of the fence. . . . Normally, one is supposed to have complained three times before actually killing the pig, but a pig seen in a garden is sometimes immediately shot with an arrow, and things can then go from bad to worse. Fortunately, very strict procedures regulate the handling of such an incident: the pig is butchered by its owner and given to the gardener.

Gardens are everywhere in the Baruya valleys, and they play a central part in the daily life of women and men. The word for "work" is "to garden" (*wawonya*; Lloyd 1992:22, 80). Because of the frequent rotation of the areas cultivated and probably also because of the duration of settlement, the tropical forest has been replaced by large expanses of savannah, notably on the valley floors. However, one can see numerous dense patches of secondary forest a few minutes walk from the villages; once a garden is abandoned (say, four years after it has been planted), trees and shrubs grow back very rapidly. Indeed, it is more difficult to cut one's way through an "old" garden than through primary tropical forest.

A Busy Open-air Workshop

Generally speaking, in New Guinea, the enclosures surrounding tuber gardens (and those containing sugarcane, bananas, etc.) result from the technical choice to enclose the gardens rather than having to watch or to enclose the pigs. The latter option is rarely taken because the pigs,

which are big eaters, would have to be fed and then would not play their scavenging role in and around the village.

In the Baruya valleys, a garden is opened in a forest where a garden had been cultivated 15 to 30 years previously. Early one morning in October 1978, I heard the characteristic creaking and then cracking sounds followed by the heavy fall of a huge tree, bringing down smaller trees in its wake (which is in itself one way to save time cutting trees), all accompanied by shouts and laughter coming from Kumain's garden.

I had come to PNG as a sort of materialist field researcher, having already written a doctoral dissertation on the "economic anthropology" of salt-making on the French Atlantic coast, to study all possible aspects of the technical system of the society long studied by an expert in economic anthropology, Maurice Godelier. So there I was, on the edge of the forest, trying to balance my notebook, pencils, cameras (colour and black-and-white films), stopwatch, 10 metres of tape measure, and, I guess, my tiny letter scale—in case I met someone carrying an unknown type of arrow: one never knows! At any rate, I had to pay close attention to every kind of material action, from shaping pieces of wood, to tying various types of vegetal ropes, to planting posts in the ground and cutting underbrush.

Having himself spent months mapping Baruya gardens in the past, Jean-Luc Lory had already told me about the complexity of the social interactions unfolding around a barrier, on which he later published

Figure 2. Baruya men collectively building a *takola* garden barrier (Wuyabo, 1978).

studies (Lory 1982, 1985). I was well aware that there was more to see and understand than simply people preparing the future production of daily food and that, clearly, constructing a garden fence "revealed a rationality other than economic" (Lory 1985:80–82). But I had no idea that I would go back to the field notes of this very day almost 35 years later with a radically different theoretical agenda.

Near a big rock that was to become part of the future fence, Kumain had already adjusted a section of barrier, following the rugged terrain up and down, but he was now extending it with the help of two other men. His two wives were shuttling between his old garden, an hour's walk away, and the present site, carrying on their head four or five old, grayish, flat posts, which they heaped in various spots around the perimeter of the future garden. One of Kumain's sisters was cutting the brush and piling the branches at the edges of the plot. Later, the women would also do all the planting and weeding, and collect the majority—or even the totality—of the plants.

One man was felling trees with an axe, but most had already been cut the previous day, including the biggest one, whose spirit had been appeased by a ritual (Godelier 1979). A few trees had only been cut back, leaving the roots to retain the soil since the cultivated slopes are steep, and the Baruya do not practice terracing. Others were left standing until they could dry and be cut for firewood. Big stumps were left in the ground. All the trees cut the previous day were already hacked up

Figure 3. Baruya women preparing rope of lianas in a stream (Wuyabo, 1978).

into irregular planks or poles, piled against tree trunks. Rolls of rattan vines, freshly rehydrated in a nearby stream, were heaped here and there. A young man was roughly planing both sides of pieces of timber and sharpening the two ends to a point. On the upper slope of the clearing, two men were planting and tying together canes of *pitpit*,[2] which would soon take root again and make a strong "living" fence.

Twenty metres away, five more men were assembling flat posts to build another section of the new barrier. Assembling or rather adjusting posts into a sort of wall made of horizontal layers of planks and logs, roughly parallel to each other and squeezed between a series of sets of two vertical flat planks lashed together, one on either side of the wall. The horizontal planks and poles were chosen, reframed, and arranged so that no space remained between them. Indeed, I could not see through the barrier and could only surmise that someone else was working on the other side, notably to manipulate the vines and bark ropes that tied the whole structure together. The vertical posts were chosen and shaped to

Figure 4. *Pitpit* fence (Wuyabo, 1978).

be in contact with as many horizontal elements as possible. Everywhere men were grunting as they tightened a vine knot here, pounded a plank down by hand there to bring it in contact another post, or forced a piece of timber between others. Even the sinking of the vertical posts (30 to 35 centimetres deep) was a demonstration of force. At times, a dozen men aged between 14 and 60 were at work, and shouts of "do this!" "do that," "not that side!" "make two knots!" "no, three!" "let me try!" etc., reverberated in the near forest. Altogether, the ambiance was that of a collective workshop, with men struggling to build an impressively high, sturdy, and regular wooden wall around the future garden.

So sturdy indeed that it did not look like most garden fences in New Guinea. Steensberg's book *New Guinea Gardens* and its illustrations of fences (1980:111–23) had not been published yet, and I could not imagine at the time that the other Anga barriers I would be describing later would prove to lack such mechanical strength. Indeed, the observer who walks through the Baruya's valleys is struck by "details" whose technical function is difficult to interpret or even seems frankly aberrant. In particular, they erect barriers of sharp pointed stakes that regularly measure more than 1.50 metres (and up to 2 metres) in height, something that

Figure 5. Men collectively building a *takola* barrier (Wuyabo, 1985).

can seem surprising if one knows that pigs, even hungry Baruya pigs, are hardly noted for their jumping skills.

Their sturdiness is both immediately perceptible and "technically" superfluous, as is soon shown by comparative "walking" anthropology—that is, travelling by foot among comparable societies to grasp the differences in social organisations, systems of thoughts, and technical systems. In Ankave valleys, for instance, a mere five days' walk from Wonenara but still in Anga country, it is exceedingly rare to see a completed garden fence, which raises doubts as to their protective function. Pigs are less numerous here than among the Baruya, but they are still able to wreak havoc in a garden. Actually, many of those Ankave gardens are rapidly declared to have been "ruined by pigs," and never harvested. Thus, what seems to be at stake in the cultivation of such gardens is the periodic reaffirmation of a right on a piece of land (Bonnemère and Lemonnier 2000). By clearing such plots, an Ankave demonstrates, through his work, that a certain portion of the group's territory is his. Ivori garden fences are similarly far less solid than their Baruya counterpart.

In other words, compared with other garden protections in New Guinea, including those of other Anga groups, the Baruya fences are as impressive as they are "nonfunctional."[3] Without a doubt, the recent "Chimbu-style" open-work and tie-less arrangement of planks that were sometimes seen on the side of the newly made walking track linking the villages and hamlets in the Wonenara Valley would have made an

Figure 6. Adjusting a horizontal plank between two vertical posts (Wuyabo, 1978).

Figure 7. An Ivori garden fence (Pio, 1979).

effective protection against the pigs if one decided to place them around the gardens. The most important part of a fence is probably the long log laid along the bottom so that pigs cannot dig up the vertical posts, which can be efficiently used with a simple unlashed fence too. In addition, it would be clear to any observer that even a small car would have been stopped by the kind of stockades Kumain and his team were making. At any rate, these fences could withstand the onslaught of any pig, providing they were maintained. Was there something special about Baruya pigs? Or was it the Baruya's way of making garden fences that was particular?

My belief in the heuristics of *technologie culturelle* and *chaînes opératoires* was such that I observed everything and anything, even though I did not know what kind of details would turn out to be pertinent. My notebook indicates that I was differentiating the posts according to their section (round or flat), their age (made of the wood of a tree just fallen and chopped, or reused). If used, I asked how long ago they had first been shaped (between 8 and 12 years, in fact). I also asked and obtained the names and locally recognised characteristics of the different kinds of trees that were chosen for this particular work: six different species for the vertical posts, and nine other species for the horizontal planks. There were 11 types of vines, and only one type of tree bark used for making ropes (*lalonga*). On another occasion I recorded the location (ecological niche, altitude) of each species and its recognised mechanical

characteristics, its durability (prone to rot rapidly or not), and its main and secondary usages, including quality as firewood.[4] I also dried the botanical samples kindly collected by a Baruya friend, Nuriandaye.[5] I was even lucky enough to get these samples sent to the Queensland Herbarium, where they arrived safely and were identified quite rapidly.[6]

I also observed and described the characteristics of the artefact itself. To say the least, it was obvious that the energy, skill, and application displayed were unusual. An average section of the barrier was composed of 10 to 15 layers of interlaced planks tightly lashed together. This sort of wall was 125 to 135 centimetres high, but the sharp points of the vertical posts could rise between 145 and 250 centimetres (above the ground). Each horizontal plank was 180 to 210 centimetres long. There were two to three knots on each pair of vertical posts to hold them against the horizontal planks. My notes also indicate that one running metre of fence contained 13 horizontal boards or logs, and seven to eight vertical posts, all painstakingly fit together. As for the new and old pieces of wood, they were distributed evenly, and, notably for the vertical posts, used alternately (an old post, then a new post, and so on).

The vocabulary I recorded on the spot for the barriers and their components proved to be largely wrong, as I had noted names of trees instead of the diverse kinds of wood structures. The dictionary compiled by the Lloyds indicates that within the class of fences (*kureta*; Lloyd 1992:136), the Baruya call the barriers so many people were building together a *takola* ("wooden fence with spaced uprights in pairs" [Lloyd 1992:298]). Alongside the generic term for "wood used for fence," *kurowita*, there exists a term for "fence post" (*kwaibelia*), a term for "horizontal timber in a fence" (*laavita*), and yet another to designate the "bottom pole of fence" (*yere'mayeta*; Lloyd 1992:136, 144, 152, 405). There is a verb meaning to "put log at the bottom of a fence to keep the pigs away" (*yere'mavemo*; Lloyd 1992:405) and another one for "to sharpen a post again" (*bwaipuremo* or *bwapuremo*; Lloyd 1992:25, 39). As for the term for "to cooperate," my friend Kumain tells me now (in 2009) that, in addition to the general *waremo*, the verb *wegaimwagemo* applies only to "helping for tying ropes."

Old Questions and Their Limits

In the late 1970s, *technologie culturelle* and Marxist anthropology were full of hopes. In short, it was thought that the way people produce and use material objects is a key factor in the transformation of societies and history. Remote, small, nonindustrial societies that had recently abandoned their stone artefacts were a sort of comparative laboratory for understanding other ways of life as well the social transformations entailed in a

dramatic change in "productive forces." As for the inescapable questions of the period, they related to land tenure, the intensity and duration of work, the efficiency of tools, and, above all, the social division of labour (notably between women and men, young people and elders, etc.).

However, the study of *material* culture in Marxist anthropology proved to be a dead end, for the very reason that anthropologists interested in economics paid no attention to productive forces, i.e., objects, techniques, and know-how! In the 1970s, they (we) were searching for "formulas" that would condense what were supposed to be essential characteristics of modes of productions or "social and economic formations," which focused mainly on the organisation of social relations having to do with productive forces (land, tools, labour, knowledge, seeds, etc.). In the New Guinea context, the heart of this type of research was the organisation of cooperation, the amount of work allocated to various tasks, the productivity of labour, and the differential efficiency of the still-recent steel tools compared with that of stone tools, which were still available for experimental research.[7] In other words, for fear of "vulgar Marxism" or "reductive materialism,"[8] it was out of the question to scrutinise the physical dimension of techniques to see if it had anything to do with social relations, systems of thought, etc.

Nevertheless, a few anthropologists were looking for a possible "ethno-technology," as we would have called it, were interested in the local classification of the materials, and were secretly hoping to document the "elementary means of action on matter" in a given society, in a tentative bridging of Leroi-Gourhan's analytical grid with Marxist economic anthropology.[9] In the absence of a precise theoretical program, everyone agreed that recording corpuses of "technical facts" was a priority, and it was fashionable to consider hand-drawn sketches summarising operational sequences as practically able to talk (Lemonnier 1976).

I definitely adhered to that program when I first set foot among the Baruya, having already studied a technical system "in depth"—that of the salt-making communities of the French Atlantic coast (Lemonnier 1976, 1980, 1984c). In particular, I had previously shown that some technical operations (which I called "strategic") were more important than others for obtaining the final physical result desired in a given technical procedure. These are steps in an operational sequence that cannot be delayed, omitted, or replaced without jeopardising the whole process (Lemonnier 1992:21). I even showed that these kinds of operations were likely to be performed and controlled by particular people, who had special status and powers (Lemonnier 1980:161–64).

In going to Baruya country, my two dreams (and so many years later, I realise that this is exactly what they were: just dreams!) were (1) to

be able to delineate and grasp "correspondences" of a sort between some techno-economic "structures" and other aspects of social life, and (2) to be able to decipher some regularities, characteristics, or, even better, "structures" (again!) of operational sequences. In some loose way, I had mixed some of my own readings in operational research with the omnipresent, fashionable, but vague idea that there should be some application of Bertalanffy's *General System Theory* (1968) to social sciences. In terms of technical actions, graph theory had allowed fantastic gains in the productivity of the assembly lines that had produced bombers, fighters, and Liberty Ships during World War II. After all, operational sequences are nothing but well-documented graphs of sorts. It should therefore be possible, so I believed, to characterise their key elements just as operational research had done for many industrial processes.

Operational sequences are memory aids that help identify and locate the many relations, agents, and factors involved in technical action—more or less those the Actor-Network Theory was to advocate later on. For instance, I had included the east winds and the alga *Dunaliella salina* among the actors/factors of salt production—with less success than Callon's (1986) scallops, I must admit![10] Operational sequences are also drawings of sets of relations whose layout might be analysed, or so we optimistically thought. Observing and describing them was therefore an absolute prerequisite for deciphering some hidden socio-technical logic (whatever that meant!). Yet, and to make a long story short, after hours spent at home looking for homogenous segments, regularities, or "structures" of operational sequences drawn on A3 paper, I was no further along.

You cannot know unless you try. And during my first sessions of fieldwork among the Anga people, I was in fact observing and describing any detail I could lay my eyes on of the techniques taking place around me without regard for the possible pertinence of what I was focusing on, for the excellent reason that you never know what might turn out to be pertinent. Even worse, I now realise that while the Baruya men were making the artefact to which I am now devoting a chapter, I spent more time recording the making of bamboo house blinds, about which I still have nothing to say, than concentrating on Kumain's new garden!

Like more or less everyone at the time, I was interested in questions of land tenure and "property" (or, rather, usage rights), of organisation of labour, in the respective tasks of men and women, and in working time, about which Godelier had already answered most of the questions. Interested in the political dimension of land tenure, population pressure, the conquest of enemy land, etc. (Godelier 1969), he had shown that among the Baruya (as among all other Angans, as I was later to realise), reference to work—cutting a path in the high forest to find game, building

a hunting hut, cutting trees to open the first garden in an area—is what allows a lineage to claim a right of usage on a portion of the group's territory. The agnatic descendants of the man who opened a garden in one spot in the forest are free to dispose of it as they wish. With respect to *technologie culturelle*, what was at stake, though, was the particular anthropological touch that an acute interest in material action could add to what was already known. I was therefore considering a garden barrier as a way to delimit the plots where families had a right to cultivate.

Recording working time was part of my observation of the various operational sequences involved in the clearing of the new garden and building of the barrier. But, here again, Godelier's earlier research had explained what there was to be explained: his experimental comparison of the respective efficiency of stone adze and steel axe had shown that depending on the diameter and hardness of the wood, men worked approximately 1.5 to 4 time faster with a steel axe (Godelier 1979). Furthermore, whereas men's lives had improved in the mid-1940s (at least with regard to the effort needed to transform their forest into gardening land) as they moved from stone to steel tools, women's labour productivity was unchanged because they had kept their wooden digging sticks until some time later.[11] It is probable that the arrival of steel tools also allowed more gardens, which, provided women planted and weeded larger cultivated areas (which seems to have been the case), led to an increase in the production of sweet potatoes and, consequently, of the number of pigs fed with these tubers. Women were thus obliged to work more, both to keep up with their brothers' and husbands' new ability to cut more trees, and to feed more pigs.

With regard to my present topic, the importation of steel tools at the time of World War II also raises the question of how long the Baruya had been using the type of barrier I am describing here, but I have no doubt that it was already the main way of protecting gardens long before they discovered the outside world, in 1951. Jim Sinclair, the Australian Patrol Officer who led the first exploratory expedition into the country of the "Batiya salt makers" in early August 1951,[12] mentions "the garden settlements . . . surrounded by well-made fences of bush timber lashed with vines" that he visited in Marawaka Valley (Sinclair 1966:67). Old Baruya men, who were in their late 30s when the first white man appeared in Wonenara, told Maurice Godelier (and later, me) that there were fewer pigs and gardens before the advent of steel axes and machetes. But none ever suggested that the type of fence had changed.[13] Furthermore, although steel tools had been traded for salt before the first white man discovered the Baruya,[14] they were still very rare in 1961, when the first patrol post was opened in Wonenara (Booth 1963:11). By that time, the missionaries and linguists Joy and Dick Lloyd had arrived in the

valley, too, and they now tell me that the landscape was already as it still is: divided up by myriad gardens delineated by the white or gray lines of their immense fences. As for the barriers made of planks piled between two rows of posts (*podzaamawanaya*), also locally known as a "Chimbu-style fence," these were clearly adopted after the Baruya discovered other areas in PNG.[15] Nowadays, this kind of fencing is regularly used within the hamlets and villages to circumscribe the private area surrounding each permanent house, as well as to enclose *individual* coffee gardens. But the usual, very robust *takola* are still collectively made and used to fence every garden.

The study of gender relations was another common topic in the economic anthropology of gardening. Among the Baruya, the relationship between gender and work in the garden is twofold. First, regarding the way the genders are involved and intersect in the division of labour, we have already seen that the Baruya women transport the fence stakes from old gardens in the valley and then gather and burn the underbrush, while the men cut down the trees, prune those they leave standing, and make the barrier. Men never weed gardens, and they harvest only sugarcane (Godelier 1986a:111). It is also their job to take care of the socially important areca-nut palms (*Areca catechu*), the nuts of which are the basis of everyday sociality, and also to look after the forest groves of Pandanus (*P. julianettii* and *P. brosimos*) and to collect their fruit, which

Figure 8. A Baruya nontraditional "Chimbu-style" fence (Wonenara, 1979).

is done from camps located in Pandanus groves in the mists of the high forest, between 2,000 and 2,400 metres.

Second, the gender division of tasks is also related to an explicit reference to work in another way, for it is this division that underlies the access the "owner" of a garden gives various women to the plots delimited within it. In effect, the women who have helped to carry the old posts from an abandoned garden are allowed to plant and harvest a plot. Similarly, the wife of one of the men who participated in the clearing of the forest and construction of the barrier is allowed a piece of ground to cultivate (Lory 1982:253). A Baruya garden covers an area of from 850 to 5,000 square metres (or more), in which it is not unusual to see up to 20 to 30 patches neatly separated by long logs laid on the ground (*borita*, main dividers) and planted lines (*yitaata*, inner dividers) of bright-yellow flowers. According to Godelier's painstaking inventory of 432 gardens, up to 15 or more women can have access to a given taro garden (and half this number for a sweet potato garden). As Lory has shown, using old posts from disused gardens is part of the "general exchange" of work, land, and tuber cuttings that characterises

Figure 9. Baruya woman carrying fence posts from an old garden to a new plot (Wonenara, 1978).

Figure 10. A Baruya woman digging out *pitpit* stumps with her digging-stick (Wonenara, 1978).

the Baruya's access to the means of production of the local agriculture (Lory 1982:252–53, 272–73).[16]

Back to Cooperation: New Findings for Old Data

There is no doubt that by looking at land tenure, organisation of tasks, working time, productivity of tools, and gender relations, I had done what someone concerned with material culture was supposed to do in the late 1970s. But none of this information could usefully be matched with what I was observing, i.e., a gang of many men and a few women building an impressive and quite unusual type of physical defence against marauding pigs. Needless to say, it was already clear to me that the protection of sweet potatoes against hungry pigs was not a sufficient explanation for what had to be explained in very Maussian terms: the particular ways a given society, the Baruya, was (and still is) making and using a (very) particular artefact, garden fences.

Although many men and a few women were busying themselves around Kumain, I was not that interested in cooperation—the way people organise themselves in a collective endeavour—for I already knew that the endless and controversial attempts to qualify and summarise

types of collaborative work among "primitive" people were hopeless.[17] In such cases, the reference to Marx's own analysis of cooperation in Chapter 13 of *Das Kapital* was nothing but a simplified and indeed superficial study of productive forces (Lemonnier 1980:4–9, 2011a). Marx and the anthropologists he inspired focus on the organisation and productivity of labour, whereas it is the tools, objects, materials, gestures, and skills that need to be explored to understand how much "the mental and the material" (Godelier 1986b) are intertwined in productive forces.

Much later, cooperation nevertheless proved paradoxically to be the right question to consider with respect to what barriers and their making represent in the Baruya's everyday life, social organisation, and system of thought, at least once I had moved to entirely new questions about material culture. What I found to be at stake were indeed gender relations and the organisation of labour in the making of a wooden barrier. But the local importance of what had struck me was far beyond the tension between pigs and sweet potatoes, whatever its implication for the dynamics of political and economic systems in Melanesia.[18]

As soon as I walked through Anga country from valley to valley and from one linguistic group to another, I noticed striking contrasts in gardening techniques. The very order of the series of tasks that transform a piece of forest into a planted garden is by no means regular. For instance, the moments at which the cultivators cut the biggest trees, burn what has been slashed and heaped, or plant the crops are combined in various ways. This is one more proof that technological choices often bear on important material actions, which is nothing new. But, above all, comparative anthropology shows that the fence protecting a Baruya sweet potato garden from the domesticated pigs is not simply a barrier.

The making of this artefact and its subsequent presence is in fact a way to express, build, and recall key aspects of the local social organisation, cultural values, and system of thoughts, as well as their interrelations. First of all, "doing things together" is a leitmotif of the Baruya culture, and the buzzing atmosphere around posts and planks being assembled into a strong fence is one instance of the spectacular emphasis on cooperation that pervades the daily life of the Baruya. For example, daybreak is without fail the moment when one can hear and see several men walking together in line towards the forest, holding their axe on the shoulder, and ready to do something together, whatever it may be. There would be nothing very surprising in this, except for the fact that a few days' walk from Wonenara, but still among Anga people, collective work is almost unknown, such as among the Ankave.[19]

The Baruya's insatiable solidarity and spectacularly high level of cooperation stand in opposition to the Ankave's determination that everyone should mind their own business, even if the neighbour is but

Figure 11. Cooperative work during construction of a Baruya couple's house (Wonenara, 1982).

a few minutes away, and a strong penchant for long stays in the forest. Whereas 20 or so Baruya men and women will work together to build a couple's house in a day, it is not unusual to see an Ankave man working on his house for weeks, always alone, thought sometimes he will exchange pleasantries with a few relatives or friends who stop by. When an individual garden is cleared, an Ankave man and his wife take on the forest alone. Even when it happens that two brothers-in-law or a man and his son-in-law clear a plot "together," that is, in the same spot and simultaneously, each works on his own patch. And the few times when a young husband-to-be comes to work for his in-laws, each reminds everyone that he is there of his own free will and is helping out just this once. For those familiar with the Baruya valleys, the contrast is immediately visible and striking.

Of course there are some contexts in which cooperation is just as intense among the Ankave as it is among the Baruya—in particular in warfare and male initiations—but not in the area of production: when it comes to horticulture, the Ankave and Baruya worlds are at opposite ends of the spectrum. Cooperation is clearly one kind of social relationship that varies immensely from group to group. Since no characteristic feature of the local material culture (gestures, tools, or knowledge) accounts for this disparity in the way they organise their work, it must be attributed to the other domains of social reality in which radically

Figure 12. An Ankave man opening a new garden site alone in the forest (Ayakupna'wa, 1987).

different practices are observed in the other Anga groups: namely, gender relations, initiations, and marriage.

As we have seen, from turning tree trunks into boards or sharpened stakes to assembling the fence, building a fence is one of the occasions when Baruya male solidarity is displayed for all to see . . . and hear.[20] Baruya men then wordlessly claim to the women and to themselves that they can do together impressive things such as garden fences. I should have understood that the day I tried to tie a rattan vine around two posts to hold them together. When I failed miserably, someone said to me, "Pierre, you did it the way a woman would do it!"—that is, a hopelessly wrong way. While everyone laughed, as usual, I said to myself that the Baruya's constant and overwhelming need to discredit women even concerned activities they *never* do. And this is exactly what happened. Later on, I learned that the general verb "to make a knot" (*pwoyomo*; Lloyd 1992:264) is used for fences, but there is a special word meaning a "good knot" (*kwairogusa*) which is, not surprisingly, "as a man does" it (Lloyd 1992:145).

Building a barrier is one occasion among others to demonstrate the asymmetry of the genders (or subordination of women, or male domination, or whatever you want to call it) in Baruya society—that is

the Baruya's "first form of social hierarchy" (Godelier 1986a:136). It is a moment when men show their collective force, which they build and acquire during the male ceremonies and in the men's house. And in the male rituals, men "create, build, and practice solidarity among themselves, regardless of generation and lineage, transcending the frontiers between them, outside the world of women and against them" (Godelier 1986a:54). In addition to the fence that results from men's collective action, the amount of work they display is also meaningful (see Astuti 1994).

The male initiation cycle is indirectly referred to when men clear and fence a new garden. Together with warfare, male initiations are central to those social logics by which Godelier has defined "Great Men" societies; that is, societies in which the group is (or was) focused primarily on warfare and male initiations. Around these two events are articulated the three principal hierarchies that structure the life of the society: the ranking of "Great Men" (masters of the initiations and great warriors; sometimes great shamans); the subordination of all women to the men as a group; and the authority of the older men over the first-stage initiates. Almost by definition, two men who were initiated at the same time must assist each other in all imaginable circumstances. In fights, of course, but also whenever one has something a co-initiate (*nyakwai*) is interested in: betel nuts, a taro, a folding knife or watch given by the anthropologist a few

Figure 13. Baruya men during the construction of the *tsimia* ceremonial house (Yanyi, 1985).

minutes ago. It is simply unthinkable not to give or at least share with a *nyakwai* what he has caught a glimpse of in your net bag.

In the case of preparing a garden, not only does its "owner" tell his co-initiates in advance about his plans to clear a sector of the forest, but any age-mate of his who happens to be around will feel obliged to come and help. Mere friends are also supposed to help one another, but *nyakwai* are obliged to. Therefore, many of those who volunteer to help the garden's owner are his co-initiates.[21] Needless to say, with hundreds of planks and posts variously tied to each other, the built artefact is in itself an image of the strength and efficiency resulting from leaning on each other.[22] This is reiterated even further when dozens of men work together to prepare the huge collective gardens that will be harvested for the closing feasts of the male rituals (Lory 1982:257).

Brothers-in-law are another category of men who are supposed to help each other, especially in garden work. The principal Baruya marriage rule is (and remains) sister-exchange (*ginamare*): to marry, a man (and his father) must give a "sister" (real or classificatory) to the brother of his own wife-to-be. Contrary to marriage exchange with bridewealth, *ginamare* implies no gift of wealth.[23] Two lineages "exchange" two women, and no shell money, live pigs, or butchered pork is involved. A mandatory gift (of cowry strings, vegetable salt, bark-cloth capes, or modern PNG currency, but never pork) must be made when one of the women involved in a marriage by "sister-exchange" gives birth to

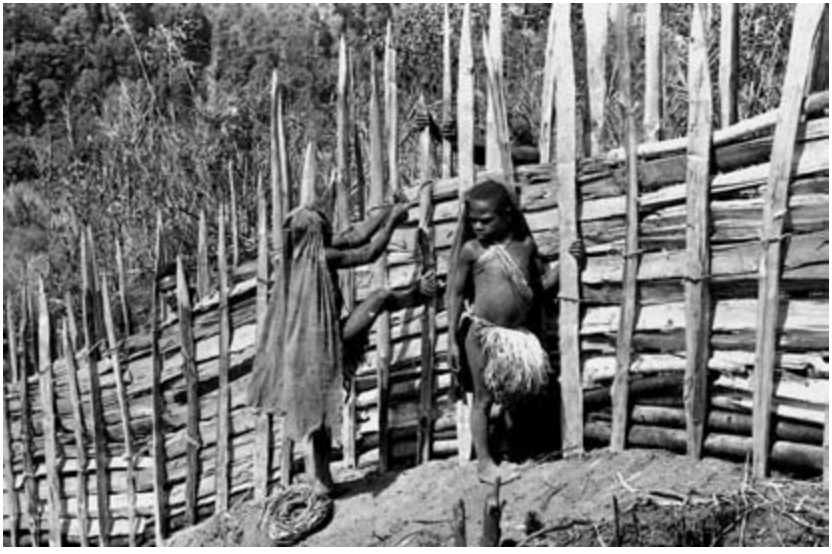

Figure 14. Young Baruya initiates helping to make a garden fence (Wuyabo, 1985).

many more children than the other . . . and, interestingly enough, also when the brothers-in-law failed to perform with each other the various exchanges contributing to harmonious relations, such as working together and sharing food. For the Baruya, when it comes to marriage, a balance in terms of people, labour, food, and so on is all important (Lemonnier 2002), and systematic assistance with garden fences is *the* instance when this is to be shown to one and all.

In itself, the collective effort of fencing a Baruya garden is the reaffirmation of a certain number of social relations: between men and women, between co-initiates, and between brothers-in-law. These impressive ramparts against pigs, which elsewhere in New Guinea do not try to break through far flimsier obstacles—remember that Chimbu-style fences are not even lashed together—are not only assigned the concrete task of establishing an impenetrable barrier between pigs and tubers, but remind everyone of one's property and rights of usage. In them and through them, a whole portion of the Baruya social order is produced, with emphasis first and foremost on cooperation, but also on male solidarity, which is loudly proclaimed to the women; on the absolute reciprocal confidence and mutual assistance of the co-initiates; and, last, on the concord and collaboration in work of brothers-in-law who, according to the marriage rule, have "exchanged" "sisters."

In other words, what is striking is that these social relations and moral rules, rendered visible and literally embodied by the participants, are precisely those features which set the Northern Anga (Baruya, but also Sambia or Watchakes) radically apart from their neighbours to the south or the southwest. We are still dealing with the organisation of work, but we are miles away from the anthropological topics and problems of the 1970s.

It is noteworthy that, by contrast, among the Sambia—the Baruya's closest cousins, both by their language and by their social organisation and ritual life—who abandoned sister-exchange as their predominant kind of marriage and discontinued their male rituals 30 and 20 years ago, respectively, both *takola*-like garden fences and beehive-shaped houses have disappeared. This is an indirect but strong indication of the direct link between those aspects of the Baruya social organisation and system of thought with the material means that express their all-pervading nature.[24]

Summary

A New Guinea garden fence is a mundane artefact. Tuber gardens and pigs are common throughout the big island (Hide 2003), and in most cases, some sort of fence protects the crops. Yet, a Baruya fence is not that mundane. It is remarkable in a number of ways. For the people

who make and use them, men and women, it is an object that has to be made in the right way. The Baruya guides who walked with me for days among non-Baruya groups when I was doing a general survey of the Anga technical system were appalled each time we arrived in a valley where the gardens were just ordinary New Guinea gardens. I found it funny at the time—"Pierre, have you seen that! Poor people! Tss, tss, tss!"—but my friends were not only ridiculing other people's techniques. They were truly sorry to see what they saw, for garden barriers are a serious matter.[25]

Even a superficial comparison sets Baruya fences apart for the anthropologist mindful of the mechanical characteristics of things. The solidity of this artefact and the obvious surplus of planks and knots aimed at reinforcing the wooden wall instantly signals that pigs, tubers, and private property are not all there is to it. There is something more than a palisade here. In addition, the boisterous ambiance of the gathering of (mostly) men literally showing off their energy and ability as fence-makers confirms that something that has not much to do with crops and pigs is going on *at the same time*.

By documenting fully the operational sequence of the making of a garden fence (i.e., by taking into account all possible anthropological information about what is involved in the action taking place), it appears that making a barrier, and the barrier itself once built, communicate in a non-verbal way key aspects of the Baruya culture relating to marriage, male rituals, collective actions, and male–female relationships. It is also noteworthy that (1) these material actions and objects simultaneously remind the actors that these various domains of social life are locally interrelated the way they are; and that (2) only human beings and artefacts are involved here, and no supernatural powers of any sort.

The next question is to evaluate the specificity of this case study. Are there other objects and techniques that play a similar role? How does this nonpropositional communication actually work?

Chapter 2

Entwined by Nature: Eels, Traps, and Ritual

When it comes to strange-looking objects, an Ankave eel trap is a must-see. Or, rather, it appears strikingly odd to the anthropologist who takes Mauss' program on techniques seriously. For the average anthropologist, it looks like a nice fish trap, but only if it can be seen minutes before it is put in a stream; once it has been removed from the water, it rapidly turns into a shrunken, twisted roll of dry bark.

Located a five- to eight-day walk southwest of the Baruya, the 1,300 members of the Ankave tribe are also forest horticulturalists. They live in a sparsely populated area in the Gulf Province of Papua New Guinea. In the mid-1960s, the area was still considered "unpacified," but warfare and feuding actually ceased earlier in that decade (Bonnemère and Lemonnier 2009). Altogether, the Ankave still have a very partial view of the State, of the Church, and of the market. Up to now, and although more than half of the adult population has been baptised (some people have even been baptised four times!), Christianity has had almost no lasting effect on the Ankave's moral code or on their residential patterns. There is no aid post, no school, no road, and no bush store in the Ikundi Valley, where Pascale Bonnemère and I have done fieldwork since 1982 among the 475 people who live there. The first plane landed in 2011 on the airstrip the local population has been building since 1985.

Like all Anga people, the Ankave are a "Great Men" society. The last collective initiations took place in 2004; as for the third-stage ritual (Bonnemère 2009), which is held for a man who has just fathered his first child, it is still ongoing. So are the *songen* rituals by which the Ankave collectively drive away the spirit of those who have died recently.[1]

In these ceremonies, eel flesh, smaller quantities of pork, or money are given to the classificatory maternal or paternal cross relatives of the deceased (Lemonnier 2006a:253–69). Only these people receive gifts: the closest relatives do not receive any, either because they are made of a substance that is partially identical to that of the deceased or because they have already received gifts from the paternal relatives of the deceased at his or her birth, initiation, or marriage.

Innumerable rivulets swell the mountain streams of the Ankave territory to tumultuous rivers. This is where the freshwater eels (*Anguilla interioris*; *waabe* in the Ankave language) are found (Lemonnier 1993a). They captured in a variety of ways: they are shot in the water with an arrow, killed by chance during fish poisoning, or lured onto firm ground using a live frog as bait. Today, they are also sometimes caught using a metal fishhook and nylon rope if any anthropologist around happens to have brought some. However, the huge majority of eels taken are caught in traps (*waabe kwiea*), particularly in preparation for the ceremonies marking the end of the mourning period. Other fish are (extremely rarely) caught by poisoning, using a vine sap that suffocates the animals.

Like the traps used by all the Anga groups and some of their northern neighbours (Fischer 1968; Sorenson and Gajdusek 1969), an Ankave eel trap is made out of a tapered "cylinder" of bark. The animal is lured in the cylinder by means of a bait (a frog), and a mechanism closes the door. One end is blocked by bars, while at the other end a door snaps shut on the animal. The front (and widest) face, where the door is placed, is an oval whose larger and smaller diameters are 18.5 and 15 centimetres, respectively.

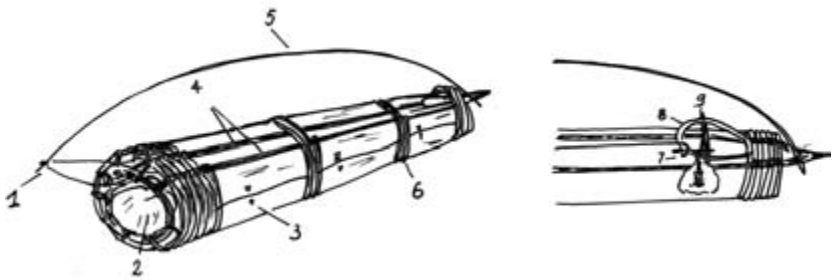

Figure 15. An Ankave eel trap (total length 115–135 cm) and its different parts: (1) *soxe* (rattan); (2) *pepewa* (door); (3) *sim'maa* (wooden pin); (4) *i'tengen* (forked piece like a tuning fork); (5) *metse* (spring); (6) *weongen* (spiral). Detail of the release mechanism: (7) *perangen* (small stick); (8) *kekapere'o'* (rattan loop); (9) *pi'a'meo'* (T-shaped piece onto which a living frog is tied, trigger).

Making an Ankave Eel Trap

When the time comes to get rid of the spirits of one or two recent dead, each of the organisers of the ceremony marking the end of mourning—father, brother(s) of the deceased, his wife's new husband (i.e., from one or two to half a dozen men)—construct between three and five traps, which they will place in the part of the stream where they have exclusive rights of usage. Five or six weeks before the ceremony, each trapper goes deep into the forest to cut the pieces of bark (*kwiea*), 125 to 155 centimetres long and 50 to 55 centimetres wide, with which he will make the traps. The bark is cut vertically and horizontally on the trunk, and the pieces are pried off one after another with a pointed stick. In practice, one tree can provide five or six pieces of bark.[2] Consumption of sugarcane near the bark tree or near the pieces themselves is prohibited, or no eels will be caught: the Ankave say that the sugarcane is soft inside, and its presence near the trap is said to weaken the spring and thus the effectiveness of the release mechanism.

The construction of the traps takes place in a temporary camp a short distance from the stream where the eels are to be caught and near a garden currently in use. The trappers and their family live in this camp until the songs and dances marking the end of mourning begin, which is one to three hours' walk from the village in which the ceremony will take place—usually the village of the man who initiated the activity.

After the inside of the bark has been roughly prepared and scraped with a machete to clean off the fibers that are still attached, the bark is folded along its original curve (i.e., with the outside of the bark facing out), to make a cylinder. A few provisional rattan ties (*Calamus* sp.) and three or four wooden pins hold the roll together. A double piece of wood (called *i'tengen*), made from branches of *sapia'a* (*Canarium* sp.) or *too'mwe'* (*Anthobambix* sp.), is then fixed along the length of the truncated cone. This piece resembles a tuning fork with very long prongs, and keeps the trap longitudinally rigid. Most important, the multiple rings of rattan that circle the trap are attached to it, closing the bark together and strengthening it.

Most of the work of making a trap involves putting on these rattan hoops at both ends and every 15 to 20 centimetres down the length. Rattan reinforcements are added to the front and back of the trap. The two to four bars that close the back of the trap are fixed by simply pushing them through two or three holes pierced in the cylinder. The door is cut from a piece of rigid bark (unidentified), slightly over 1 centimetre thick, and is attached to the bottom of the opening of the trap by a rattan tie. This technical step ends the work on the traps done in the camp.

Figure 16. Apatse prepares a hole in the future door of a trap (Suowi valley, 1987).

The releasing device is completed shortly before the trap is put into the water. A bow-shaped spring is attached at the back of the cylinder. It is made of a flexible branch 1.5 centimetres in diameter and rammed between the last rattan coils at the back of the cylinder and the junction of the two branches of the *i'tengen* (the tuning-fork–like component). The bowspring is bent by pulling a rattan cable attached to its free end until it nearly touches the "door" of the trap, at the front of the cylinder. This cable is then run inside the trap and attached to the release mechanism, which is set off by the eel when it tries to take the bait. Another rattan cord is tied between the end of the spring and the top of the door, so that the trap snaps shut when the spring is released.

In the procedures I observed, the time spent on making each trap varied from two and a quarter to two and a half hours. In all, the preparation of traps was spread over three days. Finding enough material to make nine traps—bark, rattan, branches for the spring and the "tuning fork"—took about 10 hours, including travelling time.

Every morning and evening during this time, and sometimes even in the middle of the night, each trapper sings songs about earthworms coming to feed: an allusion to eels approaching the traps. During the night before the traps are set out, one of the wives of the man in charge of the end-of-mourning ritual goes, using a bamboo torch, to find tree frogs for bait. The frogs are kept in a section of bamboo plugged by

Figure 17. Apatse closes the trap door by pulling the rattan rope connecting it to the bait (Suowi valley, 1987).

andzaa leaves (*Saccharum spontaneum*). A cowry is placed in the tube as well: in the same way that people exchange shell money for pieces of pork, frogs are exchanged for eels. The next day the traps are brought to a clearing next to the section of stream where they are to be set and are aligned, propped upright against wooden sticks, with the opening at the top.

Ritual Intermezzo: Women Come into the Picture

It is only at this stage that the springs for the traps are made and set. The principal organiser of the end-of-mourning ceremony places and sets the springs on the bottom of all the traps. One of his wives, together with another woman if there are a dozen or more traps, quickly triggers the traps one after another, by touching the release mechanism with a stick made of *ingwij* (*Litsea* sp.) wood, with which she has just put some vegetable salt in her mouth. The smell of the salt is thought to attract the eels, and without this ritual it is said "you would only catch one eel in a month!" Only a mature woman is reputed to know how to perform this ritual correctly. She learns it from her husband. This rapid activating of the traps is a way to verify that the triggering device works and that the rattan cable or the door does not jam.

Figure 18. Apatse's wife, Modeni, goes into the forest at night to catch frogs to be used as bait the next day (Suowi valley, 1987).

Figure 19. Apatse installs the springs of the traps prior to the rapid ritual done by his wife (so fast that there is no still picture of it, only 8 seconds of video) (Suowi valley, 1987).

While his wife does this, the organiser of the ceremony silently says a magic formula in which the stick held by the woman is described as releasing the tensed bow that springs the trap. He then stops in front of each trap, takes the upper end of the spring in one hand, and, with the other hand, grips the knot at the end of the rattan tie leading to the trap door and the release mechanism. At the same time, he rubs it with a magic nut that is half concealed in his hand (a seed of *wiamongwe* [*Mucuna albertsii*], a Leguminosae that does not grow spontaneously at the altitude of Ikundi but is brought from the lower part of other Ankave valleys and planted). The movement of his hand brings to mind the gesture made by a billiard player rubbing the head of a queue with chalk. It also resembles the action performed by the Anga ritual experts when they pull on boys' joints to increase their strength, usually during initiation. Simultaneously, he whispers a magic formula that alludes to closing the doors of the men's houses of two large enemy groups, the Menye and Iqwaye, who live a two-day march to the east in the Menyamya region, where the migration of the Ankave began several centuries ago. It is hoped that the eels will pass through the doors of the traps in as large numbers as the warriors and young men that live in these houses. This is a masculine magical practice used only when the trap is being set for a *songen* funerary ceremony. The formula is spoken again, later, if the eels are slow to enter the trap, which would be seen as proof that the ritual performed by the woman was ineffective.

The traps are then decorated with different kinds of leaves, which are stuck in the rattan hoop near the middle of the cylinder: *kwiapo'* (*Geanthus* sp.), *waabbo'* (*Elatostema* sp.), *komeje* (*Ocimum* sp.), and *soe* (*Riedelia* sp.) have a pleasant smell that, when added to that of the frog, attract the eels. *Ime'* (*Codiaeum* sp.), *sona'* (*Caryota rumphii*), and *ingwij* (*Litsea* sp.) are purely decorative. Some leaves are white "like the eels' stomachs." This decoration and the female ritual are used only when the traps are intended to catch eels for the end-of-mourning ritual, or, in other words, when a large number of eels is wanted. Normally only the opening of the trap is decorated.

Using Eel Traps and Eating Eels

Immediately after the rapid ritual done by a woman, the traps are carried to the stream by the organiser of the *songen* and positioned near the water's edge in suitable places, such as water pockets, close to a fall, or between rocks. The spring is tightened, and a live frog is attached by its back legs to the vertical section of a thin T-shaped piece of wood that is part of the release mechanism. The frog hangs head down so that it moves and can be seen by the eel. The horizontal part of the T-shaped

piece lightly props in place the small stick (*pi'a'meo'*, or "lever") holding the rattan cable, which in turn keeps the spring flexed. Some fragrant leaves are attached to the *pi'a'meo'* at the same time as the frog.

The trap is then delicately placed in the bottom of the stream, close to one bank, with the open end angled downwards so that water comes in this end first. Then it is wedged at the side between stones (it can also be stuck between two sticks jammed into the streambed if it is soft). Other blocks are placed on the cylinder, obviously without getting in the way of the spring or the rattan ties that connect the release mechanism. The trap is in no way concealed under the heavy blocks of stone, but merely kept in place. Magical formulas are said that refer to the ancestral beings in charge of the eels. As he is about to leave, the man placing the trap

Figure 20. Apatse attaches a living frog to the T-shaped part of the trigger mechanism before placing it in the trap (Suowi valley, 1987).

scratches the spring, murmuring a few words alluding to the strings of the Menye and Iqwaye bows breaking. The idea there is that the slightest touch to the frog/T-shaped stick will sever the connection between the trigger and the spring, which will release the latter and close the trap on its prey.

When the trapper dreams of a bow or of cutting tools (axes, machetes, bamboo knives), he knows that an eel has been caught, and he goes to inspect his traps. The captured eels are transferred into cages (*waabe epije'*) that look exactly like the traps but without springs or triggers. Once inspected, the trap is baited anew with a live frog. The remains of the previous frog are slipped under the bark of an *ondzoo'* (*Trichospermum* sp.) with the idea that the oily, slippery sap of this tree will prevent the eels from sticking somewhere in the stream and that nothing will hold them back from coming to the traps. This goes on for two to three weeks, until the organiser decides that enough eels have been caught.

This moment coincides with the end of the ceremony closing the period of mourning for persons recently deceased. After one to three weeks of nightly dancing to the sound of hourglass-shaped drums (Chapter 3), and after the spirit of the dead person has left the community for good,

Figure 21. Apatse slides one of his traps into the stream before wedging it in place with small stones (Suowi valley, 1987).

the principal trapper and organiser of the ritual goes to get the cages. The eels are threaded through their gills onto a rattan cord before being struck violently against the ground, which finally kills them. If the occasion arises, and if he knows the right magic formula, the man who has caught the eel can whip his son with it, to make him grow because "eel is a fat food and grows quickly." He then guts the eels and pulls out their spines before they are smoked over a hearth for several hours or days, and then given to those who ask for them.

An eel is usually cooked in a roll of bark from a variety of trees.[3] The cranial bones are conserved, except the lower jaw, and placed in a magic packet (*sabe'a' o'we'*) used in trapping eels and marsupials (see Chapter 4). The old cranium is thrown into a stream along with the bark in which the last eels were cooked with the idea of pleasing the eel master.[4]

When a Basic Trap Is Intriguing to the Anthropologist

By definition, anthropologists are supposed to control their ethnocentric feelings. I was nevertheless amazed when I first saw a pristine Ankave eel trap ready to go into the water. In a drawer of a storeroom at the Peabody Essex museum in Salem, Massachusetts, I had previously seen a "wrung-out" Sambia trap, all twisted and dry, that had been collected by Carleton Gajdusek[5] and described by Fetchko (1972:118–19), and I had mentally equated it with the one a Baruya friend once made at my request. I had also looked at illustrations of two other Anga eel traps: a photograph of a "Kukukuku fish-trap" in a paper by Bramell (1946) and a drawing by Fischer (1968:302) done among the Jeghuje. Last, I remembered photographs of the traps made by the Fore, a non-Anga group, north of the Baruya (Sorenson 1976:Figure 26, p. 60; Sorenson and Gajdusek 1969:296). In fact, the Ankave trap is definitely the same, and yet it is completely different.

The general mechanical organisation is similar, as is the closing mechanism, which is of a standard type. However, in the Ankave case, the bark cylinder which holds the captured eel is characterised by the number of spiralling rattan strengtheners holding it together. Mechanically speaking, the bark and its reinforcements form a structure in which each part is tied to the whole several times over, thus guaranteeing robustness. Not only are all the spirals, which act as hoops, held tightly to the bark, but they are also held in place laterally by being strongly anchored down the length of the exoskeleton formed by the "tuning-fork." At the ends of the trap, the bark roll is held firmly between a horizontal ligature on the outside that ties it on to a second spiral within and concentric with the first. At these places, the bark is subjected to a double mechanical constraint since the internal spiral, acting like a spring, tends

to open it, whereas the outer ligature (which can be up to 13 turns of rattan) tends to close it. These two ligatures are further kept rigid by a third ligature running across the bark. In case this is not already enough, runners in the shape of a figure eight are tied to the exterior spirals of the two ends and are themselves fixed to the bark.

An observer—the one who describes operational sequence during the making of the trap—is struck by the effort and care taken by the Ankave throughout the process of constructing the trap to build up the passive strength with which the trap will resist the struggles of the captured eel. All these extra precautions seem rather superfluous, for we know of other traps of the same type that are not so lavishly reinforced, such as those used by the Fore. The evidence suggests that the trap would resist the eel's movements equally well even if the ligatures were less elaborate; similarly, the frets could be constructed and installed with less force and precision, and less regard to aesthetics.

To put it briefly, the bark cylinder that holds the captured eel is characterised by the extravagant precautions designed to ensure its solidity. From a mechanical point of view, it definitely reveals an extraordinary tendency to redundancy of the devices aimed at strengthening and reinforcing it. It is also well made; it is built with a will to do things exactly as they should be according to a local state of the art. But there is more. The traps decorated and displayed for the few minutes the woman was

Figure 22. Various kinds of spiralling rattan at the "mouth" of the trap (Suowi valley, 1987).

doing her own part were a pleasure for the eye (mine!) and instantly evoked a piece of art: at least, it was important for the Ankave that they look nice (and smell good). These traps are so "neat" (or strange) that some, notably the late Alfred Gell, with whom I corresponded after he read a previous publication of mine on these artefacts, asked whether they might be pieces of art and should be moved from the dusty shelves of ethnographic museums into art galleries (Gell 1996).

It was clear to Pascale Bonnemère and myself that the Ankave had a particular interest in eels. We knew that beneficial nutritional qualities are attributed to the eel: its fatty flesh is thought to form the human body's fat, and being fat is a sign of good health and energy, whereas being thin is associated with weakness. But that was nothing original in this part of the world. Fortunately, as a routine in a long-term anthropological project, we were also recording as many myths as we could, and in fact, the origin myth of the eels revealed that they are far from being ordinary fish for the Ankave: eels were indirectly engendered by the severed penis of a man, a long time ago.

The Eel According to Myth: An Icon of Masculinity and Territoriality

A woman (sometimes called Mbebaeni) was in her gardens, while a man (sometimes called Jegweno) was in a neighbouring village. He had a very long penis that would creep under the grass cover of the ground and penetrate the woman. This stratagem was repeated fairly often, and one day the woman got fed up with it. She made a deadfall trap in which the log would strike a sharpened bamboo blade. When the male member once again approached through the woman's garden she sprang her trap, and the bamboo blade sliced through the man's penis. The man kept one part of his member, of the same length as the penises of men today; but the other piece, the longer section, made its way to the river, where it produced young, and the river has been full of eels ever since.

When talking about this myth, some Ankave would name the lewd hero (Mebero), and make it clear that, once at the river, the severed penis spontaneously produced a pair of *temugwe* fish (an unidentified small deepwater fish with a sucker-like mouth [Speece 1987:345]). The male of these primordial *temugwe* was called Meja ("beard"),[6] and the female, Mbuo. They engendered all of the fish that exist down to the present day, eels included. Only this sort of fish has two sexes; all the others, including eels, are male. The *temugwe* pair are the masters of fish, and both are addressed during trapping rituals, asking them to tell their children to go to the traps and be taken by men. It must be noted that opinions vary as to the identity and origin of the beings that

help trappers capture fish, but they are always associated in one way or another with the severed penis in the myth. Some men call the eel female ancestor "Iwoni."

It is probably because a male fish is more or less directly identified with a severed penis that the eel is the environmental product most closely associated with a portion of a lineage territory inherited in an agnatic line. As a general rule, within a lineage, each group of brothers born of the same father uses a particular section of the river that lies within or delimits their own sector of the tribal land. This section is marked by a boulder, tree, rivulet, or bend, but frequently each of the brothers keeps de facto part of this stretch for his own use. In fact, of all the rights of usage related to land tenure, the one that regulates water access is the most rigorously defined and sanctioned by the Ankave. In the past, many of the bloodiest disputes, and those with the most serious consequences, leading to death and decades of bitterness, arose from disagreements between brothers over the segments of river where each could set his eel traps.

If we now go back to the making and setting of the traps, we observe that several steps in the operational sequence of preparation and use of the traps refer to the origin myth of the eels. Some are explicit: some people said that the first stone laid on top of a trap once it is in the water is given one of the names of the female ancestor of the eels, Iwoni. Her name is not spoken out loud but is nevertheless pronounced as the stone is placed. Unable to bear that someone could demand a gift without receiving an answer, the ancestor tells the eels to go to the bait. Similarly, when the trap is correctly placed on the edge of the stream, water is thrown "ten times" towards the release mechanism, and the master of the eels (Meja) is begged to attract several kinds of trees—a metaphorical way of asking him to send a large number of eels into the trap. These magic formulas are uttered by men, but women are said to know them, so that they can teach them to their children should their husband die.

But there is another central yet untold reference to the myth in the operational sequence of the preparation of the trap. Indeed, if one keeps this myth in mind while looking at the operational sequence of the preparation of the traps minutes before they are put in the water, it is clear that the woman who springs the bow-like device closing the trap is doing something similar to the mythical woman who deliberately activated the deadfall trap that cut through the lover's unwelcome penis, thus creating the ancestors of the eels *and* inaugurating today's male sexual organ and sexuality. Eels are by no account ordinary fish for the Ankave, and testing the functioning of an eel trap is not a mere technical activity. But what about the trap itself?

Funnelling Thoughts, Capturing Values: Why Special Traps Help Make Special Fish

For the anthropologist interested in material action aimed at a certain material result, it is striking that compared with the strength of trap, the attention paid to fixing it in the edge of the water leaves something to be desired: the strength of the trap is all out of proportion to the risk of seeing it washed away. To be sure, two or three big stones are placed against the sides of the bark roll, and one or two more are laid on top of it. But in no way would these stones be sufficient to hold the trap in place in the event of a flood. Watching an Ankave torrent swell and seeing its level rise a metre in less than an hour is somehow terrifying, and it is beyond all doubt that the rapidity and overwhelming violence of the river would carry the trap away and destroy it in seconds.

In other words, for the Ankave, it is not the actual capture of an eel that is important. It is the possibility of keeping it imprisoned and controlling its force, real or imagined. The priority in building the trap is given to creating its enormous passive energy, capable of successfully resisting the vitality attributed to the mythic eel. Therefore, the techniques used in constructing a trap as well as what everyone knows of its construction, together with the trap's appearance itself, correspond to the supposed strength of eels. The trap and its builders' grunting with the effort they exert are an indirect proof of what an eel is for the Ankave. For them, this strange-looking fish is associated with an extremely vigorous male member. At the same time, the trap functions as the equivalent, or marker, of a piece of territory held through the male line. This is why, although it resembles similar Anga (and New Guinea) fishing devices in its general shape and the physical principles put into play, an Ankave trap is so different.

A common feature of Ankave eel traps and Baruya garden fences is that they also have nontechnical functions, or purposes, in the respective human groups that make and use them. In writing "nontechnical functions," I do not intend to add useless lines to the hackneyed disputation on the composite "nature" of human actions on the physical world, the "seamless web" of human activity (Bijker 1997; Hughes 1986) or the "hybrid" character of objects (Latour 1993). I simply mean what I write: for the external observer, both the barrier and the trap have simultaneous effects on the material world and on various relations between human beings. The trap allows the capture of a certain kind of locally valued fish, *and* it refers to a series of ideas and practices that the Ankave associate with eels, namely the human (or superhuman) origin of this fish, its anchoring in sexuality, and women's ambiguous role in its capture, as well as the fate of an ill-mannered man belonging to an earlier

humanity, the part a woman took in it, and the fish's association with a patrilineage land. From an emic point of view that is in Anga everyday life and interactions, the different roles of each of these objects in the making, thinking, and reproduction of particular social relations are undistinguishable.

What is at stake is not the methodological dualism of *field* anthropologists, but understanding the possible specificity of material actions in blending together several among the diverse fields of human thought and action that anthropologists conveniently distinguish.

In the case of the eel trap, the main quality of this blending relates in several ways to Ankave gender relations. First, it echoes gender asymmetry and ambiguity in their Ankave variety. On the one hand, the object and a well-delimited step in its making and use remind everyone that a woman had a key role in sizing men's penises. On the other hand, the wife's activation of the trap is imbued with an ambivalence that is consistent with the representation of women's powers in Anga culture. In effect, the device she tests is already made and finished, which is a reminder of men's part in this making. But above all, while the woman's participation is clearly exhibited when she releases the springs and pronounces a magical formula, the trapper silently speaks his own enchantment; he will perform another course of magical action on his own if the eels do not come to the trap, something that definitely minimises his wife's action. Last, the fish captured by the trap is the strongest symbol of a patrilineal territory in a cultural system in which women, not men, transmit the one and only life principle, i.e., women's blood.[7]

An Ankave eel trap is not only a means to blend extremely diverse thoughts and registers of actions. It also shakes up some anthropological borders. First, we have seen that what is supposed to be a common-place object designed to capture fish happens to be a material device that brings together seemingly disparate domains of the Ankave's social interactions and system of thought. It is one of these objects whose making, appearance, and physical usage are part of a non-verbal communication, namely that of fundamental cultural values.[8] An eel trap does something that the words of the myth alone cannot do.

What Is a Trap For? Disrupting Anthropological Categories

Ankave eel traps are furthermore remarkable for anthropologists because they cannot—and should not—be assigned to the "technical," "ritual," "mythical," or even "gender" realm of social relations. As we have seen, it is impossible to pigeon-hole the action of the woman releasing the triggering mechanism of the trap. What she does is

simultaneously "technical" and "ritual," and she is obviously repeating a mythical episode at the same time. On the contrary, eel traps illustrate a *sui generis* conjunction of thoughts, actions, and relations that *we* would attribute to definite subdomains of human life.[9] As Latour (e.g., 2005) has so often stressed, in such a case, there is no addition of a "symbolic" or "social" dimension to a given "technological" situation: the local practice that has to be understood by anthropology is that admixture underlined by Mauss (1934[2006]:82). This, in turn, has two important consequences.

First, it leads us to investigate the specificities of this assemblage made possible by material productions and the reasons why artefacts and physical actions may be particularly suitable for anchoring and making thinkable such a convergence of domains of human life. Second, although anthropology of ritual almost always refers to an opposition between ritual and technical actions—the former displaying actions lacking any "rational" means–end relationship (Goody 1961:156)—the case of the Ankave eel trap demonstrates that what *has* to be understood is an indivisible mixture of ritual, myth, and technical action.

Last, another feature of these eel traps is that their mere appearance denotes, both to the anthropologists and to the Ankave, who recognise the expertise embedded in their traps, that they are skillfully constructed. The swarm of "messages" or "meanings" that is conveyed is not to be read in any symbol of sorts that might be painted, engraved, or otherwise added to the trap. The penile background of the eel is based purely on the Ankave's apprehension of the tangibly oversized mechanical peculiarities of the trap: eels and the male penis are so mighty that the artefact designed to hold them in their fish form has to look like a indestructible container.

This point, on which I had already built my earlier analysis of these traps, was developed and surpassed by Gell in his paper "Vogel's Net: Traps as Artworks and Artworks as Traps" (1996). I will comment later (Chapter 6) on Gell's very particular definition of "technology" and on his propositions concerning the "agency" objects, but I must here mention his interpretation of the Ankave artefact to replace what he rightly stresses about traps in general within my own approach and also to disagree with his interpretation of a particular, and important, point of ethnography.

Besides Gell's new reflection on traps,[10] his invitation to "define as a candidate artwork any object or performance that potentially rewards scrutiny because it embodies intentionalities that are complex, demanding of attention and perhaps difficult to reconstruct fully" (Gell 1996:36) is in line with the blurring of anthropological categories and borders I just documented. One may respond that the following sentence

could as well be applied to a Baruya fence, but an Ankave trap indeed "embod[ies] ideas, convey[s] meanings, because . . . by its very nature, [it] is a transformed representation of its maker, the hunter, and the prey animal, its victim, and of their mutual relationship" (Gell 1996:29). It is noteworthy that Gell mentions explicitly the "material forms and mechanisms" as the medium by which the "nexus of intentionalities between hunters and prey animals" is communicated. Indeed, the Ankave representation of the eel is partly underlined and produced by the trap being formally as it is *as well as* by the myth that explains how eels became eels.

Gell also took his reading of the Ankave traps further and interpreted them as "'images of the ancestors' in the sense that they contain 'ancestral power'" (1996:34). This is either vague or wrong, and misleading with respect to the precise load of representations the Ankave embark in their artefacts. It is merely vague if it means that the trap is a reference to past events during which a woman played a key role in the origin of the eels as well as a reference to the male ancestor's power possibly embedded in eels, which are related to a segment of his supernatural penis. But it is mostly wrong because nothing in the Ankave ethnography supports the idea that there is any "power" in the trap itself, save the same capacity to capture powerful eels as any other eel trap also has. In particular, the ritual activation of the traps by a woman related to its maker and user expresses nothing about the trap, except that another kind of trap (a deadfall trap [*mete'*] based on other mechanical principles and unique in its genre) was once used by an ancestral woman to cut a penis, indirectly producing eels.

"Producing eels," not traps. Nothing in the materiality of the trap or in its making alludes to a role played by ancestors in its design or origin. The trap is indeed involved in a non-verbal communication about the mighty ancestral strength of the eels, but it contains no ancestral power, nor does it result from ancestral power. In other words, one can rightly say that the trap materialises a story full of ancestors and powers: the power to have sex at a distance, the power to modify forever the length of men's penises, and the power of a very energetic penis and its eely transformation. But neither the ethnography, nor the myth, nor the object itself can be used to argue plausibly that traps are "'images' of ancestral power that accomplish work, (and) actually nourish those who make them" (Gell 1996:34). The mere sight of the trap and observation of its painstaking fabrication tells us something about the penis/eel, not about the trap, its origin, or its ancestrality.

In passing, this *is* of course "apparent to the uninstructed" and to "a native," contrary to what Gell thought, and if it was not so, the whole argument would fall apart (Gell 1996:33, 34). Unlike anthropologists, the Ankave may not have the possibility to compare their traps with

those made by other Anga groups, although this is not even sure,[11] but they have witnessed on countless occasions the force deployed for days by the trap-makers to store up the passive energy that will oppose the thrashings of the captured eel.[12] The Ankave are fully aware of the effort and skill needed to make an eel trap, and they comment that young men in their early 20s could not achieve it.

In Chapter 4, we shall see that the sacred objects and theatres of the male rituals are cases in which some Ankave ancestral powers are present in a material device, and that this presence is made tangible through the physical characteristics of these ritual artefacts. But regarding the trap, we have a story materialised by an object (for those who know this story), and a property of eels is explained in this story and physically demonstrated by the very materiality of the traps; but there is no ancestral power in the trap.

As we shall see near the end of this book, this is not a collateral remark about a usual case of anthropological overinterpretation. My disagreement in fact lies with an essential theoretical point regarding the ability that some objects and material actions have to reinforce shared systems of thought and action, and more particularly the eventual role of supernatural agents, namely that the fundamental function of artefacts underlined here is by no means restricted to ritual or religious situations. For the time being, what has yet to be explored are the material modalities of the blending of representations and situations that happens in the mind of actors variously engaged with some particular objects, as well as the nature of the message that is thus communicated.[13]

Chapter 3

The Anthropological Complexity of Unremarkable Drums

The third object in my series of misleadingly mundane artefacts is an hourglass-shaped drum. Unlike an eel trap, this object—made of wood, vegetal ties, and a dried python skin—would survive almost forever in a museum, but it is nonetheless another Ankave production that will never end up in a display window, except in the event of a not-yet-planned exhibition of anthropologically attractive but ordinary and poor-looking objects. For personal reasons, I have an Ankave drum hanging on my living room wall, but by New Guinea standards, it is an undecorated and unsophisticated hand drum, resembling those produced by southern New Guinea societies, but lacking in any kind of "art work," such as sculpture, engraving, or painting.[1] At first glance, it is a musical instrument, something that might be described laconically on a museum file card as: "wood, python skin, animal wax, mid twentieth century?" On closer examination, it is more complicated; much like the eel traps, with a basket or platform on which corpses used to be left to decay and particular body decorations, the drums belong to the series of objects involved in the mortuary practices of the Ankave and play a highly important role in the ritual by which the spirits of the recent dead are expelled from the world of the living.

Mourning, Drums, and Cannibal Spirits

These drums are called *songen*, a word that designates both the instrument and the ceremonies in which it is used. It looks like an elongated hourglass (the ones I saw measured 77 to 120 centimetres in length) made of two long cones joined at the tips and often topped with a handle. The head of the instrument, which is struck with the hand, has a maximum diameter of 11 to 13 centimetres, whereas the opening for

the sound ranges from 12 to 16 centimetres. The drum skin and the pellets of wax that are stuck on to tune it bear the name of the material from which they are made (*sindre' waa'*, or "snakeskin," and *undaa'*, or "insect wax"); alternatively, the other parts of the instrument are described using vocabulary for human or animal bodies: "shoulder" (*saongwen*) for the handle; "mouth" (*manga*) for the opening over which the membrane is glued and tied; and "anus" (*ike' manga*) for the opening. The narrow part in the middle is the "throat" (*ngu'no'*). The cones themselves are both described as "middles" (*a'wone'*), in the sense of "intermediate parts."

These hourglass drums are central to the ritual of second funerals, which the Ankave organise a year or two (and sometimes much later) after a person's death. It is at this time that the spirits of those who have died recently (*pisingen siwi'*) are driven away from the world of the living; it is the time when people can "forget" the spirit of the recent dead. These ceremonies are held at least once a year and gather from 100 to 200 people for nighttime "dancing," loud singing, and drumming, all of which lasts between 8 and 20 days/nights. Those in charge of this rite are the deceased's close kinsmen (brother, husband, sons, etc.). "In charge" means that they have decided to organise the ceremony, that they are the ones who trap the eels, and that they decide the timing of the event: when to start and when to end the ritual.

Figure 23. Drum-beating *songen* ceremony at Ayakupna'wa (1987).

No one really knows where a *pisingen siwi'* goes once it is separated forever from the body it used to inhabit. To be sure, it may nibble on the liver of a kinsman, such as a niece or a nephew, to make her or him sick in revenge for poor relations in the past, but also that of a beloved spouse, so that s/he dies and keeps the dead person company. Does it stay around the grave? Does it reside in the mourning decorations (*aziare'*) people wear? Or does it wander near its old home? On the other hand, everyone takes for granted that it is expelled from the world of the living forever during the drum ceremony.

These *songen* rituals are the most visible part of a thought system that revolves around vile, man-eating beings, invisible and deeply hostile to humans, known as *ombo'*, which the Ankave hold responsible for most fatal illnesses: any serious illness occurring outside the bad season (November to February), or the death of an old person stems from the deliberate action of a being capable of thought. Since the ban on fighting was instated,[2] open violence has given way to more subtle forms of aggression, of which the Ankave give pride of place to the work of sorcerers (*ayao'*) and, above all, the *ombo'*.

The *ombo'*, who came into the world at the same time as humans, are a band of dreadful, famished beings that haunt the Ankave's everyday life. They look like ordinary men, women, or children, except that they harbour a human-eating being, which they direct as they wish. Ontologically, these are neither human nor spirits but instead the *sui generis* combination of a human being (man, woman, or a child having reached the age of reason) and a cannibal spirit. What is important is that the host be old enough to have the will to direct his *ombo'* towards a victim. An *ombo'* is simply an emanation of the human being that harbours him; his host is not a witch.

To those who can see them, the evil-doing invisible hybrids look like "wind," or like a "shade." They travel underground and can also fly like birds. When *ombo'* from different Ankave valleys gather for some cannibalistic feast, they travel along strings of cowry shells, which they fold up like a rope ladder when they get home. To approach their victim, they take the form of various animals: rats, birds, snakes, and, most frequently, fireflies. One must be particularly careful of animals seen at the wrong time or in the wrong place, such as a diurnal lizard seen at night, a wild cassowary that does not run away but follows you, or an unfamiliar domestic pig wandering around. In particular, all animal gatherings (fireflies, frogs) are highly suspicious and lead people to suspect a band of body-eaters most probably going to or coming back from a cannibalistic feast. When *ombo'* get close to their human target, they abandon the animal appearance used in making their approach. The detested hybrids then throw an invisible object into the victim's body (in the case of an

action supposed to cause illness); if they intend to cut and take some flesh, they enter the future victim in the form of wind.

Ombo' have always existed, but their numbers are increasing these days: for fear of sanctions from the administration, people who would have been wounded or killed with bow and arrows some 20 years ago are said to be the target of *ombo'* now. The very recent abundance of fireflies is seen as proof of the renewed outbreak of attacks by these monsters. This is confirmed by the shamans, who continually describe their patients as suffering from interrupted circulation and haemorrhages, which they attribute to the work of the *ombo'*. The objective of an *ombo'* attack is always the same: to feast collectively on the rotting flesh of Ankave corpses when these cannibalistic spirits gather in the darkest depths of the forest, particularly at the bottom of ponds; their intrusion has no other immediate purpose than the more or less rapid death of those they attack.

Altogether, *ombo'* are held responsible for most fatal illnesses. If there were no *ombo'*, people would die only when they became old, and only during the bad season. *Ombo'* play two essential sociological roles, at least from the anthropologist's point of view. First, they are said to attack, devour, and share among themselves the men, women, and children who themselves are believed to have refused to share. The *ombo'* are therefore a constant reminder of one of the pillars of the Ankave social order, which is the obligation to acquiesce to all requests for food or objects. Second, they are de facto in charge of ridding the village of the flesh of corpses, which they are believed to devour. They are also deeply connected with the *songen* ritual and with the drums.

These drums are a means to make as much noise as possible to threaten the *pisingen siwi'* and make her or him go away forever and leave the living in peace. But the origin myths of the end-of-mourning ceremony tell another story. The drums were in fact given to humans long ago by the *ombo'* cannibal spirits: not only did they give the drums and the technical sequence for making them, the *ombo'* also gave the humans the masks worn by the drummers and the songs sung during the *songen*. As they discovered the drums, reputed to have been stolen from the *ombo'*, men concurrently discovered the transitory nature of life, sexuality, and marriage payments. As we can see, the matter is of some importance.

One day, long ago, according to the myths, an ancestor heard a noise (drumming and singing) and came to a pond where the sound was located. He saw a whirlpool from which a drum popped out while a song was coming from the water: "*Nerwambona-a-a rwambewayo nerobewa topewayo*." This phrase is in an unknown language but usually is construed as "*ombo'* are eating an uncooked man with *rwambore'* green leaves."[3] The drum floated as long as he listened to the many songs that

the Ankave sing today during the *songen*, but when he tried to catch it, it suddenly disappeared beneath the water. Another instrument appeared and was seized by the man. Leaves and pieces of bark were attached to it. He took all these things and hid the drum until nightfall. When he arrived with the instrument and song, people were amazed by the beauty of these new sounds. The next morning, everyone looked at the drum and tried to interpret the various vegetal clues to discover which trees and lianas were to be used to make a drum, and how each tool or element for making the drum was to be used.

In the story, the "technical myth" is immediately followed by another myth, which explains how the python, whose skin is to be used, was an eternal being that could not die, and how it got to the sky after a series of adventures and became the thunder (Lemonnier 2006a:212–21). The myth and its variants also explain how to capture a python and which kind of python, and how to go about covering the drum with its sun-dried skin.

In other words, the tales associated with the *songen* drums do more than explain the role of the *ombo'* and that of an Ankave's ancestor in providing them. The *ombo'* and the water also supplied human beings with enough information about the operational sequences to be used for producing new drums. The myths contain a step-by-step explanation of how to make the instrument, an explicit operational sequence that furthermore underscores the key aspects of the imaginary device whereby the Ankave dispose of their dead. It is noteworthy that the story dwells on the several careful steps needed to fashion and pierce the "throat," or narrow section, of the drum. Indeed, the *chaîne opératoire* given in the myth would almost match the detailed one that an anthropologist would describe from watching the making of an hourglass drum.

Imagining the Invisible: An Anthropological Interpretation of the Drums and Drum Ceremony

The man responsible for organising a *songen* is one of the deceased's close kinsmen (brother, husband, sons, etc.). He is the one who decides which night these end-of-mourning rites will start, considering his own agenda, the weather, and the propensity of eels to enter the traps he has set. Beating the drums and leading the *songen* chants are male prerogatives. Men, too, are the only ones allowed to wear the head decoration (a sort of conic mask with two arms, each terminated by a cockatoo feather) called *newimbere'* (bird of paradise), referring to the feathers that top it off. Depending on the hour and the degree of fatigue, anywhere from 5 to sometimes even 40 men, women, and children turn single file in a circle, chanting. On the edges of the small "dancing" ground, participants cluster around fires, especially when the predawn

chill begins to fall. And so it goes night after night from midnight until dawn (except when it pours with rain, which is not uncommon). As soon as the sun breaks over the wall of mountains that closes the upper end of the valley, everyone goes home to get some sleep.

The end of the *songen* ceremony comes when its organiser decides that enough nights of drum beating have been held to chase away the spirit(s) of the dead for good. It is marked by the abandoning of the *aziare'* mourning decorations, and, if it is the fruiting season, the end of the ban on consuming red pandanus juice that the deceased's spouse had respected since the death of his wife or her husband. This is also the time when payments are made to the maternal kin. In particular, the eels captured during the previous weeks or days are killed, rapidly smoked above a house hearth, and distributed. At that stage, and explicitly, people have "forgotten" the dead person, whose *pisingen siwi'* has gone.

For the Ankave, the ghost leaves the living amid the din of the drums; none of the Ankave ever explained to me how that happened. However, there is no mystery as to how the spirit of someone who has recently died passes into the world of the *ombo'*, because the drums were associated from the start with exchange and the passage from the world of men to that of man-eating monsters. Ankave people know that while the humans

Figure 24. While most people circle and beat drums, others rest near fires and chew betel nut. Wite Teradze warms the drum skin on his belly to tune it (Ayakupna'wa, 1987).

are indefatigably circling to the sound of the drums, the *ombo'* are doing likewise in a parallel realm, or rather a symmetrical one, since their myths say that they organise their own *songen* ceremonies in the depths of ponds. The myths, the ceremony of the rituals, and observation of the drum and the *newimbere'* mask-wearer all indicate that the hourglass drum plays a crucial role in dismissing the spirits of those who have died recently.

When the first hourglass drum was discovered, floating vertically for a moment at the surface of the water, it appeared as a passage between the two sides of the water, between the world of the *ombo'* and the human world. According to my (anthropological) interpretation, the *pisingen siwi'* is drawn in by the arms of the *newimbere'* mask that continually whip the air[4] and is driven towards the other world by the racket made by the drum skin, the exact roar that resounded on either side of the water when the Ankave ancestor discovered this wonderful object. At this point, the spirit slips through the two pieces of the instrument, about which the myths recounting the origin of the *songen* ceremonies have much to say: the narrow piece that connects the two chambers of the drum and the python-skin membrane acts as a gateway to eternity. The hourglass drum now appears as what it primarily is: a funnel-shaped psychopomp that conveys souls from one world to the other, a narrow canal whereby the ghost travels from this world to that of the *ombo'*.

Figure 25. The arms of the *newimbere'* mask attract the spirit of the recent dead (*pisingen siwi'*), who are then funnelled via the drums to the world of the *ombo'* (Ayakupna'wa, 1987).

The *pisingen siwi'* emerges amid the dancing *ombo'*—that is to say, in the midst of their cannibal feast—for, unlike ordinary humans, who are satisfied with eels and tubers, these hybrid beings divide up and consume the flesh of a cadaver during their own *songen*. Even if it was not enough to know that the *ombo'* make their own rounds to the sound of the drumbeat while men keep them chained up night after night in our world, the fact that *ombo'* are sometimes seen in the midst of the dancers, carrying a corpse on their back, would already lend weight to the idea that these rituals given to mankind by the monsters must indeed have something to do with the mysterious transmutation of *pisingen siwi'* into *ombo'*.

Figure 26. Once the *pisingen siwi'* has been driven away, the living feast on sweet potatoes and tubers, while those who have received the smoked eels eat them (Ayakupna'wa, 1987).

Drumming to Forget with the Help of an Invisible Cannibal Band: An Artefact in Context

At that point, we could be satisfied with the idea that the Ankave drums are material actors in the dismissal of the dead, which Robert Hertz demonstrated some time ago to be a universal aspect of human social life. After all, the *ombo'* have given human beings the ceremony and the device to collectively cope with mourning, and this ritual has both a social and a psychological function. Yet, if we were to content ourselves with this result, we would miss a lot of the anthropological complexity of what is going on when members of this tiny population of New Guinea make and use these drums. In particular, in terms of ethnography, to limit the drums' role to a mortuary practice would be to ignore the overwhelming place of the cannibal *ombo'* in Ankave' culture. And in terms of anthropological theory, it would miss a yet-unnoticed function of objects in people's lives.

Let's start by the *ombo*'s place in Ankave world. Because they are invisible—or rather, usually invisible—these dangerous and terrifying characters are mostly made of words. First of all, there are the words spoken by the shamans during their seances, and then the words that compose the stories we call myths, which are notably the reason why everyone agrees that what the shamans' spirit familiars (*pidze' menaa'*) see in a sick human's body results indeed from the action of *ombo'*. Every day, at dawn and twilight, one can hear the whistles by which the *kwoda'* (shamans) encourage their *pidze' menaa'*. As a matter of fact, the bulk of the shaman's everyday healing consists in removing the objects the *ombo'* have injected into the patient's body and then repairing the intestines or blood vessels in shamanistic sessions that go on into the night. In the most complex cures, the shamans send their *pidze'menaa'* into the invisible world to retrieve the spirit an *ombo'* has stolen from the sick person in view of sapping their strength or killing them. Ankave shamans also use special powers during funerals that allow them to see and locate invisible attacking *ombo'* attracted by the corpse's smell, which makes them greedy for flesh, and to designate them to people around who can then shoot arrows to chase them away. Thus, in the past, people who could not explain why they had an arrow-like wound were accused of being *ombo'* that had been shot by good people, and those bearing such a scar were then killed, cut into pieces, and thrown into the torrent.[5]

The other series of words that feed the *ombo*'s manners, intentionalities, motives, and ontology are those contained in the myths, for if very few people have seen *ombo'*, many "true stories" give detailed accounts of some people's encounters with the hated band of cannibals. These men and women who have survived stumbling across *ombo'* confirm

that they look like animals. Even more important, those who have had the horrible surprise of identifying an *ombo'* in the crowd of hungry ghouls have recognised maternal kinsmen, notably maternal uncles and maternal cross-cousins! They looked exactly like these relatives, except for their red eyes and their dog-like ears.

The beings who eat the corpses of the Ankave are maternal kin, and this makes sense. If people see their maternal kinsmen in the *ombo'*, it is because these uncles, aunts, or cousins always claim they have not received enough gifts to compensate the birth of children who are "one blood" with them. In effect, a foetus is believed to feed and grow on maternal blood (without the aid of any paternal substance), and everyone agrees that a brother has given to his sister's children the life-giving blood he shares with her when she transferred to the lineage of her husband. Yet, both the recruiting of lineage members and the rights and duties of these members are patrilineal. A person "belongs" to his or her father's group, and, in the long term, land is transmitted from father to sons.[6] It is also to their father's group that boys and girls contribute their force as producers and, in the case of the boys, as warriors. This creates tension. Ultimately, the *ombo'* are like mothers who eat their own children, first giving life and then recycling the life-giving substances by sharing the bodies of the dead.

Drums, *ombo'*, Material Actions, and Ritual

Drums are essential for dispatching the recent dead from the Ankave realm of the living, and those characters who are omnipresent in the mortuary ritual and receive the dead are greedy maternal kin. But, in addition to these anthropological "results" explaining a particular ethnography, the analysis of the *songen* ceremony leads to a series of hypotheses bearing on a specific role played by material actions in rituals.

During the nights of *songen*, people have in mind, in some way or another, the mythical origin of the drums and the reason why they make these instruments with a given wood, lianas, python skin, etc., in the manner they do. They know the part the *ombo'* played at the origin of the ceremony as well as their bad habit of killing and eating humans. They differentiate their own ongoing *songen* from that of the members of the cannibal band. They know how the terrifying hybrids gather, dance, and feast. They also remember the words of the shamans and many stories that are linked in some way or another to the *ombo'* and to the aura of ambiguity and anxiety that locally transforms the origin and gift of human life into an everyday burden.

As for the words that dozens of people shout for hours, these are uttered in a language that is no longer theirs while they beat drums,

wave the *newimbere'* arms, or walk. These words are clearly not enough to convey the bundle of meanings, contexts, and actions that revolve around the *ombo'* in Ankave culture, especially the contradictory message they convey about maternal kin. The persons who sing and circle until dawn know why they are there beating drums in the middle of the night and why a recently deceased person will be gone and theoretically forgotten at the end of the *songen*. And, they do not ignore that it is notably for fear of the *ombo'* that they live in scattered forest camps to which they will return the next day. They are used to the ambiguity of their maternal kin and know how to behave in their presence. They have also assimilated the reason for the parents' endless gifts, the lasting greed of the maternal aunts and uncles, and the menace they represent for their nieces and nephews. They remember that most of the shamans' daily tasks consist of observing the viscera of *ombo'* victims and trying to repair them. Needless to say, everyone has firsthand knowledge of the *ombo*'s responsibility in people's death and their role in the slow disappearance of the corpses' flesh.

All these references to the drums and the *ombo'* intersect in many ways in the Ankave's ordinary life and pervade their behaviours, exchanges, worries, strategies, illnesses, emotions, hopes, and despairs. What is thus made present in the minds of the participants is a network connecting cannibal monsters, shamanism, the various origins of illnesses and the ways to cure them, the management of mourning, the representation of life, and the proper conduct in the presence of maternal kin.

In their own way, the Ankave's nocturnal use of the drums and the endless round involve gestures, emotions, thoughts, images, and sounds that, when taken together, "tell" the same story of dead people and their transfer to the parallel party of the *ombo'*. Even smells are involved; according to the shamans, *ombo'* carrying a decayed corpse on their back sometimes force their way into the midst of the dancers, which makes some people feel the need to wash in a nearby stream to remove the matter and odours that may have touched them. The drums and their nighttime beating link and mix domains as *diverse* as the ambiguity of those kin, the origin of the drums and that of the shortness of life, the dispersion of the bush camps, or the collective banquet of the *ombo'*. It is only during the *songen* rituals—and because of the very physical use of the drums—that all these aspects of life converge and bounce off each other. The artefact and the material actions are what make several domains of social life resonate together, and their resonance is a unique way of communicating particular messages. Or, as we shall see, it is a way of communicating *one* new message, which results from the convergence of what is simultaneously brought to the minds of the participants.

Figure 27. Drum-beating night after night in a deafening atmosphere is the work the Ankave have to do to piece together in a non-verbal way the ins and outs of the ambiguity of maternal kin (Ayakupna'wa, 19-87).

If so many facets of Ankave life are brought together during these ceremonies, it is because the drums were given by the *ombo'* and were (and still are) made and used according to their instructions. It is because they are physical funnels linking the world of the *ombo'* and that of the living and, furthermore, in circumstances recalled and physically re-enacted during a *songen* night. The non-verbal communication is not based on an indirect evocation of the origin and making of the drums. It hangs on the very materiality of what is done during the nights of drumming because it deals precisely with what is going on: the departure of a *pisingen siwi'* towards the world of the *ombo'*.

Amid the racket of a dozen drums and the pandemonium of the participants, the churning round of stamping men, women, and children draws every participant into the ritual recreation of the whirlpool in the

pond, while the funnel-drums convey the spirits of the dead towards the middle of the maelstrom; that is, towards the gate temporarily opened between the two faces of Ankave society. Remember that the first drum to emerge appeared floating vertically, with its narrow middle section (its "throat") right on the border between the human and the *ombo'* worlds. Instantly it passed from the bubbling whirlpool into the hands of an Ankave ancestor. The instrument now held by humans stands in precisely the position designated by the function assigned to it by the *ombo'* and, through them, by the Ankave culture: that of a double funnel linking the two sides of the same entity, the Ankave society, with its living and its dead.

In conclusion, it is all these actions that saturate the participants' minds with the idea that the *ombo'* are maternal kin responsible both for giving life and for taking back the flesh of their nieces, nephews, and cousins by cannibalising their corpses during drum-beating ceremonies that reflect those of the Ankave actors. Beating drums is a unique way of bringing together myth, ritual efficacy, and material actions by doing and making things, and not by looking at them or talking about them.

During Ankave mortuary rituals, and because of the drums on which they are focused, various aspects are made present to the minds of the participants through material action, through contact with matter: making the drums (cutting trees, making a hole in a log, hunting "immortal snakes," looking for lianas, etc.), beating the drums, singing, waving the "hands" of the masks, walking, and walking again in a circle. The words of the myths inform the making and the use of the drums, and the gestures that produce these instruments deal at once with the origin and the use of these artefacts. In the end, the material actions performed during a *songen* play a preeminent role in the building and the wordless revelation—"emergence" (Hutchins 2005), actually—of the unspeakable status of maternal kin as gentle life-givers and detestable killers and cannibals.

In such a case again—something that would also be true of the eel trap—trying to disentangle objects or actions in order to classify them as "artistic," "ritual," or "technical" would precisely miss what has to be understood (i.e., the sui generis and efficient blending of domains allowed by the drums). I shall come back to that point later, but let us also remark that what is at stake in the actions surrounding the ear-splitting drums has *nothing* to do with affairs of identity, power, economic status, social hierarchies, evaluation, or controversies, which are the mainstream approaches to that domain taken by anthropology and sociology.

For the present, we must further concentrate on the functioning of the kind of non-verbal communication—"non-representational significance" (Tuzin 2002:18)—in which artefacts as various as a garden fence,

an eel trap, and a drum are involved. In other words: how does it all work? What enables material actions—in reality, a series of material actions and objects—to convene actors' thoughts and beliefs so that all-important cultural values and key social relations and behaviours are envisaged simultaneously?

To get closer to an answer to this question, the following chapter will look at particular objects that are not so mundane, especially not to those who use them—a ritual theatre for male initiations and the ultimate sacred pouches of the Anga masters of initiations—and compare them with an ordinary device used for hunting magic.

Chapter 4

Artefacts as Images or How to Relate Relations

The secret and sacred objects that an Anga master of initiations carefully looked after cannot really be called mundane; nor can the material setting of a ritual theatre constructed in the forest for the duration of a male ceremony. These material productions are not part of the basic Anga toolkit; they are usually hidden away and seldom used, and their effectiveness—the way they affect people's lives—belongs to the realm of magic. Whereas a fence, a trap, or a drum are all objects for which the physical action is obvious, the effect that the material operations or artefacts used in rituals have on various beings, human or not, lacks the kind of causal link between action and result observed in the technical domain.

However, what may be a useful opposition to anthropologists struggling to distinguish realms of human life, such as "ritual," "religious," or "technical," to discover what best characterises them, may be irrelevant or even misleading in the present case. In effect, defining "technical" in opposition to "ritual" obscures what needs to be understood; namely, how objects, gestures, or physical activity participate in human relations in a way that nothing else but material actions and artefacts can achieve, whether or not the effects locally attributed to them are compatible with our own ideas about the kind of physical causality underlying a "real" material action.

After all, if I had stuck to the usual range of kinship studies, I could not have demonstrated that a wooden garden fence paradoxically participates in a kinship practice. Similarly, as soon as I wish to investigate the roles material actions have in rituals, I must take into account what the people I am interested in consider to be material actions, even though we would classify these actions as "imaginary." With such an emic point of view, it is clear that many objects put into play in various rituals

are locally seen to exert very material actions, although these actions are largely invisible and do not comply with the laws of physics. They nonetheless are locally thought of as material. What is at stake for the anthropologist is to understand how and why the materiality in question is associated with a particular ritual effect; that is, what is said to happen during or after the ritual. Such is the case of the material devices used by the Anga during their male initiations. These are, notably, objects that allow important beings of the past to be present among the living.

Male Initiations among the Anga of Papua New Guinea

Anga societies are characterised by a tightly interlocking system of warfare, male initiations, and male–female antagonism. There is no ceremonial exchange between groups, and exchanges (of women, goods, hostilities) are kept strictly balanced. Anga political leaders were[1] "Great Men" singled out by their hereditary functions (as ritual masters) or their skills (as great warriors, hunters, or shamans) as being superior to other men, at least in the exercise of these functions (see Godelier 1986a).

All Anga groups share the idea that women's sexual physiology is detrimental to men, that it saps their bellicosity and therefore jeopardises the group (Lemonnier 2004b). The initiations are a source of physical and moral strength for the men, and are the framework for the transmission of the practical knowledge that enables them to mitigate this dangerous state of affairs. The initiation rituals, which are mandatory for all boys, are presented by the Anga as procedures necessary to complete the maturation of young boys of 8 to 13 years of age and turn them into adult men, into strong warriors able to control their fear and stick together in all circumstances, however terrifying and dangerous. Less-explicit but still-crucial functions of the initiations are the reproduction of the hierarchies (men versus women, ritual experts versus ordinary men, older initiates versus young men), the separation from the mother, and the transformations of the relationship between a man, his mother, his sister, and his wife (Bonnemère 2009:232–33). For the outside observer, the process at the end of which the boys appear as transfigured, "completed," males and warriors is patterned on the human physiological process of conception, intrauterine growth and feeding, and birth. This "rebirth" follows the initiates' brief, close encounter with a state of death or with dead people, prior to being reborn. Last, in all Anga groups, the whole process of male initiation is anchored in the distant common past.

At the core of this transformation process is a series of objects, the most prominent of which are those possessed by the men who are the masters of the initiations. In some way or another, and notwithstanding

Figure 28. Building the *tsimia* during the Baruya male rituals (Yanyi, June 1985). The next *tsimia* was held in 2005.

their present geographical dispersion in 40 or so local groups ("tribes") that today speak 12 different languages, the Anga represent themselves as those people who, in a distant past, received and still hold these objects that allow them to make the boys grow, despite the influence of women.

Many of these objects are gathered in a bundle, the possession of which gives their status and role to the man in charge of the initiations, or rather to the men who belong to various clans that are jointly responsible for the ritual work. There are always several such sacred artefacts in one given local group, ranging from two objects among the Ankave to seven among the Baruya. These sacred bundles, held and looked after by specialists, are also secret objects: for the women, who at most see their external envelope from afar; for the novices, who are almost unable to look around them and are stunned by the potential violence and the incredible powers locked up in these objects; and for ordinary men, who have only a vague notion of their content. They are used, thought, experienced, and even explicitly presented as the quintessence of the group's culture and identity. Their theft or destruction is considered a catastrophe. The fact that members of a particular Anga group recognise themselves and each other in such an object means they consider that they are what they are because of the existence and use of their sacred bundles. And thanks to their myths, or "ancestors' stories," they

Figure 29. Each holding a sacred *kwaimatnie*, three Baruya "Great Men" of the Tsatse clan transmit the powers of the Sun into the novices' bodies (Wonenara, 1979).

know in detail why these things set them apart from all other human beings. An Anga sacred object simultaneously defines a tribal identity and distinguishes Anga tribes in general from non-Anga people.

Altogether, the Anga secret bundles and the things, gestures, etc., that go with them give the anthropologist an opportunity to understand how the artefacts in question intervene in a same (or roughly same) type of ritual action—initiating boys—both within one given society and in different societies. My cases will again be taken among the Ankave.

The Origin of Humanity, of the Ankave, and of Their Sacred Objects

The Ankave locate the male rituals they perform in a historical past (for us, a mythical past), which is largely that of the origin of the powers brought into play by the masters of the initiations and contained in a ritual expert's magical bundle (*oremere*), or in the things and plants associated with this sacred object. An *oremere* and related objects are linked to two remote ancestors: an Ankave man who was at the origin of humanity at large and, less explicitly, to a cassowary that was changed into the first real woman. Both ancestors intervene during the first and second connected stages of the rituals.

The putting to "death" of the novices by piercing their nasal septum is the key moment of the first stage; then comes their growth with the help of red pandanus juice, then their "rebirth." Let me emphasise here that death and rebirth are not the anthropologist's projection of van Gennep's interpretation of rites of passage (1909[1960]). When I once said to an Ankave expert that I wondered why he held an eagle feather while doing a certain thing at a certain time (digging up ginger roots), he answered that "the object had to know that he was going to kill the boys." Whatever the ambiguity of the Ankave verb *peki-arenne* ("to beat, slaughter") he used, and that of the similarly equivocal Tok Pisin equivalent he gave me (*kilim*, which means anything between beating, making unconscious, or killing), the lethal liminality of the gesture is clear. Furthermore, the close encounter with death is no joke, nor is it merely "symbolic," since an infected wound of the nasal septum is something that can indeed kill a novice. As for the rebirth, the Ankave give an unequivocal proof of it when the women who receive the new initiates at the entrance to the village after weeks of seclusion in the forest go through a brief ritual similar to that performed on newborn babies.

Figure 30. Unlike their Baruya counterparts, the Ankave *ipane* initiates are allowed to approach women once they have left the ceremonial lodge in which they have endured the two first stages of the male rituals (Ikundi, 1994).

The Ankave myths say that the first man to come into our world gave those who followed him—the respective ancestors of the 12 different Anga linguistic groups—their specific language and their body ornaments before each set out on the long trail that eventually led them to their present-day territory. This First Man was put to death "because he had no name." Then, an eagle came and, with its claws, dispersed the viscera and bones of the ancestor so that each Anga group got its own bone, which they then made into the awls used to pierce the septum of the boy initiates.

All Angans have a fairly similar myth relating the origin of present-day humanity (i.e., Anga humanity) and often the origin of the male rituals, too (Lemonnier 2005), but the Ankave myth says that they took the main bone of the right arm of the primordial man. It also specifies that from his blood and the soil it soaked sprang the red cordylines that generation after generation of ritual experts have cut and used to delineate and decorate the sacred enclosures where they initiate the boys. The red pandanus tree, the fruit of which is used for a juice that is equated with human blood, grew from this blood, too (Bonnemère 1994, 2001). The First Man's spirit then came in a dream to show the Ankave how to grow the young boys and make them strong through initiation.

Many generations after this all-important and founding event, the bones and blood of this primordial ancestor are made present and tangible at the ritual scene of the male initiations in four ways: by the sacred bundle and its contents; by the juice of particular cultivars of pandanus; by the soil that the First Man's blood soaked, which is magically preserved in a bamboo tube and rubbed on the initiates' bodies; and by the elements of the ritual theatre where the initiations take place, in particular a dark-red cultivar of cordyline that the master of the initiations replants near his own house. As we can see, the objects and material apparatus central to male rituals are not at all mundane artefacts. They are highly valued objects which convey tremendous ancestral powers that the Ankave themselves amalgamate with the story of their own origin as human beings and a society.

The Ankave *oremere* are objects, or compound objects, whose components are physically used to produce an effect on human beings (some would speak of "agency"). This outcome is obtained by various modalities of contact with it and through the relations—indeed, material relations—these objects have with a source of power located in a remote space and time. It is therefore worth looking more closely at these material apparatus to discover how these sorts of images work to make the primordial ancestor present among the Ankave men of today, and more precisely, what part of their very materiality, of their being physical things, is at work.

Materiality in Question: Description of an Ankave *oremere*

When it comes time for the initiations, the ritual expert "awakens" his magical bundle: "look!" ("*sonwewuñe!*"). At the end of the ceremonies, he sends it to sleep, saying respectfully but firmly: "You killed the men; go back to sleep" ("*Dzoxe a'ma' pekijine. Dzoxe saa' wee*'"). He can also say:[2] "You beat the kids; go sleep!" ("*Dzoxe ñaewa mexe wi'i'ne.*") The periodical "awakening" of the *oremere* thus places every man in a double set of relations: with all the initiates who are his contemporaries, and, notably, with those boys who are his co-initiates; but also with all the deceased men whose growth, finished state, and warriorhood resulted from contact with the primordial heroes at the origin of the *oremere*.

The name *oremere* designates the principal sacred object (a bone awl used to pierce the novices' septum), its tapa container, and the other artefacts enclosed in the pouch. The object carried by the ritual specialist looks like an ordinary triangular pouch made of *ogidze*, beaten ficus bark dyed red with the juice of the *Pandanus conoideus*. The tapa pouch is closed by a ribbon made of *ogidze*, and we shall see that this material is also used for the large tapa on which the various body decorations are

Figure 31. An Ankave *oremere* tapa bundle can go unremarked, yet Mark's sacred object contains the formidable powers of primordial ancestors (Ikundi, 1994).

displayed during the third stage of the rituals. Even adult men hardly see what is inside an *oremere*, but they see what the ritual specialist takes out of it. Lucky anthropologists, however, may get a glimpse of the contents.

In addition to the bone awl, the pouch contains several other things: the *sima ki'je*, which is a small magical artefact wrapped in *ogidze* tapa cloth and used to soften the novices' nasal septum; a wooden bullroarer (*pisingen igara*: "voice of the bush spirits"); a piece of white quartz (*ima'tsa*); cassowary quills; some Baruya salt (obtained through intertribal trade); an eagle feather; an eagle "elbow" bone; cowry shells; and seeds of *wiamongwe* (the nut *Mucuna albertisi*, which we already encountered in eel-trapping magic). This sacred artefact is therefore a composite image of the First Man, the primordial ancestor of all the Anga groups. But it also recalls the cassowary-woman ancestress as well as the eagle that dispersed the corpse of the ancestral hero. For instance, when he pierces a novice's septum, the master of the initiations uses a cassowary-bone awl as a substitute for the primordial hero's bone. Then, for a second, he leaves this awl, which he holds in one hand, inside the boy's septum

Figure 32. Old Ankave men and anthropologists are sometimes allowed a glimpse of the contents of an *oremere* (Ikundi, 1994).

and does not remove it before his other hand is ready to force a small plug made from a cassowary quill into the new hole, all in one seamless gesture. The sacred *oremere* thus materialises the conjunction of two sets of powers, male and female.[3]

It is important to note that the *oremere,* a composite in itself, is also brought in contact with other material elements in the course of the initiation rituals, notably a series of plants that compose the vegetal theatre where the ceremonies take place (betel nuts, sugarcane, taros, strong-smelling leaves, etc.). The plants that first grew out of the primordial man's blood—the red pandanus and the red cordylines—are believed to have a ritual efficacy comparable with that of the *oremere* sacred objects because of their common origin and relations with the hero's death. In some cases, the *oremere* even recedes into the background. For instance, during the second stage (that of the "rebirth" of the novices), the *oremere* bundle is merely laid open in the ritual expert's house while the sauce made from the juice of a particular cultivar of red pandanus is given to the novices. During the third-stage ritual, performed to celebrate a man's first child, the sacred bundle is simply hung under the arm of the specialist, who also uses it to carry cordyline leaves he has unearthed in his own garden. It is these cordylines that give the ritual scene part of its power to transform the novice, and they give us an opportunity to describe and understand how the very materiality of these plants is central to their ritual efficacy.

Tsuwangen as a Ritual Theatre: A Non-metaphoric Living Image

Called *tsuwangen*, after the name of the body decoration (a sort of collar) made of two pig tusks, which the young father receives for the circumstance, this ritual and its material setting refer both to the first hero, who distributed the languages, names, and body decorations, ancestor of all the Anga; and to two fearless Ankave warriors, father and son, named Idze Angato and Idze Natemowo.

Seconds after having been dragged by the arms by two minders or sponsors with whom he has run until almost breathless down a forested slope, a *tsuwangen* novice undergoing this third-stage ceremony discovers a small but noisy and menacing crowd of men surrounding a large orange-coloured object. He is propelled into an area where the freshly swept ground is strewn with *saore'* trees (*Elaeocarpus* sp.), the trunk of which has been scraped and decorated with red leaves of the same trees. Bullroarers are played constantly, and men shout at him aggressively. At the centre of the ritual area is a display, a sort of rectangular surface (2 metres long and 60 centimetres wide) covered with a red-dyed *ogidze*,

on which body decorations have been laid out. It is propped against a tall *saore'* tree and surrounded by dark red cordylines. Amazingly, the tapa moves up and down erratically, like the skin of a man breathing with difficulty (someone is either hidden underneath and waves it, or tugs irregularly on a vine invisibly attached to the platform).

This display is interpreted by the anthropologist as a mixed image of two recent ancestors of the Ankave, two entirely human heroes whose history in some way repeats that of the primordial ancestor. Three or so centuries ago, members of a non-Ankave group (the Jure, a clan of the neighbouring Kapau group) attacked the Ankave and stole their *oremere*. A man named Idzi Angato was killed, and his blood spilled onto the ground. The blood-soaked clay is conserved by the ritual specialist, who

Figure 33. Out of breath and amazed by what he discovers in the middle of the forest, a frightened Ankave third-stage initiate listens to the elder men's lesson in front of a *tsuwengen* tapa display (Ayakupna'wa, 1998).

keeps it in a bamboo tube. However, some people say this *suwaye* clay is in fact filled with the blood of the primordial hero. Soon afterward, Idzi Angato's son, Natemowo, was killed. The cordylines arranged around his corpse were shared between several clans. They are now planted around the display of the *tsuwangen* rite for a few hours.

According to the story, which is presented as a piece of history, an "ancestors' narrative" (*peyengen debo*) and not as "tree-stump words" (what we would call an origin myth), Natemowo's bones were shared between the Ankave and the other Anga group who came to help him fight the Jure. Like the bones of the First Man, they became the awls used

Figure 34. Thanks to its very materiality and to the stories that go with it, an Ankave *tsuwengen* display is a living form of primordial ancestors and heroes (Ayakupna'wa, 1998).

to pierce the boys' septum. At some stage, Natemowo's arms and legs were stolen, and the Nguye clan had to pay, either to recover them and use the bones as awls, or to eat them; this is unclear, as are all cannibal stories told among the Ankave, who were not cannibals, or at least have not been for the two last centuries. However it may be, the Nguye paid cowry shells to get the legs and arms back, part of which are said to be inside the *oremere* tapa pouch. Other shells of the type used in homicide compensation are evoked by the ones displayed as body decorations on the tapa and given to the initiate during the *tsuwangen* ceremony (Bonnemère 2009).

What tells the onlookers they are seeing an image of Idzi Angato and Natemowo are the cordylines surrounding the display, and the red tapa cloth moved up and down by a hidden acolyte. In addition, the shells are of the kind given for homicide compensation, which is also a reminder of Angato's and Natemowo's saga.

The material apparatus centred on the tapa display not only reinforces its perception as an image of Natemowo, it gives life to this hero, or to the series of heroes equivocally conflated in this circumstance. Before the eyes of the new initiate, Natemowo is not dead, but dying. He is there, in pieces, but alive, as is the strength of the primordial man in the *oremere* magical bundle or in the red cordylines (the master of the initiations speaks to the bundle, and the bundle "knows" what's going on).

Yet, how does an image like a sacred bundle or display work? To answer this question, we must have a look at the network of explicit and/or nonexplicit meanings, clusters of thoughts, memories, and myths surrounding an *oremere* or a *tsuwengen* display, and more particularly at the physical characteristics and properties on which the Ankave draw to make this assemblage of perceptions and thoughts denote the active presence of mighty, albeit usually invisible, ancestors.

Where Materiality Comes in as a Part of a Thick Description and Not as Mere Lip Service

The context of shared representations that participate in giving Ankave men the intense feeling that the potency of long-dead ancestors infuses a ritual space is notably made of narratives of the kind I have already cited concerning the origin of the *oremere* pouch and its contents. However, it is also composed of the ideas and practices surrounding some elements of the ritual theatre that are associated with the sacred objects, namely the plants.

The bones kept in the tapa bundle clearly convey ancestral powers, namely the power to "kill," in the case of the awl. The cassowary bone used for piercing is equated with the humeral bone of the primordial

man received when the eagle dispersed his corpse, and it has the power to wake up and become powerful enough to initiate the boys when told to do so. As for the blood of the primordial hero or that of Natemowo, the substance that gives or gave him life, according to the Ankave theory of the life-principle of human beings, it is present and alive in the form of the two plants central to the Ankave male ceremonies, the red pandanus of the *perangen* type, and the dark-red cordylines of the *oremere* type, both of which grew in soil soaked with this blood. The blood of these heroes is also found in the *suwaye* wet soil that fills the bamboo tube brought by the master of the ritual and rubbed on the faces of the initiates, as well as in the juice of cooked red pandanus seeds that has soaked the tapa cloth.

In keeping with the general theme of this book, the association of the primordial beings with these two special plants is of utmost importance because of what the Ankave know of them (cordylines and pandanuses) as elements of their natural environment. For once, this is a case in which the idea of "affordance" makes sense (Costall 1997; Knappett 2005:45–57; Norman 2002) and can be documented. The very nature of each of these two plants, cordylines and red pandanus, is in keeping with the idea of an enduring physical link with a dead ancestor. For some reason—anthropologists are not diviners—the Ankave of Papua New Guinea have built on characteristics of this type of plant, which is their vegetative mode of reproduction, by cloning.

The case of the cordyline is particularly stunning. These are plants that can thrive even if planted as a short, grayish, dry piece of stem.[4] There is no doubt that the particular mode of reproduction of these plants helps the Ankave imagine that the cordylines they see or the pandanus (from whose fruit they extracted the juice they use to dye the tapa, feed the novices, or smear their body) did once grow in the soil that drank the blood of various ancestors. The dark brownish-red cordylines are there, before the eyes of the participants, planted in the ground all around the bottom end of the tapa. Surely these plants contain life-forces; moreover, they are clearly alive because everyone can see that they grow again and again in the particular cordyline which is manipulated, transported to the ritual site, and brought back to the specialist's garden.

From the botanist's point of view (that is, from the point of view of any of those experts in botany that the Ankave clearly are, as are all New Guinea forest people), it is plausible that a cordyline that is known to have grown in a place *P* at a time *T* has been multiplied clone after clone until the present day. For an Ankave man, the *oremere* leaves he sees arranged temporarily in rows at the foot of a red *tsuwengen* stand in the forest come from the *same* plant as the one that grew far away and long ago. This plant first appeared in blood-soaked soil, and there

Figure 35. Minutes after the *tsuwengen* ceremony, Joran, who looks after the *oremere* belonging to the Nguye clan, takes the red *oremere* cordylines back to his own house garden (Ayakupna'wa, 1998).

is no break in the continuity between the sap of the very first dark-red cordyline and that of the plant or leaves observed by the participants in a contemporary ritual in a forest clearing.

It is important to note that the transmission of the primordial heroes' powers is by no means limited to their presence in the ritual area. The initiates and other participants do *see* the ritual artefacts, but the initiates are *physically in contact* with them. In the *tsuwengen* ceremony, their feet are literally in the midst of the cordylines, their toes almost touching the tapa stand that is strangely shaking; at some stage, their joints are heated and nearly scorched by the flame of a smokeless fire lit under the tapa; the first- and second-stage novices' bodies suffer from

the bone awl, and they are violently smeared with pandanus juice. These ritual actions involve much more than merely *looking* at things.

The heroes' blood is there, in the middle of the forest, as a part of the mighty heroes, and not in a metaphoric way.[5] Similarly, their strength is present and efficient in the bones concealed in the *oremere* bundle. And this potency of the objects—to transform the body and mind of young men—is the result of the intermeshing of objects, of material actions, and of the representations explaining what these objects are during the ritual action. These representations and, in the case of cordyline, the botanical specificities of that plant, account for the modalities of the *physical* connections between the past and the present that convey the powers the manipulated objects owe to the beings of the past.

As we shall see in the next section, a similar conjunction of material actions and narratives related to the material dimension of the rituals explains the paradoxical abundance of "unique" ritual objects among the Anga.

Multiplying Unique Objects: Various Forms of Redundancy as Cultural Tricks

According to the Ankave, from a unique event—the origin of Anga humanity—and from a single dead man, a *series* of powerful sacred objects has emanated. *Each* Anga group is now in possession of one or *several* objects all of which emanate from a singular ancestor and are yet considered peerless. To achieve this feat, the Anga have taken advantage of various modes of redundancy.

With the notable exception of Tambiah's detailed comments on its application to ritual (Tambiah 1985), redundancy is a hackneyed term (in French, a *tarte à la crème*; see Lemonnier 2011b) in anthropology and deserves a few comments. The general idea behind the use of this word in anthropology is, first, the vague notion that there exists a "reciprocal reinforcement of particular aspects of several domains of social reality" in a given society (e.g., Lemonnier 1995, 2004a:173–74). For instance, I could say that, among the Baruya, "there is some redundancy between the making of fences and the kinship system." Yet, in this sense, the notion of "redundancy" is no more than a substitute for the likewise vague although widespread notion of "correspondence" between several aspects of a social organisation and the system of representations.

What I mean by "redundancy," on the other hand, is the use of various means to obtain the same effect; in this chapter, it refers to conveying towards a local ritual arena the ancestral capacity to transform boys while reducing women's influence in the process of

change. The simplest type of redundancy is the use of doubles. For instance, thanks to the physical particularity of the source of power used in initiations—a dead body in the form of a skeleton—all Anga groups are reputed to have received similar yet different bone-made artefacts to pierce the nasal septum of the boys. In turn, in each Anga local group, it is common for several clans to have their own sacred object, which are used for a particular stage of the ritual. The Ankave have two such objects (*oremere* bundles), one for the first and second stages, and the other for the *tsuwengen* ceremony. Needless to say, seen from the anthropologist's viewpoint, this multiplication of sacred objects is both a way to divide ritual responsibilities (and the political roles of the experts), and a sort of insurance in the event one of them is destroyed.

The other kind of redundancy put into play by the Anga is "asymmetrical" and is comparable to some of the devices used in modern trucks and buses, which have two kinds of brakes: one hydromechanical system that eliminates kinetic energy by friction (on drums or disks), and one electromagnetic auxiliary braking system. The same goal is achieved by systems that have nothing in common.

By analogy, among the Ankave, the unique and irreplaceable power to transform the boys that is attached to a singular "historical" episode and object is delivered in two different valleys through five means as diversified as bones (for the awl), wood (for the bullroarers), cordylines leaves, red pandanus juice, and a particular type of clay (*tsuwaje*). Some of these means are more crucial than others—the bone awl clearly is of utmost importance—but the fractioning and diversification of the media capable of delivering the incomparable might of the ancestor(s) of yore is remarkable.[6]

Let us also keep in mind that in the course of a given ritual procedure, the ritual operations performed with these objects calls on diverse types of physical media and material actions (using clay, leaves, bones, etc.), but all of them refer to a single source of power. The activation of ancestral might is done through *different* channels, which, in turn, correspond to different types of perceptions and the various media and objects that link the present ritual scene to the mythological past (see Chapter 6). And all are connected to each other in some way that the origin myth of the ritual accounts for.

As we shall see now, it is only these relations between the items that are materially used during the male initiations which distinguish the most important of them—the most secret and sacred objects responsible for the transformation and growth of the male initiates—from the very similar-yet-ordinary magical bundles used by all adult men in trapping or hunting.

Sacred Ritual Objects and Ordinary Magical Bundles

The similarities observed between the two kinds of magical packets are amazing. By its form, content, and general function, the sacred pouch itself looks very much like the magical bundles used by the Ankave in hunting and trapping. But it is also because of the sameness of the sorts of things that are concealed and transported inside the tapa pouches, and because of some of the manipulations surrounding them, in ritual as well as hunting context, that the two kinds of tapa bundles must be compared.

As already mentioned à propos of the Ankave eel trap, hunting and trapping magic combines whispered formulas and charms that the hunter keeps in a parcel of tapa. The Ankave packet is called a *sabe'a' o'we*. Used by most adult men, such a magical bundle contains bones (an eel skull minus the lower jaw and a cassowary leg bone) and various animal parts (pig ungula, cassowary feathers, echidna quills, the claw of a spiny anteater [*Tachyglossus aculeatus*], eagle claws, and a marsupial pelvis). It also comprises the usual magical *wiamongwe* nuts (*Mucuna albertsii*), some fragrant leaves of *nenge'* (*Euodia* sp.), and cowry shells.

Except for the nuts and fragrant leaves, and sometimes for cowry,[7] only one or two of the items wrapped in the parcel are used for a *particular* hunting or trapping activity. When a man wants to go hunting marsupials, for instance, he takes the front paw or the pelvis of a marsupial and an eagle claw and a *wiamongwe* nut, which he rubs on his arms so that his arrows will hit the game. That will also help him search the tree holes where these animals live. When it comes time to set traps, the magical packet is opened and the appropriate objects are taken out. To set an eel or a marsupial trap, the magical bundle is laid open on fragrant *nenge'* leaves, which are "neatly arranged" on a platform made of criss-crossed bamboos inside the temporary hunter's hut.

Once he has killed or captured game, the hunter put the elements he used from the *sabe'a' o'we* back into the tapa parcel. We saw in Chapter 2 that after eels have been caught, the magical nut is put back in the packet (or today in an empty food tin) and the cranial bone is replaced by a fresh one from the latest capture. The old bones are thrown into a stream, together with the piece of tree bark in which the fish was cooked, to please the master of the eels.

It is remarkable that, taken separately, each of the things contained in a *sabe'a' o'we'* tapa bundle—magical nuts, cowry shells, pieces of quartz, fragrant leaves—may be also used at one moment or another during the male rituals. Conversely, things central to the Ankave rituals may appear in hunting and trapping practices. For example, red cordylines of the *oremere* kind are named in the magic formula used to trap

a cassowary. The *komeje* flowers (*Ocimum,* a Labiatae) that are either attached to the flutes, tied to cassowary quills, or added to the mixture of vegetal salt given to the first-stage initiates during the rituals, are also used during the hunting magic done on the hunter's fingers. Even the presence of bones is a similarity between the two contexts.

It is remarkable that the resemblance between the two types of magical artefacts is also observed and historically attested among the Baruya (Dick Lloyd, personal communication, September 1996). They too equate the making of an initiate to the making and birth of a human being; but, whereas the Ankave use a particular substitute for a maternal substance (mother's blood; i.e., red pandanus juice), the Baruya think that semen is the key substance. Their sacred *kwaimatnie* differ from an *oremere* because it contains almost no human relics; in addition to the usual magical nuts/seeds, it holds a black stone "inhabited by the spirit of Venus," a primordial woman who rose into the sky (Godelier 1986a:81–84). It contains the bones of an eagle (eagles are the messengers of the Sun, who is "the father of all the Baruya") and also those of a more human and recent hero. All theses things are wrapped into a red *ipmulje* (dyed with betel juice), which signifies the road/link with the Sun. It is the Sun and Venus who empower the novices. As for the Baruya hunting bundle, known as a *siwuya* (literally, "stone-tying"; Dick Lloyd, personal communication, March 2010) it is a tapa bundle containing magical nuts, some white fuzz from an eagle's belly, and aromatic leaves. It also contains a finger bone from a male relative of the hunter or trapper and from whom the latter asks for some help in his search of game.

There are also some striking similarities in the way the hunting and ritual objects are used. As we have just seen, for a hunting magic, the bundle is laid open on leaves nicely arranged on a makeshift platform made of bamboo inside the hunter's hut. Similarly, during the second stage of the Ankave initiations, the *oremere* is not actually brought to the spot where the initiates are violently rubbed with red pandanus (immediately after their "rebirth"), but instead remains inside the house of the master of the initiations, where it is decorated with red ceremonial cordylines and cowries. More generally, the two types of bundles are activated when opened, and put to sleep (in a real sense in the case of the *oremere*, because this is what the ritual experts tells it) by closing it.

In fact, there is no fortuity in these similarities between the things contained in the magic bundle and the ritual object of the masters of the initiations, for these two types of artefact belong to the same category of objects that allow long-distance communication with powerful entities. The links between the two domains, hunting and initiations/war, are many.

Hunting is obviously necessary to obtain many of the things that compose an *oremere*. One needs to hunt or trap to get a cassowary femur, claw, or quills; an eagle claw, fuzz, feathers; or an elbow bone, not to mention the leg bone of a wild fowl that is a reminder of the ancestor's bone and his potency in the form of the first-stage initiate's nose plug. In addition, the gift of game is important in the rituals. Ankave first-stage initiates give game to their mothers, and the capture of the first cassowary or third eel is an important moment in the relationship between a young man and his mother.

It is also worth noting that several components of the sacred objects are also used in domains outside hunting/trapping and male initiations, thus creating an indirect relationship between the two types of artefact. For instance, the whitish quartz *imasa'* used in both Ankave pig-hunting magic and first-stage initiations is also used for a terrifying kind of black magic. Likewise, the bullroarers one hears at length during the male rituals are also played after successful trapping or hunting expeditions to obstruct the forest paths that displeased *pisingen awo* bush spirits may follow to harm the hunter.

In sum, the two types of objects look alike, compose a more or less *comparable* identical series of things, are often used in the same way, and have a similar function: that of conveying invisible powers to a contemporary scene of ritual, hunting, or trapping. Yet, the hunters' parcels

Figure 36. The Ankave *ipane* initiates wear a nose-plug made of a megapode leg bone (Ikundi, 1994).

are ordinary objects, whereas we know the bundles looked after by the Anga ritual experts give the local groups their indispensable strength and are at the heart of their feeling of being different from any other human group. They are seen to be of supreme importance for the continuation of the group, and their possession entails one of the highest political statuses in an otherwise egalitarian "Great Man" society.

Figure 37. While they arrange body decorations and perform various rituals on the new Baruya *muka* initiates, the ritual specialists have put their powerful *kwaimatnie* back into ordinary tapa pouches slung under their arm (Wonenara, 1979).

One immediate and obvious difference between the two kinds of objects is the presence in the ritual objects of relics believed to go back to the origin of present-day humanity. Yet, things are more complicated, and also more illuminating, when it comes to the mode of "functioning" of these ordinary or extraordinary magical artefacts crammed with material references and actions.

The Materiality of Multichannel Communication

Comparison of the highly sacred *oremere* or *kwaimatnie* with *sabe'a' o'we* or *siwuya* hunting bundles shows that the bones, cassowary quills, magical nuts, cowries, stones, etc., that are inside or associated with a ritual expert's object are not sufficient to distinguish it from a perfectly ordinary magical pouch. It is the association of these elements and their relations in the very particular context in which an *oremere* is put into

play that are significant here and which alter an ordinary magical device in such a way that it is regarded and used as a forceful image.

As we have seen, such artefacts make sense only in relation to other objects and substances; to a vegetal theatre; to individual gestures and crowd movements; to speeches, myths, and emotions; and to a particular relationship with time: the time of mythical heroes, the history of each secret mighty bundle held by particular clans, etc. In other words, the specificity of these sacred bundles is the way the Anga imagine their action and efficacy, a knowledge about the origin of the powers they contain as well as the reasons for their relations with the other elements of the rituals in which they are involved.

As Godelier (1999:25, 30, 33) would put it, no "symbolic" system stands on its own. It needs an imaginary basis; that is, a basis in myths, narratives, shared representations about the origin of humanity and of the Anga as a distinct people of New Guinea, but also about the physiology of cordylines and pandanus, about blood,[8] and, indirectly but crucially, about the respective qualities attributed to men and women. The sacredness of the *oremere* and *kwaimatnie* bundles or the perception of a *tsuwengen* theatre as a living creature are inseparable from the familiarity the onlookers have with the real (when and how did the object arrive in the hands of its present ritual custodian?) and imaginary historical features that explain the basis of the particular relationship of these artefacts with the powers they harbour. In particular, the narratives make clear the relationships between the *various* material media that play a role in the ritual. There is a historical and material basis to the redundancy observed by the anthropologist.

What such images or artefacts provide is precisely this conjunction, this way of putting together myth, ritual action, and doing things. Material actions are essential, because they are part of a non-verbal communication about what is going on in the ritual, and why. For instance, in the case of the *tsuwengen* ceremony described here, material actions are constant: planting cordylines, dying tapa, sharing tapa, displaying body decorations as they were on Natemowo's body, shaking a bamboo tube filled with blood-soaked clay, etc. It is this combination of narrative (the story of the First Man, the story of Engato and Natemowo) with the ability of pandanus and cordyline to live through time that makes the *oremere* artefacts or the *tsuwangen* ritual theatre images that manifest the ancestors' power to transform the initiates.

Last, it is important to note that these composite images bring together ideas and gestures belonging to *various* domains. To sum up one more time: the origin of humanity and its link with the beginning of the male rituals, the specificity of the Anga as a different humanity, the distinctiveness of the Ankave within the Anga, the human killing of

a human-like ancestor, the history and basis for the power of the *oremere*, the ability of this object to kill and the power of the cordyline to revive, the hierarchies between initiates and non-initiates, the ambiguity of female powers, the fear of the neighbouring Iqwaye, etc., are all concentrated in the use of the *oremere* and/or that of the display upon which a novice stumbles during the *tsuwangen* ritual.

All these contexts are present in the minds of the participants through their *doing* various things, and not just looking at them, deciphering them, or contemplating them with emotion. People do not merely look at such objects. They produce them, manipulate them, and perform material actions with them, such as piercing the nose, rubbing bodies, transplanting cordylines, making noise, shaking a tapa, etc.

As we shall see in the next chapter, this ability of diversified material practices to convey non-verbal shared references to the past and to gather people together is by no means limited to exotic ritual objects.

Chapter 5

Race Cars, Dinky Toys, and Aging Boys

Despite the apparent heterogeneity of the cases addressed, the ethnography of the artefacts studied so far has given us a glimpse of the unexpected participation of material actions and objects in the non-verbal communication of sets of ideas that are important, and even essential, for the people who manipulate them. Objects and physical actions do this by creating in the actors' minds simultaneous references to numerous and varied domains of social life and types of social relations. In addition, the channelling and convergence of those sets of shared representations seems to depend on the multiplicity of the types of material actions and objects put into play.

At this stage, the question to answer is still: exactly "how does that work"? What gives a central role to particular objects at a given time in the nonpropositional evocation of events, values, or core of all-important representations? Why does such a set of ideas, social relations, and practices lend itself to being called forth in that material way? One may also wonder if what I am talking about is a characteristic of small-scale, non-industrial societies, or if it bears some generality? The present chapter raises the latter issue via an excursion into our industrial society that is partly based on the idea that the anthropology of material culture should be as bound by estrangement and comparison as any other anthropology.

In appearance, there is not much in common between New Guinea garden fences, magical or ritual objects, and the most mundane artefacts of our modern world: cars. And even less between Melanesian objects and the iconic racing or sport cars of the mid-1950s and early 1960s that I am interested in. Yet we shall see that what scores of people (mostly men) do together in connection with these cars reveals relations between humans and things akin to those discussed in the previous chapters: relations that are indispensable in the production of shared representations and in their ability to bring people to act together.

This chapter covers more than 50 years. It is based both on history and on participant observation, and it addresses the evolution of these sports cars to the modern day, as well as the changing interactions that boys, then teenagers, then adult men had and still develop around them. On the one hand, the cars in question have long been technically obsolete; save for their four wheels, they do not have much in common with the race cars of today. Yet, they still are the stars of raging track competitions. As for the former boys of the 1950s, they engage in an endless series of relations with these dream-cars of the period in which they grew up. This chapter therefore deals with those now-classic topics of the anthropology of material culture labelled "cultural biography of things" (Kopytoff in Appadurai 1986) and "ordinary passions" (Bromberger 1998), but it focuses on what I have been interested so far: the specific role played by objects in the sharing of representations, values, ideas, and emotions, and their role in creating and maintaining (and possibly changing) particular social relations and ways of living together.

I will be drawing on my own multisited experiences with "fine racing cars" between 1955 (I was 7) and 1983 (when I sold my own "collector's car"), so I shall start with something seemingly personal: the presence of Jim Clark in my study in the form of a 1:43-scale model contained in a plastic box. This great Scottish Formula 1 driver was one of my boyhood heroes. In addition to the articles and books I have read about him (and kept) and several photographs I know by heart, I remember the date of his death (7 April 1968) and also my stupefaction when I heard on the radio that "a world champion" had been "killed in a race." In a corner of the model's box is a mirror cleverly set so that I can see both sides of the "Lotus 49." There is also a golden sticker on the bottom of the box that reads "South African Grand Prix Winner." But like thousands of others, a mere glance at the model and its driver (with a black nonintegral helmet, goggles, and beige driver's suit with red stripes on the arms) immediately brings dozens of memories to mind, including that of a friend showing me his own model of Clark's car and the discussions that ensued.

"Friend," "memories," "model," and "discussions" are also what this chapter is about. In ethnographic terms, it describes and analyses the past and present practices centred on famous racing cars of the 1950s and 1960s, which many people (say, Frenchmen who were boys in the 1950s) have had and still have. What are these memories and discussion about, and how can they create an almost immediate accord between strangers who have only just met? In terms of anthropological theory, this is another chapter about the construction, reproduction, and change of social relations mediated by particular material actions and objects.[1]

Figure 38. A 1:43-scale model of Jim Clark's Lotus 49 by "Quartzo" (without its plastic box, removed for the sake of the photograph).

An Almost Endless Skein of Thoughts: The Wikipedia-like Effect of a Simple Sentence

My starting point could be Clark's 1:43-scale model car or any reference to one of his feats. Let's say a short phrase, such as: "Clark at Nürburgring in 1962." These few words, when spoken, bring back the memory of Clark's tiny Lotus 23 finishing the first lap of the race 27 seconds ahead of all the other cars, including some that were much bigger and more powerful (Clark 1966:92). So incredible were this sight and his performance that some argued over the capacity of the engine and could not believe that the car had only a 1,500-cc engine with a mere 100 bhp, compared with the motors of his challengers, which were two to three times bigger. The truth is that Jim Clark was one of the greatest drivers of all time (many think he was the best ever), and that the Lotus 23 set new standards for race car chassis, suspensions, and road-holding.

For many men, the evocation of Clark's tremendous race necessarily convenes a whole pack of Ferraris, Maseratis, Aston Martins, Porsches, and the like, driven by other legends of the time. Instantly, the mind is overwhelmed by all kinds of images of drivers, cars, and heroic feats, and even by smells and vibrations, all of which flutter around in an endless concatenation of ideas. Moreover, the memory of Clark's distancing everyone at the 1962 Nürburgring race, and hundreds of similar related memories, create between those exchanging them an immediate intimacy

composed of references to fields of interest, practices, institutions, values, and passions, which they are fond of evoking again and again. Moreover, it creates social bonds and shared activities for enthusiasts to get together for events dealing with these cars. But, first of all, what is the avalanche of thoughts triggered by a few words about Jim Clark?

The evocative power of an utterance like "Clark, Nürburgring, 1962" is enormous. Within seconds, 10, 20 thought-grafts may attach to it, all of which would make sense for several hundreds of former little boys of the 1950s. For instance, in less than five minutes, the following thoughts come to my mind, any of which could lead to a digression: other feats in the history of car racing, such as Fangio's greatest race, also at Nürburgring, in 1957, where he won, although an incident had delayed him in the pits for almost one minute; or Louis Rosier's solo drive at Le Mans in 1950, when he stayed behind the wheel for 23 hours; or young Jacky Ickx winning the French 1968 Grand Prix at Rouen in pouring rain, which at once reminds me of other victories in heavy rain.

We return to the Lotus 23's first spectacular appearance. I also remember that, compared with this frail, diminutive two-seater based on the enlarged chassis of a single-seater (the Lotus 22 "Formula Junior"), the Ferraris, Aston Martins, Maseratis, and Jaguars seemed like something out of the past. Following Cooper's revolution in Formula 1 chassis, Clark's car had a tubular space-frame chassis and rear engine that also set the pace for future sports car designs. At this point, there is a strong possibility that the amateurs' fuzzy discussion drifts towards other breakthroughs in race car design: let's say the Jaguar D-Type disc brakes; the fate of four-wheel-drive single-seaters, including the Ferguson-Climax, which grafted a tractor transmission onto a racing car; or the use of spoilers, which would lead to the moving airbrakes of the 1955 Mercedes at Le Mans.

Just say "Mercedes 1955 at Le Mans" to any of the millions of French, British, or Germans in their 60s, and they will conjure up the horrendous image of Pierre Levegh's car debris killing more than 80 people in the main tribune. Security matters will then crop up, with a possibly long list of the dead drivers of the 1950s and 1960s, and a digression on their incredible courage or recklessness. And that may bring the enthusiasts back to Clark for another imaginary circuit in a Wikipedia-like package of multiple cross-referencing entries linked in some way or another to the "fine racing cars" of the immediate postwar period.

This show of near-esoteric erudition somehow related to a model of Jim Clark's Lotus 49 could go on for pages, and the reader is asked to believe me when I say that a conversation about these same themes would take a similar form and go on for hours without anyone getting bored (yes!). What I would like to understand is why the participants in such a conversation would enjoy it, and what past events lived

Figure 39. Kling and Simon's Mercedes with its airbrake opened at the ill-fated 1955 Le Mans race (copyright Getty Images).

individually might they have in common that bring such fond memories collectively flooding back at the mere mention of a famous driver of their childhood. What is the logic of these mental drifts that takes one from a car to a driver, from a driver to a model in a display case, and from a model to a motor-show or race or book or journal, and then sparks another phrase like "Remember Clark in the Lotus 23?" What is the system of thoughts and actions that, after 50 years, maintains so vividly—and prone to create social bonds—the myriad of thoughts I have been alluding to, which are blatantly incoherent for the *non*-aficionado? And first of all, what was that particular past made of?

A Look Back: A Boy's Auto World in 1955

To imagine the point of view of the boys of the period, one must first think of a time when the two main technologies that occupy kids' leisure time today, TV and the Internet, did not exist. Portable radios and record players were scarce or still to come, so that listening to recorded music depended on turntables often as big as a piece of furniture and affordable for rich people only.[2]

Let us choose a date at random (or so): say, 1955, the year of the Caravelle aircraft, of the Citroën DS, and of the second generation of Chevrolet Bel Airs. Peace has only been back for 10 years, and the

Cold War is on. In those days, dozens of new transportation machines, cars and aircraft, were appearing each year, and they nourished the large public appetite, including that of young boys, for novelty. Each Salon de l'Automobile (motor show) at the Grand Palais in Paris exhibited as many new cars as the air shows at Le Bourget or Farnborough unveiled new aircraft. When the latest model featured a number of novelties, it was in the media for days, if not weeks.

Such was the case of the Citroën DS, which combined a series of new technologies: a futuristic aerodynamic shape, an hydropneumatic suspension (without springs or conventional shock absorbers), a hydraulic gearbox and automatic clutch, a gear lever set between the steering wheel and the dashboard, power-assisted steering, a road-holding and comfort "beyond comparison," ultra-powerful inboard disc brakes, an adjustable ride height, a completely flat floor, headlights with beams that stayed parallel to the ground whatever the pitch of the body, and even an hydraulic jack of sorts, not to mention the spare wheel above the engine that provided protection in the event of a shock, wheels each secured by a single large central nut, etc. For the first time, mechanics were totally disoriented by what was under the bonnet. And like the mischievous androids that peopled the consumerist imagination, the DS displayed impenetrable quasi-intentionalities at which children marvelled as much as adults.

Figure 40. Unveiled at the 1955 Salon de l'Auto in Paris, the Citroën DS was something completely new. For years, it was a strange shape on the roads, something unusual enough for a family photograph.

Like the Salon de l'Auto, the "24 Heures du Mans," or the Monaco Grand Prix, was the occasion to discover another kind of extraordinary vehicle: racing and sports cars. The sports car is the one type of car that remains unique because of the sophistication of their engines, their high performances, the shape and quality of bodywork, and their singularity. It is these cars that flood the mind, triggered by a series of words like "Clark, 1962, Nürburgring." Whether derived from street-legal models or purpose-built for racing, these cars differ from everyday automobiles in their adaptation to high performances. Their components (space-frame chassis or monocoque structure, wheels, engine, suspension, transmission, shape, and bodywork) are designed and assembled to maximise their lightness, strength, endurance, durability, and speed, as well as the mechanics' speed in the pits. Aerodynamic shape goes back to the racing cars of the 1920s, but it is the fashion and the theories of the 1950s and 1960s that made for the aesthetic qualities baby boomers consider beyond compare in the cars of that period.

Each fan has his hit parade based on his own experiences with those cars, but among cars made especially for racing, the Maserati 450S, Aston-Martin DBR1, Jaguar D-Type, and Ferrari 250 and 375MM would feature on anyone's list of favourite "sport prototypes" designed for endurance and long-distance events of the Le Mans type. Among the single-seaters, there is no getting away from the Maserati 250F, Vanwall, Talbot-Lago, and the streamlined Mercedes. To these pure racers, most amateur sports car lovers would add a few cars "made in limited series" (10 to 20) that were both very successful and beautiful automobiles, such as the Aston Martin Zagato, the Ferrari 250SWB and GTO, or the AC Cobra Daytona, to mention a few well-known and much-admired cars about which dozens of books have been written.

The following sections deal with the history and the ethnography of these encounters, their evolution since the heydays of the cars in question, and the material aspects of these relations with cars.

Dream Cars as Part of a Boy's Material Culture: Yesterday's Practices

The interest men in their 60s have for racing cars of the 1950s and 1960s is a direct result of their growing up in a particular cultural and historical ambiance in which cars had the place and importance I have just roughly depicted. One could therefore say that some adults have reserved a special spot for race cars in the nostalgia they feel for this period. But that would be merely pointing to what has to be described and explained, without accounting for what is at issue: the materiality of young boys'

interactions with key objects of their culture: cars, and notably the great diversity of their material relations with cars.

First, one must realise that, in the games and imaginations of boys, racing a Jaguar or a Ferrari at Le Mans were on a par with flying a fighter plane, or saving lions and elephants in Africa. The weekly issues of the boys' journals also featured the achievements of drivers. Among the characters of Belgian and French comic strips were car drivers like Michel Vaillant (driving a "Vaillante"!) and his friends or dangerous opponents, and several similarly brave fighter pilots: the U.S. Navy's Buck Danny, the Royal Canadian Air Force's Dan Cooper, and, later on, the French Armée de l'Air's pair, Tangy and Laverdure. A few boys read "Biggles" books. Any action by these paper heroes was a tremendous feat. Not only they did they do good, but they also survived desperate situations thanks to their almost-superhuman talent. Boys' weeklies had a special section devoted to automobiles and their technical aspects.

I mention planes and their pilots, because, as I said previously in this chapter, the period was overwhelmed with amazing new technologies and shapes aimed at achieving ever greater speeds, either on the ground or in the air. To go back to 1955: in addition to the first flight of the Caravelle, this year also saw the first flights of the French Super Mystère B2, the Griffon, and the Trident II. In new jet aircraft alone, test pilots or record-breakers had already demonstrated 20 new machines since the end of World War II. Needless to say, a French boy knew everything there was to know about the British V bombers that took to the air in the same years, and could tell a U.S. F-86 Sabre from a F-100 Super-Sabre in a second, as well as recognise instantaneously the different types of Russian MiGs. And you are right to imagine that railway machines were of some importance as well.

What was less widespread and probably limited to young middle-class children was the importation of the outside world's fantastic cars and planes into boys' daily games. After school, mixing comic book heroes with real actions using Dinky Toys, 1:72-scale fighters, and Hornby trains was an almost daily occupation.[3] Again, it must be remembered that there were no video games, TV, or Internet around. A boy spent thousands of hours down on all fours forcing 1:43-scale models into sideslips, spins, and perfect four-wheel drifts on the carpet. Of course, you could also be Robin Hood, a cowboy, an orchestra conductor, or a policeman driving a motorbike around the garden. But Fangio, Moss, or Clark appeared regularly among those living semigods to be imitated.

Boys' fantasies as well as their perception of what cars and racing cars were in the world in which they were growing up were fuelled day after day by material practices. Cars were everywhere and were used to go from one place to another, and were present in adult conversations, in

Figure 41. Test pilots were heroes in the 1950s. Here, special postage stamps celebrate Charles Goujon (killed when his Trident II prototype exploded in midair) and Kostia Rozanoff (who died test-flying a Mystère IV, the aircraft with which he was the first Frenchman to break the sound barrier in 1954). (From the collection of Pierre Lemonnier.)

daily newspapers, and in the weekly magazine *Paris Match* (1.8 million copies a week in 1958), which devoted several pages to automobile-related events: the new models of the forthcoming Salon de l'Auto (often visited by the whole family) and the annual race at Le Mans (hence its strong presence in the present chapter) as well as the development of special engines by "the sorcerer" Gordini, but also the construction of motorways, the opening of new assembly lines, sport or cinema stars with their glowing Cadillacs, and of course the details of every possible mechanical breakthrough.

Very French, too, was the daily newspaper *L'Equipe*, the one and only daily in the world at the time devoted exclusively to sports. Every year, the issue published on the Saturday of the start of the Le Mans race contained a double-page spread listing the competitors' cars and indicating technical data, in particular the makes of their different components: from engine, fuel system, and gearbox to starter, headlights, oil, and tires. This was considered a mine of crucial information that helped to understand what was at stake in the great race.

It was mainly in the weekly newsreels at the cinema that one could see black and white images of the cars on the circuit, the drivers, and the accidents. For boys, the very fact that these short summaries of the week's events gave a large place to car-related news was proof of sorts that automobiles were important things in this world. To have one's own

ideas about the respective talents of the leading drivers, the likelihood of a Jaguar rather than a Mercedes or a Ferrari winning a particular race, or the comparative qualities of a Citroën DS and Peugeot 404 Injection were not side issues. It was part of being a boy in an industrial world in which cars were becoming a key aspect of almost everyone's material culture.[4]

By the early 1960s, the little fans of Fangio and Moss had become teenagers. They had reached the *lycée* and were now aficionados of Clark, Hill, Brabham, etc. Motorsport was thriving and documented in new monthly magazines dedicated to sports cars and car racing such as *Moteurs*, *Sport-Auto*, *Virage-Auto* (a Belgian journal), and then *Echappement*.[5]

Indeed, one should not underestimate the role of these journals in the mental gymnastics that those interested in race cars developed. These journals reported on recent competitions, but they also tested sports cars and some race cars, too, all of which were described in detail, commented on, and compared with more-or-less similar models: something that has become common for mundane cars in any magazine today. There was news about the racing teams and the situation in various championships. Strangely enough, the technical domain was ill accounted for. Yet, these journals were a storehouse of information from which it was possible to draw a personal comparison of one's own favourite sports cars. Alongside the dimensions, weight, maximum power, and torque, these journals provided acceleration figures and the highest mean speed obtained on one lap of the Montlhéry circuit (near Paris). At the time of the Salon de l'Auto, these data were collected and updated. Yet, for a "serious" comparison, a boy had to hand-make his own tables and, even better, his own diagrams, showing the correlation of the weight-power ratio to acceleration figures. With such solid data in hand, he knew why he would own or race a particular model, provided he found the money to buy it or the talent to drive it.

Any test of a sports or race car was also an opportunity to discover and appreciate the material features that distinguish a thoroughbred from an ordinary vehicle, namely, in the interior: a wooden steering wheel, lightweight pedals and handles, a bucket seat, all sorts of dials (including the essential rev counter and oil-pressure gauge), numerous electrical switches, a special gearbox grille, a seat harness, etc. As for the exterior appearance that made these cars special, there were the special shape of the wing mirrors, a big quick-fill gas cap, a series of vents and bonnet pins or leather straps, enlarged wire-wheels and tires, additional headlights, etc. Any detail was worth noting and was immediately memorised.

New Races for Old Drivers: The Enduring Second Life of Famous Sports Cars

It is highly probable that certain images of car competition, the voice of a famous radio commentator, or the fine illustrations on the "Starter" pages in the boys' magazine *Spirou* are fixed in the minds of hundreds of thousand of those who were boys in the 1950s. I have no statistics, but, for instance, most of my male anthropologist colleagues who have read the French essay from which I have taken this chapter generally have their own memory or anecdote to add about their favourite car or driver, and still find time to go and watch old race cars in action.

Why does anyone become a sort of expert in "classic" cars rather than an aficionado of musicals, thriller books, or bicycles? Age, class, educational level, or social background are all clearly important, but even brothers may have totally different pastimes, as we all know. In other words, personal history and taste clearly play a central role in the permanence of one's long-lasting fascination with a few dozen noisy cars that started their racing life 50 years ago or more. As we shall now see, this personal history is made of changing and various material relations with these cars. I do not know *why* some of the French middle-class and bourgeois boys have developed an interest for the sports cars and the iconic race cars of their boyhood and adolescence, but I do know *how* this interest was developed over a long period of time via material interactions with those cars and their substitutes (models, photographs, etc.).

In France, coming up on 18 years of age is the time when one can get a driver's license. At the end of the 1960s, this was also the age when a lot of young men realised, among other things, that driving a car at Le Mans of or flying low passes in a Mirage III might not be part of their own future. Cars were more affordable than fighter planes, and many tested their driving skills in ordinary secondhand sedans, possibly "tuned" to improve their power, road-holding, and, most of all, noise. For better or for worse, some tried a personal encounter with a *voiture de collection* (collector's car), and also with old-but-affordable sports cars: MGs, Triumphs, Alfa Romeos, and even Jaguars and Porsches.[6]

Their interest in fast cars and track or rally competition had evolved towards new cars, new shapes, and new drivers, but the racers of their youth still excited the curiosity of some. A few famed race cars arrived in ad hoc museums. In England, the Montagu Motor Museum, founded in 1952, became the National Motor Museum in 1968. In France, a Musée de l'Automobile opened right on the Le Mans circuit in 1961. In Paris, the first "Rétromobile" motor show, exclusively devoted to "vintage and classic cars," was held in 1975 (and every year since then). Put

differently, the race cars that the baby boomers had admired at school were now in museums. But they were also back on the track.

The "Coupes de l'Age d'Or" was organised at Rouen in 1964 for "vintage" (1925–1940) race cars, but as of 1968 (and until 2004), these races were regularly held at Montlhéry, with an increasing number of cars on the track and spectators around it. In the 1970s, British "club" members began visiting France, Holland, or Germany, and racing old cars slowly turned into a quasi-business. The most famous sports cars were no longer to be seen only in museums and photographs, they were also to be seen on the track, racing at full speed; moreover, the cars eligible for competition—those which were almost 20 years old in 1964—were more and more recent and faster and faster. Most cars taking part in these events were ordinary sports cars sold in the 1960s (then 1970s) to rich amateurs. But gradually, even prestigious and soon-to-be priceless race cars (Ferrari SWBs and GTOs, AC Cobras, Aston Martin DB4 Zagatos, Lister-Jaguars, etc.) were run. As of the 1970s, 20-year-old "legendary" Formula 1 single-seaters or Le Mans–type "sport-prototypes" could be seen several times a year in international competitions, sometimes driven by semiprofessionals and always by still-brave drivers.

The interest for these races and cars was such that, as early as the mid-1960s, new old-car magazines appeared (*L'Automobiliste*, then *L'Album du Fanatique de l'Automobile*). In the mid-1970s, the weekly *La Vie de l'Auto* came out, and was soon joined by several other monthly magazines. One had to read journals in English too.[7] Nowadays, there are more than half a dozen magazines in French dealing exclusively with old cars, notably restored sports cars that some baby boomers are now rich enough to afford as full-scale objects, rather than as a models.

The Changing Relations of Aging Men with Classic Sports Cars Newer than New

The objects central to the piece of modern material culture I am describing are remarkable because they have remained almost unchanged over 40 or 50 years. As I just mentioned, these cars have begun a second racing career that is still going. Together with the other practices I am now going to describe, they have been central to the *uninterrupted*, although transformed, interactions of the grownup teenagers (then adult men) with the objects for which they developed an enduring passion of sorts. Well before the "baby boomers interested in classic cars" became interesting targets for all sorts of journals, car-sellers, workshops, gadgets, shows, auctions, etc., amateurs continued to manipulate elements of the race car-related material culture, namely specialised books and journals as well as models, and for some (but far fewer than in Britain), full-scale old cars.

In terms of biography of things (*carrière d'objet* in French), small-scale models are of interest because, beyond what could be said about their commoditisation, exchange, or role as identity markers, they are *one* of the objects that epitomise the convergence of knowledge, material practices, souvenirs, feelings, institutions, etc., that are at the heart of a baby boomer's complex relationship with, say, "the race cars of Fangio, Moss, and Clark's time." In their boyhood, model cars were one way the surrounding material culture, socioeconomic system, and way of life penetrated their world. But in the late 1960s and early 1970s, tens and then hundreds of 1:43-scale models of different sports and race cars were produced, after a British maker (John Day) had the idea, in the late 1960s, of selling white metal kits. Most were period race or rally automobiles. Formula 1 or Le Mans freaks could now get their favourite model with the visual specificities it had when raced in their favourite race, either in kit form or ready-made in a plastic box. At the same time, those Dinky Toys kept as souvenirs in shoeboxes were acquiring value (especially if you had kept their original packaging!).

Together with the possibility of making a model of almost any past or present "important" car, the number of information sources about them grew considerably. The new magazines all had historical sections dealing with particular models, races, or drivers, but there was also a rapid growth of specialised books and bookshops. In particular, extremely well-documented and -illustrated booklets were published for the sake of model-making, notably those by Profile Publications in the 1960s and 1970s, which were written by renowned drivers and journalists.

Within a few years, and with the help of "chemically milled" small pieces (wire wheels) and later on of the "photo-etching" technique (an offshoot of the printed circuit industry), the smallest pieces of the models had reached levels of details never before seen, even at the 1:43 scale. Radiator grilles, side-vent holes, and bonnet louvers, but also wing mirrors, door handles, windscreen wipers, or gear levers were ten times more accurate that what the most passionate boy could have done with a tiny brush to "improve" his Dinky Toys and similar models a mere 15 years before. These tiny cars had become quite affordable little gems that exactly replicated any of one's favourite models, either as a ready-made model to find and buy or as a kit to patiently assemble. And this is where each amateur's own mixture of knowledge as well as past practices and feelings crystallizes in and around an object, a material thing that is both the result of his own ongoing history of imaginary or real encounters with a renowned car, and a starting point for relations with other people, such as those thousands of men who would comment on Clark's Lotus 49 in a way similar to my own Wikipedia-like gloss at the beginning of this chapter.

Figure 42. Although far from being affordable for the average baby boomer, some high-precision 1:43-scale models show detail that would simply have been unimaginable a decade ago, such as this 10-centimetre-long model of the Maserati 450S driven by Jean Behra at Le Mans in 1957, handmade by Steve Barnett (model and photograph from Steve Barnett, with my warmest thanks).

Form and Decoration as Knowledge and Concentrated Practices

The extension of 1:43-scale models into the adult world from the 1970s brought to the amateur both the pleasure of having an indirect but material contact with dream cars and the possibility of bringing together in an accurate and well-decorated object a sort of concentrate of knowledge about a particular racer, and, even better, about many cars.

Each race car known by an amateur is first of all a shape: a silhouette and volumes that allow him to identify a given car in less than a second, whether he sees it in a magazine, displayed in a model shop, or parked on the carpet of a specialised car show. This form includes the differentiating details mentioned in this chapter: wing mirrors, quick-fill gas caps, bonnet pins, particular headlights, etc. Except for a few small publicity decals mentioning a brand of oil, gas, electrical equipment, or tyre, there was almost no advertisement on the cars, hence the importance of the shape details for the identification of the cars by an enthusiast wanting to reproduce the best possible reduced-scale reproduction of the real thing.

Figure 43. The steering wheel, pedals, gear lever, fuses, and switches: everything speaks of racing in this Maserati 300S interior.

The knowledge accumulated in all sorts of encounters with the cars is all-important here. Thanks to the observation of the cars in real life (races, shows) and to the data gathered month after month in journals, books, and, from the mid-1960s, on TV, undeniably informed persons are able to differentiate models that would look similar to the layperson. Some may describe the car driven by a particular driver in a given race or even discriminate the same car at different times in one race: practice session and actual race, including possible modifications to the bodywork after a repair. At any rate, and whatever its scale, it is the first (small but crucial) thing one would look for in appreciating the accuracy of a new model car. Being as precise as possible in the material evocation of a famed car, notably a handmade model that one can comment on, is a way to be part of the ongoing "legend" (as some say) of those cars.

The evaluation of this accuracy, as well as the pleasure of buying, assembling, and contemplating the accurate model of a revered car, is a good example of a material activity that results from a convergence of past and ongoing representations and practices. But, a key characteristic of the activities relative to the passion for classic racers of the 1950s and 1960s is the *multiplicity* of the practices entailed in this particular fervour for a piece of modern material culture.

Relating Relations: Many Ingredients for a Thought Stew

Several questions pertaining to social sciences are raised by the representations and practices I have evoked so far à propos of the finest racing cars of 50 or 60 years ago; being the objective anthropologist the reader rightly presumes I am, I do not write "the finest cars ever." In history of techniques, for instance, one may wonder whether the notion of "exaptation" (Gould and Vbra 1982) is adequate to describe the technological transfers from shipbuilding to the construction of race cars (low windscreens on single-seaters are said to be an adaptation of the devices that brake the waves on the bridge of Navy ships). Similarly, a Latourian sociology of innovation would have a lot to say about the adoption of the four-wheel-drive transmission of agricultural tractors to Formula 1 (on the 1961 Ferguson-Climax) or about the controversies regarding the authenticity of some famed cars (What is a *true* Jaguar E-Type "Lightweight"? How many genuine Ferrari 250 GTOs were made?). Or the ethnology of collectors might study the similarities and differences in the organisation and sociology of clubs devoted to various makes or models: the bourgeois invited by Mercedes on a race day may differ from the "friends of the Dyna Panhard."

As for myself, I am trying to tackle the complex question of the making of a shared world with things, in both meanings of this expression. For example, in the case addressed in this chapter: how do "classic car" freaks share their life with a series of objects related to old racers? And how to do human beings (former young boys of the 1960s) come to share common activities, to do things together with great pleasure just because they have a similar interest and *roughly* the same knowledge and material practices involving those particular objects?

Every lover of these sports and race cars has his own version of the composite arrangement of thoughts, emotions, and material actions that constitute his own longstanding relations with the Ferraris, Aston Martins, etc., of his youth. Such packets of souvenirs and actions vary from one person to another, yet they share a "family resemblance" (Needham 1978; Severi 1992:168; Wittgenstein 1953). And any enthusiast could talk to any other enthusiast about past Ferrari models, about current competitions in which millions (plural!) of Euros worth of cars from the 1960s take part, and would also probably engage in the sort of neverending cross-referencing of the unforgettable events I have mentioned. What is striking is the solidity and durability of this mixture of memories with past and present material practices.

In fact, this "seamless web" (Hughes 1986) of ideas, objects, and material practices that make up an amateur's relationship with cars

and drivers, and make him endlessly unstoppable when he gets going, is composed of the convergence of three types of relations: (1) the relations that define a "historic race car" as a particular kind of car; (2) the relations of one given aficionado with a series of cars and the events in which these cars appear (including auto shows, books, models, etc.); and (3) the relations that different amateurs have between themselves because of and à propos of these particular cars. These relations are unique because they are those of one individual actor with his own items of automobile passion, but they are alike because they have to do with similar categories of actions applied to related objects of a kind. By categories of action, I mean activities such as going somewhere to look at these objects, as a driver, simple onlooker, mechanic, or model-maker; collecting them, either as models or as full-scale cars; interacting physically with these objects; documenting them, either in books, or journals, or shows (and nowadays, via an amazing number of websites devoted to every possible micro-item of the car passion); etc. As for the "related artefacts," there are the machines defined as "race cars" in a certain temporal and institutional context (races, shows, etc.) as well as pages of books and journals, official racing programs, objects called "automobilia" (memorabilia, collectibles such as bonnet mascots), paintings, posters, sculptures, rare spare parts, period goggles, etc., and of course the models themselves.

For each actor (amateur), the mixture of his mutually interlocking engagements with the cars of his dreams presents two characteristics that may be posited as playing a central role in the durability, strength, and even rigidity of his passion for classic cars. First, the various activities surrounding classic cars *echo each other and intersect*. For example, the day of a race, most of the ingredients of car passion I have enumerated so far are present on the grass around the track or in the walkways. The behaviour of the drivers and that of the cars speeding around the track are of course commented on and their performances are related to an appreciation of the driver's skills and the technical characteristics of the machine.

There are race cars in the paddock, too, but each club has also gathered some of its own cars and adherents. Spare parts are on display and for sale, together with old issues of magazines and models. This is also a time to find and buy a real sports car. Each object is commented on, touched, and evaluated, and all evoke memories or anecdotes. Similarly, a show like the Paris "Rétromobile" does not just bring together magnificently well-restored cars that demonstrate the quality of the craftsmanship of specialised workshops or the stock of spare parts suppliers. There are also displays featuring books and models by the thousands, next to stands for insurance companies, clubs, paints,

Figure 44. Since the mid-1960s, classic race cars are back on the track, and the "classic car" business has been thriving (Ledenon, 2010).

polish, auction companies, etc. Needless to say, this is a day when the owner of a classic sports car tries his best to have the car in driving condition for the event.

On the other hand, it is remarkable that the multiple thoughts and events that are called to mind by a mere mention of Jim Clark or a glance at a model are inevitably linked to *several* of the *material* actions I have mentioned. During any meeting where classic cars are on display, for instance, all the senses are mobilised. Sight, because there are so many details to look at and compare. Hearing, to hear and appreciate the roar of the engines and squeal of the tires, but also to listen to the superb sound of a door or a bonnet closing. Touch is essential to appreciate the lightness of an aluminium panel or that of a Perspex window. Smell has a lot to do with the fragrance (!) of hot burned castor oil or that of old leather seats. The fortunate visitor may even feel the infrasound emitted by a big American-made V8 engine at full throttle. Only taste is left out, except that of the delicious sausages and French fries. Visiting a car show, assembling a model kit, rearranging a collection of models, moving books, and turning the pages of the right magazine to find a particular photograph or piece of information are also linked material actions. For instance, after buying a ready-made model of a car on a stand at "Rétromobile" or the "London International Racing Car Show," I may have to check my magazines for a detail I noticed when I saw the real car in a competition, and then try to improve the model with some appropriate brushwork or accessory (such as a tiny fire extinguisher or roll-bar).

Objects: Or the Capacity to Attract and Mix Thoughts, and to Create Sociability

There would be more to say about the numerous relationships many men have with the race cars of the 1950s and 1960s. For instance, not all classic car aficionados are gray-haired men. There are also a few women among these amateurs, and a lot of younger people, too, have developed an interest in these cars, an interest that does not go back to the Dinky Toys of the 1950s. As I already mentioned, the complex relation a collector has with the real car (or cars) he owns deserves a detailed study.

A complete ethnography of the passion I have portrayed should also pay attention to the entire business and thriving economic relations surrounding the maintenance and restoration of these cars, including links with the speculation and showing-off going on around classic cars.[8] There are specialised shops for bodywork, engine work, upholstery, seats, hoods, wheels and tyres, etc. There also exist companies that transport classic cars and others that build timber garages. More generally, one should also be able to explain how the passion I have been concentrating on differs from hobbies centred on rock musicians, paintings, stamp collecting, football, etc.

However, this chapter deals only with the particular questions I am addressing in this book concerning the singular types of social relations and interactions that result from the inextricable entanglement of material actions, thoughts, and emotions. The social relations between those interested in fine cars of the past are remarkable because on the one hand, they are stable and tightly knit; on the other hand, they may be initiated by a simple comment on a beloved 1:43-scale model. The mixture of memories and actions that immediately comes to mind in such a case could be glossed as "thick," prone to launch Wikipedia-like ramifications in one's own and other people's knowledge (I dare not write "culture," but that is what it is). It is also noteworthy that for amateurs, the objects at the centre of these ideas, emotions, and practices do *not* in themselves contain any power.

There is nothing of Jim Clark in the 1:43-scale Lotus 49 that sits on a shelf near my desk, but only what I (and so many others) remember of the great driver, including his smile. Yet, many such small boxes and models can generate the shared and passionate references to the memories and practices, old as well as contemporary, I have described in this chapter. And, taken together, these references and their material hints wordlessly communicate what is at the heart of the passion for classic cars, namely the impossible yet enjoyable desire to partake in the long-gone achievements of heroic drivers.

I posit that, in the case of such pieces of modern material culture too, the multiplicity, diversity, and time-depth of the material actions related to the objects in question is a crucial dimension of their ability to bring people to act together, just as the particular New Guinea objects I have studied do. And the artefacts that achieve the biggest *concentration* of information, souvenirs, and personal skills are the models made from a kit lovingly assembled and "improved," the actual old car you manage to restore, or the one you maintain and race. This, I think (and feel), is a way to participate now, and with the means at hand, in the material legend classic car enthusiasts are interested in. A way to create and share a share in a world made up of emotions, practices, strategies, and thoughts. And yet there is no reference to ritual or to supernatural beings here.

Chapter 6

What Materiality Means: Objects as Resonators

Despite their disparity, which derives from that of my own ethnographic data (i.e., wanderings in the field and experiences with material culture), all of the artefacts described and contextualised in this volume share four anthropological characteristics, which I come back to in this chapter: (1) their making and using relate different domains of social life that are thus brought together in the actors' mind in a unique way; (2) they are part of some kind of non-verbal communication; (3) that special communication concerns key values or key characteristics of particular social relations that are usually hidden, although they pervade everyday life; and (4) the very physicality of the artefacts in question is involved in that process and is not equated to a vague and putative link with their "materiality," but it can be precisely shown.

Materiality and Communication: Beyond Polysemy

First, within the cultures or groups of people concerned, all of the realms of thought and action that are brought to the mind of those who look at these objects, make them, or manipulate them are gathered together simultaneously. The fabrication and manipulation of an Ankave drum thus bring to mind diverse domains of thought and situations, all of which tell same story of life-substance, illness, misfortune, death, sorcery, residence, circulation of life, and cannibalism, which result in the unutterable ambiguity of maternal kin. Baruya fences touch upon the four pillars of local social order already mentioned, namely gender relations, characterised by strong male domination; male rituals, involving a very long (up to 10 years) separation of the initiates from the women; marriage based on sister-exchange; and an omnipresent love of collective action. The sacred objects and theatres of the Ankave and Baruya

male initiations again call upon a mythical past and gender relations, but this time related to warfare, bravery, etc. They also refer to the dozens of daily occurrences through which an Anga group manifests the asymmetry between the genders: the division of labour, of course, but also the ways of occupying the house space; the manner of sitting, walking, carrying, and behaving in a gathering; the materials used for clothing; and access to a garden (Bonnemère 1994:119–22; Godelier 1986a: 10–11; Lemonnier 1984a). Even a simple model of a famous race car evokes the endless series of competitions, life-story events, emotions, and varied practices I detailed in the preceding chapter, and recalls in a non-propositional way that however passionate one may feel about classic cars, the famed races, cars, and drivers belong to the past.

Second, the fabrication, manipulation, and mere sight of the objects in question not only *refer* to a series of social relations, domains of action, and sets of representations; they *communicate* something about the *ensemble* of these spheres of life that underlies all of them. The object, together with its physical making and use, is not another way to say something. It is a reminder that some things and thoughts and hierarchies and histories and gestures *have* to be *thought together*. And it evokes the reasons why they have to be linked. In other words, to consider such artefacts as polysemous signs or icons of sorts because they refer to various fields would be missing the important point, which is the particular content of the non-verbal communication conveyed by them.[1] The convergence of domains thus brought to mind results in the emergence (Hutchins 2005) of another, singular message, which is an outcome of the "cognitive work performed within the blend" (Fauconnier 1997:151, quoted in Hutchins 2005). These artefacts do not (or not only) refer to diverse institutions, social relations, or ways of behaving: they "say," in their own and unique way, what these varied domains have in common, and what prompts them to come together materially the way they do.[2]

Third, my hypothesis is therefore that the artefacts and physical actions involved in the complex I have described play a crucial and *sui generis* role in a blending of thoughts and actions which results in the nonpropositional communication *of key values or fundamental characteristics of particular social relations*. They deal with topics of crucial importance in people's lives. A male ritual or a mortuary *songen* are serious matters, which are discussed and organised years in advance. They are collective endeavours that are extremely important in people's lives. Fencing a garden is something that everyone notices because most gardens are located on mountain slopes framing narrow valleys, and because the band of men is anything but silent. Fencing a collective taro garden is planned months ahead. In passing, these activities and

artefacts are also ranked highly among those cultural productions that are put forward with some pride in discussions with the anthropologist ("Pierre, wait until you see our rituals!" or "How can people make such poor-looking gardens! Remember my garden, Pierre?"). As for the "classic cars" and the practices to which they are related, the same is true, although on a much more modest scale. But, at least for those aficionados, sharing a passion for classic racers, the network of ideas and the practices I have enumerated have or may have an immense importance in an individual's life; it may be something that overwhelms their mind, can ruin or exhaust them, lead to divorce and, of course, give them extreme pleasure.

Moreover, what the fence, eel trap, drum, and sacred objects of the Anga communicate without words and bring to mind are key values, basic statements about the local social organisation and shared representations—known or unmentionable—that underlie many social relations. It is the relations between men and women, between initiated men, between the living and the dead, between wife-givers and -takers, etc., which the actors experience every day in many domains, that a Baruya fence, an eel trap, a sacred object, or a mortuary drum bring together.

What statements? The building of a Baruya fence, notably around a huge collective taro garden in view of the male rituals, is another instance when the tension between the norm of absolute cooperation between co-initiates or brothers-in-law and the reality of men's rivalry and disagreements is palpable. An Ankave trap is both a reference to past female powers and to the difficulty of having children recruited in fathers' lineages when their life-substance comes from the mother and the maternal kin. The mortuary drums refer to the same hard-to-manage maternal origin of life-principles or, rather, to the ultimate malevolence of maternal kin that is its unbearable consequence. And the ritual objects render tangible the tension and contradiction that pervade the daily relation between women in a world where women's powers are present despite general gender asymmetry.

Dinky Toys and classic car–related artefacts may not hide an "ineffable" cultural truth. Yet, in addition to general statements such as "the 1950s and 1960s were the good old days," or "these were real cars for real drivers," or "never again will such marvels be fabricated," the love of old racing automobiles often hides the individual yet common feeling that interest in sports cars is a way to delegate to braver or more-gifted others one's own desire to drive tremendously powerful and hard-to-handle priceless sports cars. And, overall, engaging with classic cars or their small-scale substitutes is inseparable from the pleasurable but forlorn quest to share a piece of the legendary races and drivers' feats.

The Durability of Materially Entangled Meanings

The fourth shared feature of the objects studied here is of course that what they perform is deeply anchored in the material procedures that take place around them. A Baruya fence and an Ankave trap are first and foremost obvious displays of skills, accumulated energy, and mechanical redundancy consistent with male (and mythical eels') strength. It is also in the course of their making that a male propensity to act collectively and the eels' encompassing of both past violent gender relations and present male force are respectively expressed. As we know, the hourglass drums of the Ankave are explicit images of the origin of these mortuary objects and of their function as a conduit between two worlds, activated when they are beaten by people circling endlessly. The sacred artefacts of the Anga male initiations, too, draw their ritual efficacy and non-verbal meaning from their physical characteristics. As composite images of ancestral beings, an *oremere* or *kwaimatnie* literally enfolds and gathers living primordial powers, the conjunction of which is needed to realise the transformation of the boys in an atmosphere fraught with the ambiguity of male and female powers. As for the small models or the photographs of cars, we have seen that their mere sight sums up the features that define a car as a "race" car—its very physical peculiarities aimed at speed—and immediately suffices to include it in a series of racers, drivers, competitions, models, etc. The words spoken about them, in turn, invariably refer to material things, actions, event, feats, and even sensations.

It is hardly necessary to stress once more that the events centred on the use of the New Guinea artefacts are the moments and places when what they bring to the mind of the participants takes on their fullest meaning (i.e., the moments when the particular feature that underlies a set of numerous and varied social relations reaches a paroxysm). In other words, I am not invoking a vague "materiality" to explain the specific role of objects in what I am talking about: I have shown how each of those artefacts, their fabrication, mechanical features, or physical components, as well as their use, concentrate and "tell" in a material way what these particular things have to express and therefore do in particular social relations, *at the place and time they do it*.

Moreover, for once, there even exists some kind of proof of my proposition that the use of these objects is crucial in reinforcing essential social relations: this proof comes from the quasi-experimental situation produced by the irruption of modernity among the Anga. Briefly, what is going on around these objects, and because they are what they are, explains the fact that the Ankave and Baruya still perform their male rituals or, in the case of the Baruya, were performing them less than a

decade ago, that the Ankave regularly hold their *songen* ceremony, and that Baruya men still gather in the early morning to clear gardens and make fences.

First contact with the Baruya came in 1951, and as early as 1963 more than 40 young men were attending the school organised by the Lutheran missionaries. In June 2005, however, the Baruya had a huge *tsimia* ceremony in which 179 young men became initiates of the fourth stage (*kalave*), among whom 68 (38%) were Christians. In 2010 the male rituals, and notably the sacred objects looked after by the masters of the initiations, were at the centre of an ongoing rivalry between the various Christian denominations, because some of them tolerate the initiations while others (Pentecostal churches and Seventh Day Adventists) reject and forbid them as being "ancestral heathen practices." Also, among the Baruya, tall trees now occupy the bottom of the Wonenara Valley, planted there to protect the coffee gardens from the sun, and the huge flat area once covered by salt fields is now an airstrip. But there is nothing new in the general landscape, where the mosaic of gardens separated by sturdy high barriers are still prominent and everywhere.

Figure 45. Baruya men during the collective building of the *tsimia* in 1985. After a 20-year interruption, a similar *tsimia* ritual was organised again in 2005, in which hundreds of Christian Baruya, young and old, women and men, took part (Yanyi, 1985).

As we have seen in Chapter 1, the Baruya situation contrast stunningly with the Sambia landscape, where the oversized garden barriers (and cooperatively built beehive-shaped houses) no longer exist today. I see this as a direct result of the adoption of marriages with bride-price and of the abandonment of the male initiations in the last three decades.

The ongoing mortuary *songen* rituals of the Ankave are another proof of sorts of the mutual cross-reinforcement and enduring quality of particular material practices (those centred on the artefacts described in this book) and systems of thoughts and practices. The efforts of the churches to Christianise the Ankave were continuous from the early 1970s to the mid-1990s (Lemonnier 1998), and some Ankave have assimilated parts of the Christian message, but there is no form of syncretism between their own beliefs and Christianity. The Ankave are careful to send the spirits of the recent dead away to an invisible realm which they by no means equate with the Christian heaven. Almost no Christian graves are to be seen, and the dead continue to go where their ancestors went. Or rather, to disappear as they always have, since the question of a possible afterlife is never addressed in this society. To say the least, the Ankave are not yet interested in saving their souls. This explains why the missionaries, who are regularly ousted by the Ankave, do not make an effort to come back

Figure 46. Sixty years after contact, fenced gardens and round houses still predominate in the landscape of a Baruya valley (Wonenara, 2009).

(the last one fled in 1994). The question then is why are the Ankave not attracted by heaven, although they had their first look at Christianity 40 or so years ago?

On the one hand, it is obvious that the New Guinean representatives of the various denominations' attempts to make the Ankave meet for Sunday service or to build the evangelist's house go against the remarkable absence of cooperation in their social practices. Similarly, to settle in a particular hamlet around a chapel would run counter to their preference for dispersal, which is directly linked with the threat of *ombo'*. On the other hand, many Melanesian societies have encountered such new constraints and beliefs and have nevertheless become good Christians. So what is particular about this small group of lowland Angans, who reject the Good News? The reader already roughly knows my answer to that question.

To avoid a circular explanation ("The Ankave do not believe in the Christian message because they do not believe in it"), one has to look for some specificity of Ankave social organisation and/or representations. That specificity resides in the procedures that deal with death, the person, and the group, and which leave no space for a Christian afterlife; that is enough to jeopardise the whole Christianisation process. In sum, the Ankave have not introduced into their mortuary rituals the slightest bit of Christian thought, and I posit that this resistance to change is due

Figure 47. Today, the Ankave still perform their *songen* mortuary ceremonies (here at Ayakupna'wa in 2002).

to the solidity, the indivisible embedding of the various domains that the *songen* ritual brings together around the mortuary drums, their making, and their being put into action in the midst of dozens of participants.

This is such a strong and coherent whole that, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the witch-hunters (*boss-sangguma* in Tok Pisin) who claimed to have learnt from the neighbouring Kapau-Anga how to identify *ombo'*, did not last long. To be sure, two women were unfortunately killed and mutilated following their denunciation by the *boss-sangguma*. But after 10 years of irregular activity, the witch-hunters have disappeared, notably because a Christian Ankave from Angae (the other main Ankave valley) publicly declared that he would bring any *ombo'* murderer to the police. Up to now, everyone agrees that *ombo'* are indeed a calamity but that no one can claim to spot them, because 50 years after they discovered the unthinkable existence of white people, and in spite of the periodical presence of Papuan catechists, which they always manage to get rid of (Bonnemère 2010), the Ankave continue to think *as a group* about such crucial phenomena as the *ombo*'s cannibal attacks, the attribution of

Figure 48. In the late 1980s, and for a decade or so, some Ankave maintained they could hunt the *ombo'*, and two women were killed for allegedly being *ombo'*. *Ombo'* are not supposed to be identified, and the witch-hunters have disappeared (Ayakupna'wa, 1987).

blame for misfortune, representations of sickness, the role of the shaman in everyday life, the proper way of behaving towards maternal kin, etc. To abandon the *songen* ceremony and believe in a Christian afterworld would imply the dismantling of the interrelated sets of representations and practices that converge towards the psychopomp drums.

Needless to say, the June 2005 Baruya *tsimia*, the current Ankave *tsuwengen* or *songen* ceremonies, or the contemporary noisy enthusiasm of a dozen Baruya men heading towards the forest to clear a fenced garden have nothing to do with the "invention of tradition," which may be an all-purpose explanation in other parts of Melanesia but is meaningless in the present case. The Anga never stopped making gardens in the same way as they did prior to contact, driving their dead away the way they do, or initiating the boys using their *kwaimatnie*, *oremere*, or *tsuwangen* as material devices. In other words, the artefacts in question are what give endurance and solidity to the fundamental ideas and practices that pervade their culture and social organisation. Rather, we have reason to think that the solidity and endurance of this sort of system of thoughts and actions has something to do with the ability of these particular artefacts to prompt the convergence of diverse ideas relating to various social relations and practices.

Artefacts as Perissological Resonators

Although I am not in the actors' heads, it is hard to imagine that these "heads" do not contain, in some way or another, a mixture of ideas and emotions, the primary characteristic of which is that they are indivisible. This is confirmed by an altogether ordinary ethnographer's experience: speaking and enquiring about the Ankave drum or about anything regarding Baruya male rituals, brothers-in-laws and gardens, etc., he would necessarily hear his Anga friends say something like "But you already know very well that . . ." and, quite often: "You make the connection now?" ("*Joinim pinis*?" in Tok Pisin). This means that the convergence of multiple situations around artefacts in action is not the result of the anthropologist's imagination. It is confirmed by the way the Anga themselves refer to these various domains as being linked.

Therefore, we have to come back to the periodical blending of thoughts and actions done by actors making or using artefacts, this time to understand how it plays a role in the *solidity* and compactness of the series of representations and related social interactions that are thus brought to the mind of the actors. Such a fusion renders tangible particular characteristics of social relations that pervade many spheres of life in various circumstances, which anthropologists call "kinship," "exchange," "myth," "gender," "illness," "gardening," etc. But what do

we know of the mixture's solidity and durability? It is certainly not the "materiality" of the artefacts that in itself gives them this crucial social function. That is only part of the explanation.

"Materiality," as we have shown, explains nothing unless one can show which property, elements, and mechanical aspect of the artefacts and of their making or physical manipulation can be associated with some aspect of the local social practices and imaginary world, and why. But why does the "materiality" I have discussed at length have a role in blending domains of life and expressing why they have to be thought together?

There is nothing new in the idea that objects "render tangible" or "actualise" in a performative way important aspects of social organisation, culture, systems of thoughts, or actions. This is notably the point in Donald Tuzin's splendid paper "Art, Ritual, and the Crafting of Illusion" (2002), in honour of Antony Forge, in which he demonstrated the latter's pioneering role in the critique of "representation reduction" in the study of art (Tuzin 2002:8). The artefacts I have contextualised in this book are indeed central to a nonpropositional mode of communication that indicates crucial values, which are ordinarily unspoken (even unspeakable or dissimulated), of "locally important existential ideas of which the actors themselves may not be consciously aware" (Tuzin 2002:2, referring to Forge's work on the Abelam). They clearly participate in such a communication of crucial "implicit non-verbal statements" (Forge 1966:30), and often of "ideas that are cognitively, socially, or emotionally unacceptable to consciousness" (Tuzin 2002:289). But they are not art objects, nor are all involved in rituals. Therefore, what matters is not first of all that the object described here are "of art" or "ritual." Moreover, by no means is what they do, their "agency," as it were, based *only* on looking at them or listening to the sounds they may produce.

What these objects concentrate and make tangible is the underlying meaning of a sort of *perissology*, or rather, a useful perissology, according to the French meaning of the term. In English, a perissology, or redundancy of speech, is the "use of more words than necessary" (*Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* 1973:1557); that is, a "pleonasm." In French, however, it is also a figure of style that consists in *emphasising an idea* by repeating it in different terms.[3] In other words, a perissology is a way to express things in various domains or registers to *reinforce* a message. Anga cultures clearly have a perissological dimension; several of their institutions, manners, exchanges, basic rules for living together, reference to the past, etc., refer more or less indirectly and in different ways to some of their key values or some of the main logic underlying particular social relations.[4] What each artefact and its associated manipulations do is not only bring these different registers together, but they also *reveal or at least put forward the general meaning of such a particular perissology*. As I have

said before, the objects in question are not polysemous: they do not mean several things. What they mean is the reason why different things, circumstances, social encounters, or sets of thoughts have to be thought *together*. And, as already stressed, this message is "emergent" (Hutchins 2005). It is the outcome of the coalescence of images, souvenirs, and feelings it activates instantaneously by the object in the context of its making or use.[5]

These artefacts are what could be glossed as "perissological resonators."[6] And I posit that their materiality is fundamental to the stability of the sociocultural configuration the basic relations of which they help render visible in a non-verbal manner. However, I am not saying anything as simplistic as "hard material makes durable social relations." I link this durability to the very characteristics of particular artefacts such as those discussed in this book, and to their role in non-verbal communication.

Interestingly enough, what the local artefact allows in terms of convergence of thoughts and in terms of durability of the complex of related ideas and social interactions about which it communicates non-verbally may parallel what Pascal Boyer (2000:17, 30, 298) writes about the production and reproduction of religious concepts. For this author, such concepts are durable because they correspond to a "successful activation of a whole variety of mental systems" (Boyer 2000:298). Inference systems are those "specialised explanation devices . . . , each of which is adapted to particular kinds of events and automatically suggests explanations for these events" (Boyer 2000:17), such as the moral system (which evaluates the morality of acts), the system involved in verbal communication, the system of intuitive psychology (that deals with other agents' mental states and access to information), and systems for inferences regarding predation, death, etc. (Boyer 2000:183, 202, 302, 309–10, 320). There are notably "specialized cognitive systems that register situations of exchange, store them in memory and produce inferences for subsequent behaviour" (Boyer 2000:183), and a person-file system that is ". . . a kind of mental Rolodex or Who's Who of the person's social environment" (Boyer 2000:219). These systems of inference correspond to what is perceived and mentally processed.[7]

With regard to the function of artefacts that I have documented in this book, Boyer advances the key idea that "the implicit representations are often handled by *several* inference systems, each of which has its own logic" (Boyer 2000:306; my italics). Moreover, "once a particular theme or object triggers rich inferences in a variety of different mental systems, it is more likely to be the object of cultural attention and elaboration" (Boyer 2000:226). He further explains that there *is no mental device aimed at the integration* of these various inferences (Boyer 2000:307, 309), which leads me to hypothesize that particular artefacts may play a role in the simultaneous activation of diverse systems of inference (regarding kinship, life-cycle, subsistence, exchange, death, etc.)

Figure 49. Artefacts such as an Ankave funerary drum are perissological resonators. Their material use concentrates various fields of thoughts and actions, which, in turn, trigger an emergent non-verbal statement about the flagitious ambiguity of maternal kin (Ayakupna'wa, 1987).

that reinforces the solidity of a system of thought.[8] But this cognitive phenomenon would by no means be limited to religious concepts.

This may in turn have something to do with the variety of senses involved in the use of the artefacts I am interested in. In line with Gell's remarks on vertigo, which "threatens intentionality" (Gell 1980:226), and with Boyer's hypotheses on the violation of intuitive expectations in religious beliefs (e.g., 1993:36–37; 2000:66, 79, 82),[9] Tuzin remarks that several ethnographic cases,[10] each referring to "different sensory modalities" (brilliance, vertigo, unheard sounds), have in common the fact of dealing with "the experience of illusion, the breaching of self-boundaries attendant

on the violation of perceptual expectations, and intimation of a supernatural presence" (Tuzin 2002:13).[11] I would even stress that the different sensory modalities often are *simultaneously* present. Such is the case during an Ankave drum-beating ceremony or any Anga male ritual, where the actors are submerged by images, sounds, infrasounds, smells, exhaustion, etc.; but they are also present around a mere Baruya fence or Ankave eel trap, the sight of which is inseparable from the feeling of the passive energy painstakingly amassed in the object.[12] What I just wrote of course participates in the perception of the now-famous notion of "'bundling' of distinct material qualities" in an object (Keane 2003:421). Needless to say, I am an anthropologist, and except for this hypothesis on a possible role of artefacts/resonators in the reproduction of an enduring system of social relations and thoughts because they activate a series of inference systems, I do not know the precise cognitive relations between such an artefact and the actors, except that several of their senses are involved.[13]

Figure 50. After a night with no sleep and no fire, these Ankave *ipane* novices have been beaten and their noses pierced. They have just removed the bark-cape hood that prevented them looking around and have realised that the strange sound they hear is not the bush-spirits' voice, but a man with a bullroarer. This multisensory experience is unforgettable and participates in the initiates' discovery of the fundamental values wordlessly revealed by the material manipulation of the sacred bundle (Ikundi, 1994).

Some of the objects I have documented (a Baruya fence or a 1:43-scale model), however, do not create an illusion capable of imparting life to unseen supernatural beings, which means that what Tuzin explains about "art's ritual efficacy" (Tuzin 2002:3, 19) or Boyer's propositions on the cognitive function of multiple inferences *would apply to nonritual situations as well*. This observation leads to a further comparison of the objects documented in this book in an attempt to understand in what respect they differ, despite their common ability to refer "to relationships of an existential or metaphysical order," to quote Tuzin (2002:2) again. But this also leads to the blurring of some anthropological borders.

Chapter 7

What's New? Blurring Anthropological Borders but Keeping "Technology" in Mind

What is at stake, finally, in the capacity that objects and material actions have without benefit of words to make "statements about the nature of man and his culture" (Forge 1970:288)? A good way to define and develop an answer to this question is to bridge the topics, results, and hypotheses explored in this book with particular contemporary approaches to the study of material culture.

The role of objects in non-verbal communication as exemplified here echoes the question Weiner posed in her seminal paper (1983): "What do artefacts do in social relations that words only could not do?" As we have seen, I have related the communicative function of what I call "perissological resonators" to Boyer's remarks on the strength of religious concepts based on multiple inferences. Once again, all that I have hypothesised so far about the triggering of non-verbal messages resulting from the confluence of thoughts and domains of experience describes exactly the kind of material "anchoring" for a "blend" of concepts reported by Hutchins (2005). Each of my examples is an illustration of the way "nonverbal action . . . can . . . express multiple implications simultaneously" (Tambiah 1968:202). In the ethnography presented here, the "new inferences" made by the actors go far beyond everyday life and are very often related to fundamental values and crucial social relations. More generally, my ethnography illustrates the communication of "unspeakable truths" and the "blurring of boundaries" (between domains of experience) that Tuzin linked with the "crafting of an illusion" à propos of works of art.

However, most of the artefacts I have considered are not pieces of art. The point of view I have developed is akin to that of Mauss or Leroi-Gourhan, and focuses on the role actions on the material world play in the particular communicative function of the objects that I have

explored. Several of the case studies in this book are furthermore an exploration of Lévi-Strauss' or Leach's earlier ideas on artefacts in rituals, and document not only the way gestures and objects intervene in loco verbi,[1] but also the particular layout of objects in ritual situations (Leach 1966). This intervention of artefacts in rituals and other social circumstances cannot be reduced to a mere interpretation of their form and decoration. I have therefore added to my approach the absolute necessity of considering the system of gestures, physical actions, and thoughts that accompany the making and using of these objects if we are to understand how they participate in social relations, and make highly visible—and even tangible—a "circular process of mutual reference" (Taylor 1996:203) between material actions, practices, and shared representations. Last, I have posited that the diversity of the sensory modalities and that of the systems of inference activated while using these objects is crucial in the convergence of thoughts, contexts, and practices that triggers or anchors a nonpropositional and new statement about essential social relations or values found in the actors' own world. In sum, this non-verbal communication intertwined with the materiality of the artefacts at hand is revealed when we regard them as things to make, manipulate, and act upon, and not—or not only—something to look at, decipher, exchange, or discuss.

As several (but still very few) scholars have shown in the last 20 years, this is the price to pay if "materiality" is to become more than a program in anthropological theory.[2] It is now well established that taking the time to consider artefacts as physical things made of materials, mechanical relations, particular assemblages, etc., brings *new* and *complementary* anthropological understandings of local situations that *could not* be proposed otherwise.

Net Bags, Canoes, Bowls, Yams, and Slit-gongs: New Findings in the Anthropology of Material Things

Several more-or-less recent studies conducted in Melanesian societies have shown in detail what objects or material actions do in ritual, in exchange, or in ways of sharing a particular way of living together. In addition, they have demonstrated a role played by objects in non-verbal communication paralleling that detailed in this book.

Some of these works even attempt to shine light on the seminal yet often mysterious conditions in which things can be said to have an "agency," particularly that of being "persons." Such is the case of MacKenzie's *Androgynous Objects: String Bags and Gender in Central New Guinea* (1991). Her study shows that the fact that women make the net bags used in male ritual made men recognise that female procreative

powers are necessary for these ceremonies to be successful. Her extremely precise step-by-step description of the making and use of the nets further demonstrates the mutual dependence of men and women in the rituals. Leach (2002, 2012) has similarly shown the mixing of myth, ritual, and technique in the very making of the slit-gongs of the Reite of the Rai Coast, and has demonstrated how such materially made artefacts represent ongoing transformations of relations between persons.

Figure 51. Thanks to years of researching the very materiality of the Massim's canoes—here the mast-mount of an *anageg* used on the eastern side of the *kula* ring—Fred Damon has modified our views on the *kula* and shown that these vessels expose, in a highly material way, a series of inter-island relations crucial to the meaning of the *kula* (Photo copyright Fred Damon).

Damon's work (2008) has profoundly modified our views on one of the regions most studied by anthropologists, the Massim, site of the famous *kula* exchanges described by Malinowski (1922) and commented upon by score of scholars, notably Munn (1977), Tambiah (1983), Gell (1992, 1998), and Campbell (2002), who focused on the canoes used in these seafaring expeditions. By listening to what the producers and users of the local canoes, or mere onlookers, said about them, Damon demonstrates that much more is involved than the objects that circulate in the *kula*. There is also a question of the types and geographical origin of the trees and vegetal ties used to tie the wooden pieces made from these trees, the proportion of the mast to the keel, or the distance between the keel

and the outrigger float, as well as the ability of the mast-mount to cushion the effect of the wind and waves. This material thing that is a canoe thus appears as a complex synthesis of a social world scattered at sea. It also almost explicitly associates the inter-island network with management of the risk of loss of resources and famine. Damon, in turn, interprets this risk in terms of chaos theory, as a consequence of the El Niño climatic oscillations that regularly bring the droughts that devastate entire areas.

It is again by observing actors as they transform the material world and comment on what they are doing that Revolon (2006, 2007a) has shown that, in the technical act itself—shaping a block of wood or a piece of mother-of-pearl used to make a Salomon carved bowl—the making articulates both the expertise of the specialist and particular spirits. The Owa people of Aorigi Island actually distinguish between "well made" and "beautiful," whereas the spirits are reputed to love what is beautiful. It is not only the finished piece of art, its iconography, or its role in the exchanges and associated strategies that matter. It is also the physical incorporation in the objects of features that attract spirits; that is, the transforming of a piece of wood into a bowl that fascinates the inhabitants of the invisible realm. Taking into account the exchanges

Figure 52. *Apira* wooden bowls of the Owa people of Aorigi (Salomon Islands). Taking into account the sculptors' relationship with the spirits who inspire the shape and details of the bowl helps understand what is going on during the exchanges in which the bowls are filled with food (Photo copyright Sandra Revolon).

entailing the wooden objects and the prestige of those men who organise such exchanges is still important (e.g., Davenport 1986; Revolon 2007b). However, Revolon shows that another key series of characters, the spirits, play their role in what the bowls are and in what they do. This can only be revealed by coming to understand the entanglement of art, economics, religion, and technique within material things.

Going back to Papua New Guinea, but now to the Abelam (where Forge worked and subsequently modified our anthropological views on art), Coupaye (2007, 2009b, 2012) has described and analysed in detail 240 operational sequences involved in yam gardening. In considering yams as artefacts, he has shown that the production of this ritual tuber entails a series of related networks of exchange (cuttings, magic, shell-money, expertise) as well as group and individual rivalries similar to those based on the exchange of wealth, pigs, and even heads elsewhere in Melanesia. In this case, too, it is the material peculiarities of the cultivation of the yams that creates their "aesthetic power" (in Coupaye's terms), what makes the actors put together what they think about yams and do with them, as Abelam people.

I do not intend to highjack my colleagues' anthropological results, but it is remarkable that, each in their own way, the artefacts they study

Figure 53. Coupaye's attention to the operational sequences entailed in the production of Abelam ceremonial yams has swept away the academic borders between anthropology of art, *technologie culturelle*, and analysis of exchanges in New Guinea (Photo copyright Ludovic Coupaye).

and the material actions these artefacts are involved in are what brings simultaneously to mind domains of cultural experience that are linked in some way. As shown in the cases detailed in this book, it is by their very characteristics and usage that they activate a convergence and meeting of thoughts that relate to particular social relations salient in several domains of the actors' social organisation, culture, and shared representations. As I have already stressed, these objects, plus their physical making and use, are *not* another way to say things. They are a particular and unique way to deliver essential statements about the actors' social lives by serving as reminders that some things and thoughts and hierarchies and histories and materials and gestures *have* to be thought *together*. And, as described and explained at length by these authors, their very convergence evokes the reasons why they have to be linked, or the social relations or tensions that are at stake in the message communicated in a nonpropositional way by their "materiality."

At any rate, Lévi-Strauss (1966:115) was right: "for the observer capable of understanding its *use*" (my italics), a ceremonial yam, wooden bowl, slit-gong, seagoing canoe, drum, or fence reveals essential aspects of cultures, systems of meaning, and social relations, which are particular anthropological results that *no other* approach can achieve. And artefacts communicating the underlying logic of social perissologies are in the forefront. Mauss' very old research program on techniques may be "utopian," as Schlanger (1991) puts it, but it is rewarding.

It is also noteworthy that none of the chapters of this book, nor the examples hastily summarised here, resonate *directly* with any of the other contemporary and often rightly fashionable approaches to objects and techniques. To be brief (I don't have room to mention the dozens, or rather, hundreds of studies to which I allude), by no means could the social function, efficiency, and workings of the artefacts in question be reduced to evaluating these artefacts, to deciphering symbols, discussing legitimacies or identities, or to delegating to the material world some aspect of political power, gender, colonialism, modernity, etc. Needless to say, these approaches raise real issues, but what is now at stake is to connect them usefully with the sort of new *technologie culturelle* illustrated in the Melanesian case studies mentioned here, as well as in the present book.

Gell and the Breaching of Anthropological Borders: Don't Mix Everything Up

The ethnography and analysis of material culture gathered in this book blurs the borders between several fields of anthropology for the very reason that what has to be documented and investigated is precisely a

local intermingling of domains that we are prone to differentiate. What we need to understand is the point of view of those local actors who produce and use the things we address because it is *their minds* that perceive the non-verbal communication in which those artefacts are central. However, these actors do not make the distinctions we anthropologists make between "mundane," "technical," "ritual," or "art" objects. Or rather, if ever they do make or mention such distinctions, it is in terms of their local categories that we have to reach our understanding, despite our own purportedly good reasons to distinguish between, say, a "technical" and a "ritual" object.

As we have seen, this mixing of what we separate is central to the role of resonator that I have attributed to these objects. No less than four subdisciplines are needed to "understand" the ritual objects of the Anga: anthropology of myth, ritual, technique, and a drop of cognitive anthropology. Looking at these artefact as being "first of all" or "only" a sort of materialisation of myths, pieces of technology or elements of ritual would miss what needs to be understood, the particular mixture of gestures, feelings, representations, and material actions they represent. In all these cases, making the artefact, using it, and "knowing" the mythology that goes with the artefact and the ritual are one and the same thing.

Figure 54. It is simply impossible—and misleading—to separate "art," "technique," "myth," and "ritual" when discussing an Ankave eel trap (Suowi valley, 1987).

Fortunately, some scholars have concerned themselves with the question of borders of anthropological domains of study, notably with respect to material culture. Gell features prominently here, for he has made several propositions relative to technology or linked to technology. The good and inestimable side of his approach is that, rather than seeing each as constituting a "separate province," he considers art, magic, and the *production* of objects to be intimately linked to each other. In particular, he has tried to soften the opposition between technology and magic,[3] which was a way to reintroduce emic agents in the description and understanding of material actions.[4] But most of all, although Gell ignored entirely the literature on *technologie culturelle* as well as on material culture studies, his work has involuntarily joined with those approaches addressing the place of material devices and actions, in particular social situations not directly linked with the production of goods and exchange. Part of the demonstration is yet to come,[5] but he has suggested that the "art-system contributes to securing the acquiescence of individuals in the network of intentionalities in which they are enmeshed." In a well-known example, Gell has stressed both the magical procedures that allow a Trobriand carver to succeed in making a canoe-board, and this artefact's ability to "enchant" those actors who see it (Gell 1992:44–46; 1998). Moreover, he has proposed that "technical virtuosity"—and the supernatural forces behind it—"is intrinsic to the efficacy of works of art in their social context" (1992:52); that is, to their "agency."

Much remains to be done before we understand how this "agency" is locally conceptualised and related to the material characteristics of objects, and, as illustrated in the Melanesian studies just mentioned as well as in the present volume, it is particularly rewarding to explore the ins and outs of the effects objects and material actions have in people's social lives. This brings me to several points in Gell's argument and understanding of technology which are misleading and deserve comment because they intersect with several of the issues addressed here.

First of all, what he writes about the "*homology* between the technical aspect of art production and the production of social relation" (Gell 1992:56, my italics) is as vague as my (and others') old (and rather useless because it is undocumented) notion of "correspondence" or "articulation" of technical features with other socioeconomic phenomena. Gell rightly includes knowledge and body skills in technology, and sees the latter as embedded in a social context (Gell 1988:6); moreover, we have just seen that he refers to "technical virtuosity." But technical action per se is not part of his program. This is clear in his understanding of the notion of technical "system," which leads him to expand the use of the term "technology" far beyond the technical domain "as it has been conventionally understood" (Gell 1988:6).

Gell at first equates "technique" (and "technical") with the classical sphere of economics[6] (production, repartition, consumption of goods), but he expands it to "the pursuit of intrinsically difficult-to-obtain results by roundabout, or clever, means" (Gell 1988:6). Therefore, according to Gell, kinship is a "technology of reproduction," whereas "art, music, dances, rhetoric, gifts, etc." are "technologies of enchantment" (Gell 1988:7; 1992) using "magical technology" (Gell 1992:59).

Assuredly, if Gell viewed kinship or psychological manipulations as "technologies" (Gell 1992:58 sq.), it is not surprising that he paid almost no attention to action on the material world and the physical dimension of artefacts, apart from what is visible. To be sure, he referred to the usual distinction between technique and magic, stressing that, in the former, "causal properties are exploited." But he was not interested in the modalities of action on the material world (how a carver's chisel works, for instance). For him, objects may be tools belonging to a "technology of enchantment," that is, aimed at "securing the acquiescence of other people in their intentions or projects" (Gell 1988:7). When he mentions a sequence of action on the material world, it is only because that particular action may be ordered by magic practices that have a possible cognitive role in productive systems, or a technical efficacy.[7] He referred to given technical actions as totalities, either as a particular kind of technical action (carving, making a trap, painting, etc.) or as objects observed in a particular society and place (a canoe prow-board, a lime container, a trap, etc.), but never in any detail having to do with the transformation of the matter. In sum, in Gell's writings, the words are present (agency, virtuosity, technology, body, skills, etc.), but because he failed to consider precisely how things work, are physically made, and are used, technology and the material characteristics of artefact remained a black box in his work, as if they lay de facto outside of anthropological investigation.

In this respect, what he wrote about the Ankave trap stands slightly apart. On the one hand, Gell built on what my description and analysis of the trap as a *mechanical* device reveal about the local representations of eels (Lemonnier 1993a). I can only agree! On the other hand, he saw the trap as an eel-like artefact (so what?), and he doubted that the Ankave themselves recognise and feel the link between the strength of the fish and that of the artefact that captures them. I have already explained that I do not follow Gell on these interpretations. But, as I noted earlier, my main point of disagreement with his comment on the eel trap concerns the embedding of a supposed agency of the "ancestors": contrary to what Gell proposes, there is no "ancestral power" in a trap. In fact, there are no ancestors nor spiritual beings of sorts embedded in an Ankave drum either. The *ombo'* who take delivery of the spirit of a recently deceased person at the other end of the double funnel are

indeed part of the ritual going on. But neither these powerful characters nor their "powers" are present in the drums themselves.

The possible association with ancestors or spiritual beings is nonetheless of importance with respect to this book. In effect, all sorts of supernatural agents are often given essential roles in the theory of a particular sociocultural sphere that is often characterised as comprising a "condensation" of various kinds of social relations that resembles the convergence of thoughts around artefacts I have described. This domain of social life is ritual action. Now, interestingly enough, the strain of anthropology that deals with this domain is also well known for putting "technique" to one side as being a domain profoundly different from "magic" and "religion." In other words, my proposition concerning the role of artefacts in non-verbal communication has much in common with some characteristics of ritual while also displaying many differences. Let's start by taking a detour via the relationship of ritual action to techniques.

An Infernal Couple: Technique and Ritual

Following Mauss[8] and building on a position already advocated by Goody (1961), Firth[9] (1967:34), Lévi-Strauss[10] (1981), and many others, most anthropologists characterise "ritual" actions by the absence (or opacity) of a material causality between successive ritual steps or operations (e.g., Boyer 2000:232; Gardner 1983:49; Rappaport 1979:177). This lack of "technical motivation," or absence of an intuitive relationship between means and ends (Sperber 1974; Whitehouse 2002:95), is, for instance, central to Humphrey and Laidlaw's theory of "archetypal action of ritual" (1994:2). A well-known example of this severing of the "link, present in everyday activity, between the 'intentional meaning' of the agent and the identity of the act which he or she performs" is that of a former Royal Air Force (RAF) pilot turned commercial airline pilot. This pilot still "walks around" his aircraft, although he cannot shake its huge wings or vertical fin anymore. According to Humphrey and Laidlaw (1994:158), and as I understand it, he performs useless actions by "stipulation": in the RAF, he had to do this, notably around a small aircraft; in a civilian airline, his gestures have become "nontechnical," or "ritualised."

From a logical point of view, however, defining a ritual in opposition to a "technique" should imply that there exists such a thing as a "pure technical action." Indeed, 40 years of *technologie culturelle à la française* and two decades of material culture studies, as well as studies in sociology of innovation and modern technologies,[11] have demonstrated that this is never and nowhere the case.

The alleged "opacity" of the relationship between means and effects is no more obvious in rituals, at least not in some of them. According to Coupaye, for instance, whose research on yams as artefacts in the Abelam "yam cult" I mentioned earlier in this chapter, the manipulation of particular stones by a ritual expert results in ordering worm-like spirits to work invisibly under the ground so that the soil may be conducive to the tubers' development (Coupaye 2009a, 2012). Similarly, the idea that an hourglass-shaped Ankave drum may funnel spirits of the dead from one world to another indeed appears to me as a counterintuitive relationship between means and ends. However, this may not be the case for those who might know how to recognise a *pinsingen siwi*'! Once you understand that such a spiritual essence has an unclear shape and substance by nature, which is what the Ankave think ("Have you seen one [you foolish Pierre]?"), there is no reason why such an entity could not embark in this very material tunnel connecting the human world with that of the *ombo'*. Instead of opaque causality or "violation" of intuition, there is, in this case, as in that of the Abelam's stony underground communication with worm-like spirits, clearly a series of material causal links for those performing the ritual.

In fact, defining ritual action as "nontechnical" is so unsatisfactory that several authors, who have remarked that part of what they wrote about ritual could just as well apply to techniques, have added to their definition of the former various conditions that do *not* refer to ritual action in itself. Turner (1967:19), for instance, already talked about "prescribed formal behaviour for occasions not given over to technological routine, having reference to mystical beings or powers." Whitehouse, who observes the similarity between "highly repetitive technical procedures" (those "used in the daily round of subsistence activity") and "non-revelatory . . . high-frequency" rituals (those illustrating what he call the "doctrinal mode of religiosity"; 2000:184), adds that techniques are "never seen as constitutive of the in-group and thus of 'humanity,'" whereas the anthropologist of techniques, Balfet (1975:53, 55), in fact says exactly the contrary.[12]

In other words, for some specialists of ritual, the distinction between technique and ritual is no longer a matter of intentionality or of severing a material causal link. Unfortunately, with a few exceptions, detailed studies of the role of material action in ritual are still to come. I nevertheless posit that material actions, objects, and techniques are a fundamental part of ritual action because they play a central role in one of the main common features of ritual, namely *condensation*.

Scholars have long insisted on the phenomenon of the "condensation" (or fusion, assimilation) of elements coming from diverse domains of social reality (subsistence, life-cycle, kinship, etc.) that takes place in ritual situations, on the confrontation of the "divergent points of

Figure 55. For those who know what a *pisingen siwi*' looks like, there is no doubt that their being funnelled into the *ombo*'s realm is perfectly material, and the abundant details provided by the myths explain why this technical operation is precisely that: technical (Ayakupna'wa, 1987).

view" of various actors, and on "symbolic abundance of a polysemous type,"[13] etc. (e.g., Grimes 2008:385; Houseman 2004:107; Houseman and Severi 1998:45, 279; Leach 1976:37–41; Lévi-Strauss 1981:671; Munn 1973:588–92; Tambiah 1979:119; Turner 1967:39–43; Wagner 1984:154). Indeed, many anthropologists would nowadays agree that ritual is about "condensation" and about the transformation of relations between actors, and, more often than not, about the participation of supernatural beings who, in turn, are associated with various counter-intuitive actions (e.g., Atran 2002:100–7; Boyer 1993:36–37, 2000). Some (Houseman and Severi 1998:159, 284) see ritual condensation as the association of "opposite" or "antithetical modes of relationship"

(say, for instance, maternal uncles simultaneously acting as pampering persons and deadly cannibals). But others, notably Leach and Tambiah, insist instead on the variety of the sensory channels involved ("verbal, musical, choreographic and visual-aesthetic") (Leach 1976:41; Tambiah 1985:128, 150–52, 154; see also Monnerie 2010:201). Boyer's propositions on the role of multiple inferences in the creation and reproduction of religious beliefs is of course in line with these views on ritual.

Condensation is by no means the only or even the main aspect of ritual action, but it is always part of it. Of course, the reader will have already realised that "condensation" is exactly the phenomenon I am talking about when I stress the simultaneous evocation of thoughts pertaining to all sorts of domains of social life that the artefacts, or "resonators," analysed in the previous chapters engender among the participants in the actions centred on these objects. Condensation, in this sense, is what allows a wordless message about key social relations and practices to come to the fore. It is not to be confused with redundancy, for redundancy is the use of various means to obtain the same effect (using pandanus, cordylines, and red soil to make present the blood of a long-dead ancestor; offering food, displaying a fire, dancing, singing to making the demons present; see Tambiah 1985:147 in note 58, p. 91). It also differs from the perissology at hand, which is the expression in multiple domains of life of the key values or fundamental aspect of social relations that condensation reveals or renders tangible in a nonpropositional way.

At the end of the day, not only is the opposition between technique and ritual far from obvious, but more unfortunately, it hides what is precisely to be understood with regard to the material creation of implicit nonverbal statements in rituals. This at least is so in the Melanesian cases presented in this book, all of which show a fundamental *blending* of what we anthropologists might rapidly see as "ritual," "technique," and "myth." It is for this reason that material actions must be taken into account in the description and analysis of ritual action; indeed, must be taken into account together with meaning and communication, these other outcasts of much contemporary research on the specificities of ritual action.[14]

Is it the case, though, that all the artefacts in this book are involved in activities that are ritualised in some way? Or is there, in rituals, a participation of material actions and objects in the process of condensation that would be both necessary to ritual contexts and not specific to them?

Gods, Relations, and Things

One easy way to obscure the question would be to declare that all of the situations I have described are "ritual" in some way or another. Relational transformations or reference to invisible beings are part of

Anga male initiations and Ankave funerary ceremony, so that the objects central to Anga ceremonies (sacred bundles and mortuary drums) are undoubtedly ritual objects. But what about the construction of a Baruya fence? Or the manipulation of a model car? After all, Baruya fencing technique touches on marriage, male initiations, and gender, and that could seem to be enough to make it a special activity. For instance, because of the magic involved in felling big trees, Lory (1985:82) spoke of the "ceremonial atmosphere" in a Baruya garden being cleared and fenced. For some scholars, even getting onboard an aircraft or going to the cinema are rituals, so why not Baruya fencing?[15] Well, because if we decided they were, we might rapidly see "rituals" everywhere, which would lead the reflection nowhere.

Similarly, there are neither spiritual beings nor a religious fervour around classic cars, although the cult of famous drivers whom some people worship may sometimes show aspects of a religious system. For instance, in 1955, a continuous crowd was lined up all along the road to pay their respects to Alberto Ascari's coffin as it was transferred from Monza, where this two-time world champion had died, to Milan (Ménard and Vassal 2004:143). In 1994, the whole of Brazil was in mourning for three days when Ayrton Senna was killed in an accident. Years later, both of these drivers, and many others (Fangio,[16] Clark, and Hawthorn), are remembered by their admirers—even people who were not alive when they raced—as witnessed on various websites (e.g., "Tribute to" Mike Hawthorn, Jim Clark, etc.), or with the help of original and expensive modern paintings (depicting a driver's face next to a famous car he drove, for instance). In 2008, 40 years after Clark disappeared at Hockenheim (Germany), more than two thousand people assembled for the inauguration of a stone memorial on that circuit. There is no doubt that some people's lives are literally devoted to the remembrance of such semiheroic persons, and even to an individual and collective cult of sorts, although one that is hard to define, for particular cars. Their fervour is not unlike religious faith. However, for most classic car aficionados, there is nothing of the sort. Making a model, going to a race to see a Jaguar D-type in action, or visiting a "classic car" show are not ritual actions.

The objects studied in this book have therefore a highly variable implication in religious or ritual activities. Some are definitely ritual objects and some are definitely not. As for the association of the various ritual artefacts with supernatural beings—the presence of which is basic to the definition of the religious field, because they are those agents who achieve their goals through actions that violate our scientific perception of the means–ends relationship[17]—it is also highly variable in my ethnographic examples. Some artefacts (the Anga sacred objects) are a direct

and living manifestation of supernatural powers in ritual circumstances. Others (an Ankave eel trap and funerary drum) are related in some way to such invisible powerful entities because of their origin and what humans achieve with these objects. Yet others (a Baruya fence, a collector's model car) lack any relation to spiritual power, even though they have the power to enchant.

In sum, just as ritual objects that we would not qualified as "artistic" do function in every respect in the same way as those pieces of art described and explained by Tuzin, similarly, there exist *nonritual* situations in which there occurs the type of "condensation" that is one of the characteristics of ritual action. The non-verbal convergence and fusion of thoughts and actions that are mentally activated by artefacts and the non-verbal communication simultaneously realised *are not limited* to ritual life and ritual objects.

With respect to this convergence and gathering of thought in the actors' minds, the difference between a seemingly mundane object that is at the heart of a process of non-verbal communication and another object that intervenes in a ritual (or religious) action may therefore be one of degree, and not of nature. By this I mean that the gods, the counterintuitive inferences, and the relations with supernatural beings that characterise ritual action may be additions to a general schema or process by which particular material actions and particular objects signify in a nonpropositional way, and play a crucial role in a process of condensation that allows nonpropositional communication.

How do these remarks help us determine what the objects may tell us about the specific and irreplaceable participation of material actions in social relations at large?[18] In what respect are a Baruya fence, an Ankave drum or eel trap, a 1:43-scale Ferrari, etc., alike or, on the contrary, different despite the fact that all are involved in the blending of various domains of social life and representations? And what consequences do these possible similarities or differences have for the anthropological theory of material culture? In particular, how is it that quasi-mundane objects take on a crucial function in social life that ordinary artefacts do not have, namely the kind of non-verbal communication discussed in this book? And how are perissological resonators involved in the stability or modification of systems of thoughts and actions, and in social change in general?

In the next and final chapter of this book we shall see how similar-looking artefacts (fences that may look like other fences, traps that roughly look like other traps, magical bundles almost indistinguishable from other magical bundles) may have radically different roles in people's social lives and shared worldview. This is another opportunity to grasp the tiny differences that make the quiddity of no-longer-mundane objects in comparison with their ordinary counterparts.

Chapter 8

The Paradox of Marginal Changes

We have clarified what the artefacts documented up to now actually do, in the cultures and systems of representations related to them, that no other kind of social production could do. Namely, they allow a kind of non-verbal communication of something so important that it could not be left to the imprecision and "treacherous value" (or "vice") of words (Rappaport 1999:11; Robbins 2001:596). This communication derives from the mental processing of information by different systems of inference while using particular artefacts. It addresses key dimensions of social life, and therefore the artefacts that support it have a special status, both for the people who are engaged with them and for anthropological theory.

The objects dealt with in this book are central in bringing people to share particular social relations, in bringing them to engage in the production and reproduction of a shared world of thoughts and actions. The garden barrier and the ritual objects are involved in social interactions, such as gender relations, male initiations, or mortuary rituals, that are of key importance to the populations where the objects are made and used. One may remark that painting a Dinky Toy, tuning the carburetors of an old and oil-leaking sports car, or enjoying the infrasound and deafening noise produced by old race cars may not be vital for French or British culture or society, which is true. Yet these pieces of modern material culture are what allow thousands of men to share the same universe of thoughts and physical actions, which in turn leads them to build particular and enduring social bonds *and* to engage in collective activities. They are not ritual objects, and people's subsistence does not depend on them (unless they are involved in the business itself). Nevertheless, they are central to social interactions that are of extreme importance for classic-car freaks. As I said earlier, car devotees may find in these

artefacts enough reason to spend more money than they have, to wreck their family life, to drive them to despair, or to cause enthusiasm.

The cases studied so far thus make it clear that understanding the specific role of material things in humans' lives requires that one does not focus on particular categories of objects, for three reasons. First, we have seen that the kind of nonpropositional communication surrounding a mere garden fence has much in common with that arising from the manipulation of a highly sacred object. Second, mundane and less mundane versions of the same types of objects have to be studied together. Third, notwithstanding their diversity, the artefacts described and contextualised in the previous chapters should all be considered together. As we shall see here, it is by comparing ordinary magical pouches with seemingly similar yet all-powerful ritual bundles, and by comparing the social relations embedded in the making and use of wooden fences, drums, or model cars, that it becomes possible to specify how the physicality and material characteristics of an object intervene in a given culture, shared representations, and system of actions.

Because they are less mundane than very similar artefacts observed in comparable societies, the objects studied here reveal some of the conditions and processes of the essential involvement of material things in social life. How is it that objects which look so ordinary, which closely resemble the mundane artefacts of other comparable people, possess such a crucial function? And, in turn, how is this function related to the cotransformation of things, social organisations, and systems of thought? In other words, how much are particular artefacts involved in what anthropology is *in fine* about: social change and the transformation, as well as the stability, of social organisations and systems of thoughts. This is the subject of this concluding chapter.

From Mundane to Less Mundane

The previous chapters have demonstrated how strange the notion of "mundane artefacts" is. Indeed, the most ordinary thing, such as a wooden fence or a boy's model toy, may prove to be central or at least essential to a social organisation and system of thought as well as in a person's life, and therefore not mundane at all. The particular fence, trap, drum, or model car discussed in this book look like mundane objects, but a detailed ethnography of what people do with them sets them apart from the thousands of other fences, traps, drums, or boys' toys. As for the *oremere* or *kwaimatnie*, they are extraordinary by any reckoning; yet, they are nevertheless indistinguishable from the banal magical bundle of the type owned by hundreds of Anga men. Consequently, the artefacts treated here offer an opportunity to grasp what creates their

special status. This is possible at least in the case of the sacred bundles and mortuary drum. Situating the Ankave trap, the Baruya fence, or the baby boomers' collectible cars in some sort of transformation between mundane and nonmundane things is problematic, though.

The question is clearly not relevant in the case of the models of famed race cars of the 1950s and 1960s because what is at issue concerns only a part of the population. Tens (hundreds?) of thousands of men in their sixties probably would become talkative at the mention of Fangio, Clark, Le Mans, or the Jaguar D-type; and thousands would have a common interest and shared knowledge and practice of classic cars in general. But, although the kind of social group they represent is important as far as the classic car business is concerned, the community of aficionados in itself interacts in a manner that has a barely marginal involvement with the larger socioeconomic system at large (e.g., lobbying for special insurance, special vehicle certification, or for the right to use engines designed when the notions of pollution and energy savings were not yet in existence).[1]

The comparative situation is only slightly better for the Ankave trap and the Baruya fence. In both cases, the ethnography allows us to do no more than grasp a "before and after," with no way to imagine how their engagement in a nonpropositional communication took place. Unfortunately, I have no data to explain why eels—and their traps—are in the foreground of the mortuary gift in the Suowi valley, whereas marsupials (smoked marsupials, actually) are more often given in Angae. All that can be said, as we know, is that the trap, its fabrication, and the ritual that is indistinguishable from its mechanical test are intimately linked with the counterintuitive origin of the eels, with gender relations and with the political marking of patrilineage lands. Furthermore, this conjunction of the trap's "nontechnical" functions is directly related to the blatant accumulation of mechanical redundancy in its design and fabrication. But we will never know why and how the Ankave came to privilege eels in their mortuary gifts or to associate a female ritual action with the preparation of the traps.

Baruya garden fences are almost as difficult to situate in an evolution or transformation of sorts. No one knows when and why the Baruya adopted oversized barriers, whereas those everywhere else in New Guinea are far thinner and less resistant. All that is obvious is the intertwining (condensation) of social relations that their construction activates. In that case too, it is the additional work, skill, and solidity that go into the erection of a barrier that transforms a mundane artefact into a means of non-verbal communication concerning at the same time the production of staple foods, gender, ritual, and kinship. And we know what made the Sambia-Anga abandon their robust fences and why those

Figure 56. The pulling and tightening of the rattan-cane "ropes" is what makes the accumulation of energy (and its embodiment) part of the "bundle" of qualities that the Ankave associate with an eel trap (Suowi valley, 1987).

ramparts against pigs cease to be perissological resonators as soon as marriage rules are modified and male rituals discontinued. But we have no information about the circumstances that led to the adoption of such particular garden barriers.

We have no clues as to why the potential "bundle of qualities" (Keane 2003) lodged in rattan ties and interwoven wooden planks was picked up by the Baruya, whereas other northern Angans with roughly similar gender relations, male initiations, marriage rules, and agriculture (the Watchakes, for instance) have made nothing of it.

Luckily, in two cases—the mortuary drum and the sacred objects—it is possible to pinpoint the differences between these special objects and their mundane counterparts, and to catch a glimpse of *the joint transformations of the role of an object and that of the social relations in which the object participates*. These two objects are each more friendly for anthropological theory of change because the local myths or history say something about how they became far from mundane; their comparison is also rewarding because whereas *oremere* and *kwaimatnie* have a crucial political function, the drums do not. Yet, as we know, both types of artefacts convey without the use of words important aspects of the local cultures. So what makes them so different when it comes to power and social hierarchies?

Almost the Same, Yet Immensely Different

Besides the extraordinary *chaîne opératoire* it contains, the origin myth of the Ankave drums conveys important information about the change that occurred when this artefact was given to the Ankave. "Before," people used to strike the ground with bamboo internodes instead of beating drums. In addition, this era before the adoption of the *songen* ceremony was a time when men did not die. The anthropologist adds that the internodes were closed at one or both ends, but that did matter because, since no one died, there were no spirits of the dead to channel and expulse.[2] The main change brought about by the hourglass-shaped drums is that they help conceptualise both the eternity materialised by the snakeskin membrane and the hard work the humans "now" have to do to rid themselves of the *pisingen siwi'* and dispatch them into the *ombo'* world.

For the anthropologist, who situates the borrowing of the drum in a rather more recent period than in those times when people did not die, it is also remarkable that this adoption of the funerary drums fits so easily into the general imaginary world of the Anga. These musical instruments most probably reached the region together with some imaginary stories indicating that the dead dance under water (a classic view in South Coast New Guinea, where the drums undoubtedly came from).[3] This, as well as imagining *ombo'* living in such an environment, is in line with the Anga's general uneasiness about "round waters." Stories of cannibal ponds are numerous: whatever the origin of those who walked with me across Anga country (Baruya, Ankave, Kapau, Iqwaye, Langimar, Watchakes), I have always been urged not to linger near any body of water and to hasten to a safer area. I was allowed to jest about supposedly wandering snakes, but "round waters" were no laughing matter.

Although definitely Ankave, the *ombo'* themselves are nothing but a particular version of the faceless cannibal band composed of the cannibal spirits of the long-dead known, for instance, among the Sambia (Herdt 1989:110). Similarly, their cannibalism is just one more instance of the notoriously bad manners of maternal uncles. Among the Ankave, the maternal kin are not only reputed to bewitch their nieces and nephews, and hamper their growth and well-being. After their deaths, their marauding *pisingen siwi'* nibble at the livers of their sister's children. Here again, it is not a great leap from a recently dead uncle gnawing away at a nephew's liver to an *ombo'* slicing clear through it. The *ombo'* merely extend the maternals' insatiable greed beyond the time of mourning. Even the butchering of corpses attributed to the *ombo'* is nothing but the projection into the invisible realm of the very real practices of those Anga people who once were cannibals. The Baruya, for instance, indeed used to cover the

handle of their bamboo knives with red-dyed pieces of tapa-cloth when they cut up the body of their enemies . . . exactly as contemporary *ombo'* do, I was told, with the bodies of dead Ankave.

Given what we know from the comparative anthropology of the Anga, the manners of the *ombo'* illustrate only *minor modifications*, *marginal changes* in existing social relations or profiles of characters whenever the Ankave have adopted the drums and associated stories of the dead dancing underwater. But even more remarkable is the fact that, in addition to what the irruption of the *ombo'* has added to or transformed in relations with the maternal kin, what has been transformed in *other* social relations or domains appears also to be in continuity with existing practices, or mainly representations. For instance, since the long-dead Ankave are not the wardens of the hunting grounds, as they are known to be among the Northern Anga, those beings who look after the forest according to the Ankave are the *pisingen awo'* and *imoo'*, which are two kinds of prehuman yet socialised beings similar to some of the numerous invisible inhabitants of any Anga bush. Moreover, the *pisingen awo'* and the *imoo'* are not cannibals; they merely kill people by beating them with their hats, which are actually big mushrooms (but that's another story!). In other words, the cannibalism that other Anga associate with the dead who look after the high forest is attributed by the Ankave to the corpse-eating *ombo'*, but this part of their territory is nonetheless overseen by spiritual beings that are common among the Anga. This is again a minimal difference.

It is also noteworthy that, among the Ankave, two characters that the Northern Angans see as human plus cannibal hybrids are not cannibals at all. These are the specialist in charge of magical warfare (*kwi'je*), who is able to stupefy the enemy, and the shaman (*kwoda'*), who has no connection with warfare (or with the male initiations) in this society (Lemonnier 2006a:281–94). In this case, too, whether or not a shaman is able to eat his counterpart's liver, or whether or not a specialist of war magic is a cannibal does not change anything when it comes to their main function: an Anga shaman first of all cures people, and a specialist of war magic does war magic. Being or not being a cannibal is again a mere peripheral change.

In other words, the comparative ethnography of the Anga shows that, although specific to the Ankave, the *ombo'* world is a combination of *minor* differences regarding hybrids of human and cannibal entities, throngs of anonymous dead, ill-disposed maternal kin, cannibal ponds, and ritually eaten corpses, all of which are familiar to Anga cultures. For lack of historical data, we will never know anything of the circumstances in which the drums and the stories associated with them in non-Ankave cultures made their way up the Ankave valleys. Yet, it is this

accumulation and convergence of minor changes that has given life to the Ankave's particular relations with the *ombo'* and to the special function of their mortuary drums.

The sacred artefacts kept by the ritual specialists are another example of nonmundane Anga objects that derive directly from very ordinary objects. As already mentioned, the transformation of magical hunting bundles into ritual artefacts is historically proven in the Baruya case, and there are many ethnographic reasons to think that this applies also to the Ankave. There is no need to come back to the similarities between the two types of magical artefacts, both of which allow long-distance communication with powerful entities. An Ankave hunting *sabe'a' o'we* or a Baruya *sevuya* are composite objects that comprise various things, notably bones, stones, and magical nuts, which are also found inside the powerful *oremere* or *kwaimatnie* looked after and activated by the respective two groups' male-ritual specialists. Their manipulation is also quite similar (see Chapter 4). However, a sacred ritual object differs from a magical hunting device in several ways.

Of course, whereas a man's magical hunting packet is basically a means of communication used by ordinary humans to ask various supernatural entities to help the hunter or trapper, an Anga sacred device is above all a means to convey the powers of a few all-powerful ancestors to a collective ritual space for the benefit of the whole society. Most of all, whereas a hunter uses only a few particular elements of his magical pouch at a time, depending on the kind of game he is looking for, every element of a sacred artefact has a role in the ritual transformation of the novices, in combination with other ritual material devices that are not enveloped in the bundles but present in the sacred theatre where the ceremonial operation takes place. These elements of a sacred male ritual artefact are not only things manipulated "because the ancestors said so," i.e., with a poor knowledge of what is actually going on. They are first and foremost very material links with primordial times, beings and powers. As explained in Chapter 4, it is the *association* of these elements and their mutual relations in *one* very particular context, that of a male initiation sequence, as well as the dense mythology connected with these elements, that give an *oremere* or a *kwaimatnie* its ability to communicate non-verbally what has to be put forward during the rituals, notably the gender asymmetry and the ambiguous role of women in the ceremonies.

In this case again, it is simple, small shifts within a local material and imaginary system of relations between physical elements and particular beings that has led to a supremely important artefact, both in the eyes of the actors and in those of the anthropologist. For instance, bones of

pigs or cassowaries and eagle claws are relics of sorts, just as are those of the mighty ancestors present on the ritual scene. But the provenance and story of those later relics make a huge difference.[4]

From Marginal Changes to Stable Resonators

All the artefacts presented in this book are versions of other, and clearly ordinary, artefacts, from which they differ because of a *series of co-occurring* slight changes in their making and use, as well as similarly marginal modifications of the representations associated with them. As a result of these changes that take place in continuity with what their mundane counterparts are or were (mortuary bamboo, for example), these objects evoke or communicate key aspects of social relations and shared representations. By analogy with the analysis of operational sequence, I will qualify them as "strategic."[5] Actually, this qualification may even apply to the preferred handmade models of the most cherished racers of car aficionados, which are neither religious nor important for society at large, but are nevertheless strongly present in the lives of some people. I must add that in some way, but in some way only, because the time depth for such accumulation of microvariations to occur may be quite small in the Anga case, this phenomenon of novelty following small modifications of a system is not unlike Gould and Vrba's (1982) "exaptation" and Sackett's (1982) "isocrestic style" (see also Leroi-Gourhan 1973[1945]:382–83 on the cumulative effect of tiny differences in tool-making).

These resonators, or strategic objects, and their physical manipulation concentrate series of thoughts, emotions, sensations, material actions, and engagement in various social relations, and the more *diverse* the elements thus put together in what has been called "condensation" in the previous chapter, the stronger the communication and its resistance to change. We have seen that the drum and the sacred bundles, and even the garden fence, are so important for the local social order and people's worldview that decades after their first encounters with the colonial scouts of modernity, they are still unchanged. It is also remarkable that, up to now, a Baruya garden barrier is as stable and resistant to change as a secret and sacred *kwaimatnie*. The endurance linked to the abundance of elements gathered around the artefacts and the condensation they allow is *not* restricted to ritual or religious objects.

It can therefore be posited that the anchoring of a mixture of representations and practices in a strategic communicative artefact is *only reinforced*—not created—by the appearance of supernatural beings, the presence of which is determinant in the religious field, according to its yet-unchallenged definition by Goody (1961). In terms of non-verbal

communication based on the material type of condensation evoked all along in the present book, a 1:43-scale model of a Ferrari is similar to a sacred packet containing pieces of Father Sun or relics of a key primordial ancestor.

Paradoxically, the same phenomenon of marginal changes that may lead to the large-scale *transformation* of a system of thoughts and actions comprising (or centred on) a perissological resonator (or strategic artefact) is also what underpins its *resistance to change*. This durability is located at two levels: that of the diverse domains of social life that are underlain by a given perissology, and that of the resonator that communicates the meaning of a perissology. In effect, contrary to what was understood in the 1970s, when the social sciences started to build on the notion of "system" elaborated by von Bertalanffy (1968), it is not true that a whole set of relations, or structure (in Lévi-Strauss' sense [see Pouillon 1966]), is modified when one of its elements is altered. Rather, these modifications have different bearings on the ensemble of relations composing the system, the elements of which are not all equally important for its upholding and stability.[6]

Fundamentally, because what the artefact-plus-related actions (or resonator) "shows" in a nonpropositional way is the convergence of a large number of different related domains; one of those domains may be slightly altered without shattering the whole apparatus. If only one aspect within one domain of a system changes, the general relation, rule, tension, truth, or value that pervades so many realms of a local culture and organisation is nonetheless *still* present. For instance, the general system giving life to the cannibal monsters and which underlies the function of a funerary drum would *not* change if one particular aspect of the Ankave maternal kin's greed disappeared, for example a particular kind of sorcery against children's growth or the aggressiveness of their recent dead's *pisingen siwi'*. Sorcery practices and the bad manners of the *pinsigen siwi'* would be different, but the maternal kin would still be ill mannered. Likewise, if the local shamans lost their ability to repair the damages done by the *ombo'* to the viscera of sick people, they would still be able to certify that these invisible cannibals are all around because they also have the ability to see them marauding in a hamlet, in the form of a shadow, for instance, when they sneak up on a corpse surrounded by mourners.

Likewise, the disappearance of *one* highly cooperative Baruya activity, such as the months-long harvesting and smoking of pandanus nuts in high-forest camps, has in no way changed the general obligation to exchange work that pervades Baruya culture. In other words, there may be neutral changes in many aspects of the system of thoughts and actions that make up a perissology of which the ultimate meaning is

wordlessly revealed by the manipulation of a particular artefact. But these are changes that would modify neither the sets of values expressed in a perissological way nor the non-verbal communication that takes place around the artefact in question.

There is a kind of threshold effect at work. Only an accumulation of modifications in several *different* domains would lead to an in-depth transformation of a system of thoughts and actions surrounding a perissological resonator. For instance, if Christian beliefs (and their material support: chapel, guitars, posters, loudspeakers, flowers, white shirts and neckties, etc.) were to submerge the Ankave's minds *and* if the Ankave's shamanistic cures were banned *and* if everyone agreed that the semen of a woman's partner and not her blood has a role in procreation, it is highly probable that the world of the *ombo'* would collapse.[7]

A "strategic" artefact (e.g., the material resonator) is in itself correspondingly resistant to marginal changes. For instance, thanks to the simple redundancy of the sacred objects (documented in Chapter 4), there are enough *oremere* or *kwaimatnie* (and ritual specialists) in Anga societies to withstand the loss of one or several of those objects. And we know that if necessary, an ordinary hunting bundle could always be modified and turned into the powerful object of a master of the initiations.[8]

We have already seen that asymmetrical redundancy—the use of various material media to achieve the same task—is also at play. For example, if there were no more red pandanus in Ankave territory, there would still be red cordylines to render present the mighty ancestor of primordial times. And if there were neither cordylines nor pandanus, then there would still be the ancestor's bones and their substitutes so that the novices could be made into initiates. In other words, the most strategic artefacts and the non-verbal communication system based on them are well protected against alteration or loss. "Once" (the quotation marks indicate that we lack historical data on the process) an addition of microvariations of the type described à propos of the drums-plus-*ombo'* system has crystallised into a strategic artefact, only the disappearance of the later can destroy the mode of communication it supports and, in turn, can jeopardise the perissology it revealed.

For instance, and although anthropology is no matter for betting, I am ready to wager that replacing an Ankave drum with a guitar would mean that the ghosts of the recent dead are supposed to go to heaven (or hell), instead of meeting the *ombo'* and their feasts. Likewise, except for the Lutherans, the missions that are presently competing to save the Baruya's souls now target the "object" of the ritual specialist in their preaching (only God has the power to do what some say the *kwaimatnie* can perform, etc.) because they know that, although several masters of the initiations are now active Christians, many *kwaimatnie* still exist

and are ready to be used. Today, we see good Christians in Baruya men's houses, as well as young male initiates seated in the same classroom (still not on the same bench!) with girls. And some young Ankave and Baruya initiated men may not go through the last stage of the ritual when they father their first child. But it is impossible to imagine male initiations without the *kwaimatnie* or *oremere* of the ritual specialists. Up to now, when it happened that the knowledge relative to some particular ritual sequence was lost because the specialists had died without passing it on, the Ankave have simply removed the sequence from the series of ritual *chaînes opératoires*.[9]

In another domain, it will be interesting to see in what circumstances the Baruya neglect their strange-looking garden fences. Right now, they remain as solid as the relationships between co-initiates, marriage by exchange of "sisters" and, of course, the ongoing gender asymmetry, although this particular pillar of the local social order is slowly being challenged by the participation of women in church activities, notably their own material activities during the service. Building on the Sambia situation, I predict that the *takola* will disappear as soon as marriage with sister-exchange and male initiations are abandoned as a consequence of modernity.

Guitars have not yet been played in Ankave mortuary rituals, and the *tsuwengen* display is still temporarily surrounded by red cordylines when a man fathers his first child, but a few days' walk away, the Baruya are no longer so sure that they will ever again perform their own rituals. Sooner or later, Christian beliefs will modify the two groups' way of life more and more, as other aspects of modernity already do, although at different paces. For instance, there have been schools for almost 50 years among the Baruya, but the first classroom is only now being built among the Ankave of the Suowi valley. For anthropologists, this is an extraordinary ethnographic situation, and I will definitely keep an eye on the Baruya fences and the Ankave drums and cordylines to see what happens to these various perissological resonators, notably because they differ enormously because of their totally different involvement in matters of politics.

Artefacts, Non-verbal Communication, Exchange, and Politics

The Baruya garden fences or an Ankave mortuary drum (or an eel trap or even a model car) have similar roles in the communication of shared values, rules, and ways of living together. They are crucial elements of people's lives, and yet *they have no political function*; this makes them remarkably different from the sacred artefacts of the male initiations.

Whereas those secret objects are normally hidden, politically controlled by experts, and only efficient if one knows how to "activate" them, the *songen* drums are individually owned, and any man can have one (that is, can make or buy one). There is nothing concealed here, and no control, magical or otherwise, either of the use of the drums or of the drums themselves. There are no "drum specialists" who would magically "activate" them, for instance; any man may do with a drum whatever he has to do during a *songen* ceremony. Likewise, any man can build a garden fence. By contrast, there are very few ritual specialists, and their keeping and activating of the sacred artefacts gives them a political power, certainly limited and shared among several such masters of the initiations, but which makes them "Great Men" in an otherwise egalitarian society, with the exception of the gender asymmetry (Godelier 1986a:81–96).

But, above all, the sacred objects are at the heart of the political show of the male initiations. Whatever women's participation in the rituals and whatever the ambiguity of the female powers explicitly (Ankave) or implicitly needed to perform the rituals, male rituals are just that: rituals for men organised by men and performed in front of the women. There is also a time when those particular clans or lineages who possess one of the sacred objects have more say than those who don't and, of course, the moment when the hierarchy of the initiation stages—that is, more or less that of age—is shown and put into play. In sum, male rituals have many sides and functions (Bonnemère 2009), but they are clearly the main political event in an Anga society: something a drum-beating ceremony is not. So let us proceed to a last comparison and see in what respect these two artefacts, although similar in their communicative function in religious affairs, are so different when it comes to politics. I will concentrate on the Ankave, who have both institutions: politics-free funerary ceremonies focused on drums and highly political male rituals.

What the funerary drums and the sacred objects of the initiations have in common is threefold: they come from a primordial past, they perform invisible yet material actions, and they are related to the ambiguity of gender relations. But the differences are many:

- Whereas the *oremere* or *tsuwengen* communicate the ambiguity of female powers, the drum is linked to maternal kin, which comprise both women and men.
- A *songen* drum ceremony is entirely public, whereas parts of the male rituals are seen only by men, who nevertheless ignore some of the secret actions performed by the ritual specialists.
- A *songen* gathers only part of the population, whereas everyone takes part in male rituals.

Figure 57. Several *kwaimatnie* and several clans are needed to perform the Baruya male initiations. Particular clans or lineages have specific ritual tasks to perform during a ceremony. Here, specialists do what they have to do at the top of the *tsimia* (Yanyi, June 1985).

- Several drums are played at the same time by nonspecialists, which is contrary to the ritual sacred artefacts, which are manipulated during a particular ritual sequence only by those very few men who keep them.
- Although largely lacking the strategies, public display, and distribution of wealth that are at the centre of other Melanesian funerary ceremony,[10] *songen* is fundamentally a matter of exchange around the circulation of life; by contrast, there is no hint of exchange of wealth or life-substitutes in an Ankave male ritual.
- The mythical story of the drum is extraordinarily specific about its origin and fabrication, but the origin of the *ombo'* is hardly mentioned: they were there at the very beginning of time, but that is all that is known; this differs from the myths and oral history concerning the sacred objects used in initiations, which detail how several ancestors (the first man and his heroic doubles of more recent times) were involved in the origin and specific composition and mode of action of the various sacred artefacts held by several ritual experts.
- As already stressed, whereas the *ombo'* receive the Ankave dead but do not reside in the operative device they gave to humans—the drum—the ancestors whose powers are at the root of the initiates' transformation are present in the ritual objects.
- The drum ceremony and the *ombo'* imaginary and material complex have no connection at all with warfare or with the making of warriors (e.g., the Ankave shaman plays no role in initiations or in war magic), whereas the male rituals refer to both.

Ankave funerary rituals lack competition, controversies, strategies, and politics in general because Anga societies on the whole make a minimum use of wealth in their exchanges, a peculiarity of "Great Men" societies I have elsewhere linked to their limited compensation of war homicides (Lemonnier 1991). Basically, as observed by Godelier some time ago (1982:33; 1986a:172–73), for the Anga, a dead person is only worth another dead person, and it is exclusively in limited and particular circumstances that a dead warrior can be replaced by some kind of wealth (salt bars for the Baruya, and very specific shells for the Ankave). In societies and regions of New Guinea where the pig is a *thinkable* substitute for human life, things change radically, and exchanges of wealth are the main locus of politics and competition, notably on the occasion of funerary ceremonies and feasts (Lemonnier 1993b). There is nothing of the sort among the Anga, who ignore exchanges of wealth and link warfare with gender issues (women sap the warriors' strength) and male initiations (making adult men with as little female power as possible). Politics—gender politics, male politics, lineage politics—culminates in the male rituals and is first of all related to the historical or mythic origin and keeping of the multiple sacred artefacts that have similar yet different roles in the ceremonies of the various stages.

Back to General Anthropology

To sum up one last time: strategic artefacts, or perissological resonators, are crucial in people's social lives. They are important in anthropological theory as well because their understanding answers some of Mauss' questions that are usually set aside. In particular, the anthropology of these artefacts derived from mundane objects describes and explains their very material characteristics and real or imaginary (for us) effects on the world, or their "agency." However, the circumstances in which they are taken onboard by religious systems or political relations depend of course on the historical and larger anthropological context.

In the Melanesian case, this context is heavily related to artefacts, namely those things—pigs, pork, shell money, and the like—that are, *or are not*, used in multiple compensations related to the circulation of life in various circumstance such as marriage, homicide, or relations with supernatural entities. At stake are no less than exchange, competition, group strategies, gender, war, peace, mourning, changes related to modernity, etc.; this much is well known. Well known, too, is what has to be understood next, which is the need to explore and document the part of the material dimension of things and actions in such phenomena usually wreathed in famed expressions such as "partible persons," objects that "are persons" or have an unclear "agency."

The problem is of course to disperse the vagueness of what is asserted to be true (or plausible); in particular, if not first of all, those assertions concerning artefacts that are labelled "persons." There are exceptions (e.g., Leach 2012, for a spectacular one), but in most cases, this is merely the anthropologist's view, or at most a plausible interpretation much in need of explanation and verification.[11] A basic question such as that of the circumstances in which a pig is worth a human life or is equivalent to a shell remains unanswered. Furthermore, staying with Melanesia (but also generally speaking), there is a big difference between exchanging

Figure 58. Shell money displayed in front of Ankave initiates is an example of what has to be given to compensate a homicide; other Melanesian societies compensate life with pigs or pork. The Baruya only use salt money. The physical characteristics of rituals and of exchange objects have now become part of anthropological investigations on the enduring question of the "objectification" of social relations (Ikundi, 1994).

life-containing artefacts and exchanging ordinary wealth on the occasion of exchanges related to the circulation of life. What part do artefacts take in such an essential transformation of the things exchanged? Indeed, the pig may be at the heart of some non-verbal communication (my words and personal interpretation of Strathern's [1988] propositions) of crucial Melanesian perissologies, but that would have to be demonstrated case by case, just as we have to understand the specific role of material actions in Melanesian rituals considered as *chaînes opératoires* (that will be my next project).

Needless to say, I posit that there are some common characteristics behind the non-verbal communication on which male ritual is built in some Melanesian groups, and behind that which might give a life-value to particular wealth-items in many other societies of the region. We need to explore, too, in what circumstances the primordial beings, or any kind of spiritual agent controlling power, are part of a negotiation undertaken by humans (e.g., there is no negotiation involved in the activation of spiritual power in Anga male initiations, whereas part of Melanesian exchanges of wealth and food are addressed to spiritual beings).

These questions may seem far from the contemporary interests of Melanesianists, who are more intrigued by, for instance, the invention of tradition, the new roles of individuals, the Christianisation of minds, cultural copyrights, the manipulation of the past, and the importance of traditional knowledge in the management of the environment. But is that so sure? From what I have seen of the capital importance of material actions in the brand-new conviction some Baruya women and men have of their direct connection with Jesus, I doubt it. At any rate, the new evangelical churches that profess such a view know what they are doing when they combat shamanism, and most of all, when they target the ritual artefacts.

For instance, the Baruya who were recently baptised by the Evangelical Brotherhood Church (a Swiss mission present in Papua New Guinea since 1954) were told by the pastors that they "now had the mobile [phone] of Jesus in their body!" Indeed, besides words, you need a number of material actions and objects to convince an Anga person that she or he has a direct link with the Holy Spirit.

Modernity, too, obviously puts particular artefacts in a strategic position, transforms erstwhile perissological resonators, and modifies their possible participation in the religious or political sphere. These are all good reasons to complete the classical study of the relations between agency and modernity with that of the artefacts, mundane or not, that sneak into the lives of people who had never seen them a few decades ago.

Concluding Remarks

This book was the product of a twofold ethnographical amazement. First, the observation of somehow weird objects, technical actions, and the context of their making and use caused me to ask myself: What's going on here? Why do the Baruya construct fences that are unlike most other New Guinea garden barriers? Why do they still build beehive-shaped houses whereas neighbouring groups long ago adopted square houses with a two-sided roof? Does it make any sense for the anthropologist to decide at all costs whether an Ankave eel trap is a "technical," a "ritual," or an "art" object? How is it possible that, within the same society, 99% of virtually indistinguishable magical bundles are sometimes mundane personal hunting devices, and yet sometimes are the ultimate political tool belonging to one lineage of a particular clan? Why is it that the mere sight of a classic car (or the scream of a racing engine) suffices to trigger a long-lasting friendship between erstwhile strangers who have just met? Second, it is noteworthy (if not amazing) that what I have called perissological resonators are not restricted to nonindustrial societies.

My chapter, which may have surprised some readers, on classic cars, their substitutes, and aficionados, is an encouragement to look for material resonators in a modern context. A collector's model of a race car or his real sports car are not religious objects, but they are nevertheless central in the making and durability of a shared system of thoughts and actions. So enduring indeed that, whereas "supermodernity" is now omnipresent in the classic car business—the amateur is literally overwhelmed with websites—the three types of relations to cars described in Chapter 5 and their embedding in multiple material interactions remain unchanged. In particular, the evocative power of a mere glance at a race car, in any form (full-size, model, photograph) is essential in a car passion as well as in the enduring social relations between amateurs. Classic cars and their substitutes are yet another example of the transformation of objects from mundane to not mundane at all.

Comparing these ethnographic cases also leads to an intriguing theoretical point: some objects and material actions have the capacity to reinforce a shared worldview and system of social interaction that does not resonate with the usual questions and findings about material culture. By no means are "identity," "controversy," "evaluation," "power," "social hierarchies," or "economic status" among the tools that would help describe or explain what is going on around perissological resonators. And it is hardly necessary to remark one more time that none of the questions raised by the objects described in this book can be answered by merely pronouncing the magic words "agency," "materiality,"

"affordance," or "intentionality." All these questions deserve a painstaking observation of things being made and materially used: of people tightening ropes, sinking posts in the ground, beating initiates about the chest with a magical bundle, or tuning the membrane of a drum or the carburetor of an old sports car.

In such an approach, the role of objects in the making of a shared world resonates—if I may say so—with a series of theoretical propositions regarding objects, such as the contemporary research on Melanesia I alluded to in Chapter 7.[12] As I said time and again, it has also a lot to do with demonstrations and remarks about "material anchors" (Hutchins 2005), about what objects "do" that words alone cannot do (Tambiah 1968:202; Weiner 1983), and with "condensation" (Chapter 7). In particular, the case studies here provide another point of view, and sometimes add ethnographic data in support of such notions as "conceptual blends" (Hutchins 2005), the "blurring of boundaries between separate modalities" (Tambiah 1985:164), or, more generally, regarding the role of objects in the "synthesis of very complex relationships" (Damon 2008:126).

Yet, the point of view illustrated in this book raises a series of new questions on which I will not dwell here, notably those about what transforms a mundane object into a perissological resonator, about those strategic resonators that are key political or religious objects, and about the circumstances that dissolve this particular role of material things and actions in a non-verbal communication. Let me simply note that much remains to be done to clarify, in various ethnographic and historic contexts, the ways material actions participate crucially in the "blending" of fundamental thoughts, or possibly to distinguish different modalities of "redundancy" that may prove to be pertinent (e.g., are dancing, singing, and offering food to make demons appear the same as using various plants or soil to convey the powers of an Ankave ancestor?). We are far, too, from fully appreciating what material actions and objects do "*in loco verbi*" in ritual (Lévi-Strauss 1981:671), but also what they do that words certainly could not do.

In point of fact, this approach is both in line with Mauss' program on techniques and the beginning of an answer to the old anthropological question of the temporary coherence of a network of social relations and set of shared ideas. This is the same question that tentative notions of the 1970s tied to tackle: "articulation" in Marxist anthropology, "order of orders" in Lévi-Strauss's terms (1963:333), "structural correspondence" in Godelier's (1977) work. Rather than stressing compatibility between domains of social life (or their structural characteristics), the examples in this book advocate a role for objects and material actions in nonpropositional messages regarding fundamental principles and key

social relations underlying a people's way of living together. But values do not stand by themselves, and the members of a group, it seems, need to receive regular non-verbal statements about those values, contradictions, and particular social relations that pervade the myriad interactions they have with comembers of their society: living human beings as well as the dead, the inhabitants of their environment, and the elements of their cosmos. I propose that those strategic objects, which I have called resonators, play a unique role in the particular kind of communication that is crucial to the stability of social systems. And by no means are these artefacts of utmost importance for members of a group (and, I reckon, for anthropology as well) limited to cathedrals, ancestor statues, or sacred mountains: they can be objects as mundane as a simple undecorated drum or a garden barrier.

Notes

Introduction

1. In this book, I use "artefact," "object," and sometimes "thing" as equivalent terms. All are of course objects; that is, embedded in social life (see Appadurai 1986; Ingold 2008; Knappett 2008; Pels 1998).
2. Among tens of others, examples of this approach can be found in case studies by Gosselain (1999, 2011), Lemonnier (1984a, 1993a), Mahias (1994, 2002), or Martinelli (1996, 2005), as well as in dozens of papers published in the journal *Techniques & Culture*.
3. Meeting on "Thirty-five years of *Techniques & Culture*" at Musée du quai Branly, May 4, 2011; see also Cresswell 2010).
4. Coupaye and Douny (2009) have recently given a detailed account of the much-welcomed convergence of these so-called French and British traditions of dealing with objects and techniques.
5. Among hundreds of studies, see, for instance, Akrich (1993), Bijker (1997), Hutchins (1994), Latour (2000), Law (2002), and MacKenzie (1990), to cite those studies I am most familiar with.
6. It is remarkable, for instance, that scholars like Damon (2008), Descola (1996), Leach (2002), Lortat-Jacob (1998), or MacKenzie (1990), whose work definitely raises key issues in what I would call "anthropology of technique," have no link with the tradition founded by Mauss and then followed by Leroi-Gourhan.
7. For example, several "objects" belonging to Melanesian material cultures have been closely studied in the more general context of their production (but not always, unfortunately), use, and exchange in which they participate: ceremonial houses and ritual buildings in the Sepik (Forge 1966, 1973; Roscoe 1995), among the Korowai (Stasch 2003), or on Pentecoast, in Vanuatu (Taylor 2008:171–88); carrying-nets (MacKenzie 1991); malanggan sculptures of New Ireland (Derlon 1997; Kuechler 2002); body decorations (O'Hanlon 1989; Strathern and Strathern 1971); canoes of the Massim region (Campbell 2002; Damon 2008; Munn 1977; Tambiah 1983); New Guinea Highlands shields (Muke 1993; O'Hanlon 1995); slit-gongs from the Rai coast (Leach 2002) and drums of the Asabano (Lohmann 2007); Abelam yams considered as artefacts (Coupaye 2009a); wooden bowls of Aorigi, in the Solomon Islands (Revolon 2006); New Guinea stone tools (Pétrequin and Pétrequin 1993) and gardens (Sillitoe 2010).

8. Any list would be unfair and quite useless if I did not explain in what respect these scholars have unlocked previous problems by blurring the borders between anthropological domains and approaches. Particular examples may be found in Coupaye (2009b), Damon (2008), Douny (2007), Gosselain (2000), Leach (2002), Mahias (2002), Martinelli (1996), Naji and Douny (2009), and Revolon (2007a).

Chapter 1

1. The term "garden" is used in the literature because of the large number of species grown and the individual attention given to each plant. Among the Baruya, taro (*Colocasia esculenta*), sweet potato (*Ipomoea batatas*), banana (*Musa sapientum*), and sugarcane (*Saccharum officinarum*) are present everywhere, but sweet potato is the main crop in the gardens (0.1–2.5 hectares) that lie at altitudes between 1,600 and 2,200 metres in two valleys, Wonenara and Marawaka.
2. Tok Pisin for various canes, especially *Saccharum edule*, *S. robustum*, and *Mischantus floridulus*.
3. Complex and sturdy garden fences can be seen among the Fore, a non-Anga group of the Eastern Highlands, but they are mixed with sections of simple non-tied fences (Sorenson 1976:Figure 12, p. 44; Figure 14, p. 47; Figure 18, p. 49; Figure 140, p. 225). Sorenson indicates that the fences were "specially strengthened at crossings" and that part of the palisades protected the hamlets (Sorenson 1976:32, 35). A recent book by Sillitoe (2010:271–313) also describes in detail "ordinary" barriers made by the Wola.
4. Ethno-ecology was still new, but the way people conceptualise the plants, animals, and raw material they use was clearly something to explore in *technologie culturelle*; I also spent some time documenting the rough classification of materials. (In fact, I limited myself to the gendered classification of material [see Lemonnier 1984a].) Needless to say, together with other characteristics of a technique, the local classifications of materials are most important to compare (e.g., Gosselain and Livingstone Smith 2005).
5. Nuriandaye was my guide and friend during the years I "patrolled" the Anga country for comparative purposes (before I settled down in the one Anga group which, to me, differed the most from the Baruya: the Ankave). He is still my friend and neighbour in Wuyabo.
6. Thanks to the botanist Ross Hines, later Vice-Chancellor of the University of Papua New Guinea, in Port Moresby.
7. The reference paper of the time is Salisbury's "Change in Land Use and Tenure among the Siane of the New Guinea Highlands (1952–61)" (1964). The Pétrequins' fieldwork and publications were still to come (Pétrequin and Pétrequin 1993, 2006). More generally, looking at time allowances was held to be a key issue in economic anthropology, and Sahlins' chapter titled "The Original Affluent Society" in *Stone Age Economics* (1974[1972]) was of course on everyone's mind.
8. The one type of ("wrong") Marxism, which "reduces the economy to techniques and biological and energetical exchanges of men with the surrounding nature" (Godelier 1977).
9. The theoretical agenda and difficulties of this particular endeavour have been exposed by Digard (1979).
10. A pioneer in Actor-Network Theory (together with Latour and Akrich), Callon has proposed that the scallops, as living things, were "actors" and part of the controversies going on between fishermen and scientists about new techniques to "domesticate" them. This gave a better understanding of what was at stake in

the divergent views fishermen and scientists had about scallops and innovative techniques to make them multiply. In addition to the now-classic book by Latour (2005), see Knappett and Malafouris (2008).

11. In 1978, most Baruya women were using very small blades, and this may have slightly improved the productivity of their work. Strangely enough, up to now, more than 60 or 70 years after contact (depending on what one calls "contact" [Bonnemère and Lemonnier 2009]), no Ankave woman uses a spade. However, each of them owns and uses a machete, which she holds by the blade, to dig the ground when she plants or harvests. (In passing, this is a clear example of a technological choice that I am still unable to explain.)
12. This feat has been described in *Behind the Ranges* (Sinclair 1966:24–75), one of the numerous, lively, and well-documented books he has written about colonial New Guinea and the history of PNG.
13. Jim Sinclair showed me a photograph he took on his first exploratory patrol that features taro gardens surrounded by *takola* fences as strong as those seen today. The only difference I can see are the top ends of the posts, which are not as sharp.
14. Sinclair (1966:59) writes that among the first Baruya men he met, "many carried steel tomahawks, set on three-foot handles of polished black-palm."
15. The Baruya dictionary specifies that a *podzaamawanaya* is a "fence with posts standing in a row—not traditional" (Lloyd 1992:256). The suffix *-vananya* is used for introduced things (Lloyd, personal communication, 2011).
16. Piglets are also exchanged/fostered between related women, so that the losses linked to epizooties is diminished.
17. Controversial because Marxist anthropologists devoted hundreds of pages to the ways of characterising abstract forms of cooperation. One need only to read Bloch (1975), Godelier (1977), Meillassoux (1981[1975]), and Terray (1972) on this topic to see what "controversial" means.
18. In most cases, the introduction of the sweet potato eventually led to an intensification of pig-raising (Ballard 2005; see also Lemonnier 1991). This was not the case among the Baruya, and this still has to be explained, unless one posits that it is an "exception that proves the rule" (Ballard 2005:11).
19. The other Anga group with which I later worked for a long time, together with Pascale Bonnemère (Bonnemère and Lemonnier 2007).
20. With due respect for my Baruya friends, Sinclair's observation on his second day in Wonenara Valley was right: "The harder the Batiya worked, the more they shouted, until the din was indescribable" (Sinclair 1966:61).
21. That is, men who as young boys (10–14 years old) went together through the ordeal of male rituals in which they are "reborn" in the hands of men, notably to join the able-bodied, fearless, and inseparable group of warriors that always stands ready to defend each other and all the Baruya in any circumstance.
22. I must confess that I did not investigate the local perceptions of the efforts that an anthropology of the senses should ideally provide (Howes 1990).
23. Bridewealth is not entirely absent, but it is reserved for marriage outside the tribe (Godelier 1986a:22).
24. In the early 1990s, Coudart (1993) already noticed, from her ethno-archaeological observations of 32 houses, that an amazing individual diversity was emerging in Sambia architecture.
25. However, nothing would authorise me to say that the Baruya consider their gardens as a "collective work of art," as Gell (1992:60) says of the Trobriand gardens. But it is clearly the case that the beauty of the gardens is both a proof and a condition of their fertility (Derlon and Jeudy-Ballini 2010:180).

Chapter 2

1. The ethnographic present is required here, for although their first encounter with all sorts of Christian personnel goes back to 40 years now, the Ankave still collectively beat drums to convey the dead to another world so that they can forget them, rather than pray that they go to heaven.
2. Several species of tree are suitable for bark: *angejo'* (*Prunus* sp.), *itsa'o'* (*Mallotus* sp.), *kaara* (unidentified), *tsikwa'a* (unidentified), *xwaadungwe'* (*Piperaceae* sp.), and *segwora'* (unidentified).
3. *Itsa'wa* (*Mallotus* sp.), *igwa'a'* (*Ficus calophylina*), or *exwaje* (*F. copiosa*).
4. An uninitiated boy cannot eat the eels he catches until his second or third catch, and his mother follows the same prohibitions. When the prohibition is lifted, an adult man spits vegetable salt on the cooked eel, which is then shared between mother and child.
5. Carleton Gajdusek, who received a Nobel Prize for his work on the infectious agent (later called prion) behind the lethal *kuru* disease of the Fore people, did countless "patrols" in Anga country in the late 1950s (Alpers 1992; Anderson 2008).
6. Some regard the eel master as being the monster *tepidze*, an animal that is identified with crocodiles by those Ankave who have been to work on plantations in coastal areas.
7. This tension between the transmission of life substance, which is feminine, and the patrilinearity of Ankave society is also reflected in the naming system. It is noteworthy that women are often given the names of rivers (Bonnemère 2005).
8. In Gosden's (2005) terms, it is their formal properties that have "social effects on persons," but in this case these properties refer to invisible as well as visible mechanical aspects.
9. Schaeffer (2004) has exposed a similar idea a propos art objects that are first of all objects (2004:36). Moreover, the mechanical redundancy observed in the trap is clearly one of those "costly signals" that, according to him, characterises all sorts of artefacts and actions, including art objects. The part played by costly signals in the kind of non-verbal communication I expose here is still to be explored. Let's just remark that a Baruya fence or Ankave eel trap create a feeling of satisfaction in those who look at them or manipulate them, so that, in Schaeffer's terms, they should be considered as aesthetic and art objects. Yet this qualification would miss much of what is at stake in their making and using. Actually, I do not feel at ease with the notion of "purely utilitarian production" that Schaeffer (2004:42) proposes for objects that do not display costly signals. The anthropology of techniques has shown that no such things exist.
10. Traps have long interested anthropologists, both as a sort of object that permits a certain interaction with game and as metaphors for particular aspects of social life. With respect to the very long-term evolution of technical systems, trapping has been opposed to hunting by Moscovici (1976) for its requiring greater knowledge of the game's behaviour as well as of the making of traps themselves. Outside of the study of technique per se, ritual is often seen has a "snare for thought" (*piège à pensée*) (Boyer 1988; Houseman and Severi 1998; Smith 1982:106; 1997:152–53). More recently, Miller (2000) has identified websites with traps in which the "surfers'" wills are captured. For this very reason, he also considers these "traps" to be artwork, in the sense proposed by Gell. See also the issue of the journal *Gradhiva* on "Pièges à voir, pièges à penser. Présences cachées dans l'image" (e.g., Severi 2007, 2011).
11. Even in pre-contact times, Anga people had opportunities to compare their techniques with those of the immediately neighbouring groups with whom they

exchanged, married, and fought. For instance, the Ankave know that Kapau women are allowed to manipulate red pandanus seeds, that the Iqwaye production of *Pangium* sauce is marginal, that the Menye have no drums in their funerary rituals, etc.

12. The belabouring of the trap is clearly a "visual salience" (Severi 2007:86). In Munn's terms, it is a sort of "qualisign" referring to the accumulation of passive energy (Munn 1986:17; see also Keane 2003).
13. The next chapters too are about nonlinguistic communication and artefacts; that is to say that they do not, or not only, deal with the communication involved in the making of artefacts (e.g., Keller and Keller 1996). Nor are they, or, again not only, about the condition in which objects are supposed to "talk" to humans (e.g., Severi and Bonhomme 2009). On artefacts in non-verbal communication, see also, among others, Graves-Brown (1995) and Boivin (2009).

Chapter 3

1. By contrast, the hand drums from the Upper Sepik, south New Guinea coast, Fly River, or Torres Strait Islands are well-known art pieces from New Guinea.
2. As with every Anga people, the Ankave were fierce warriors and were still waging wars and feuding at the time the Australians were trying to establish "contact" in the area in the 1950s and 1960s.
3. The meaning of the words shouted in the night by the Ankave singers in an old Ankave dialect or, rather, in some form of Kapau language, is vague to say the least, and my translators never agreed on what they could mean. Yet, they all agreed that what is at stake is the origin of the drums and the weird habits of the *ombo'* (Lemonnier 2006a:228–32). On meaningless ritual enunciations, see Severi (2007:253–55).
4. I have mentioned in *Le Sabbat des Lucioles* (Lemonnier 2006a) that the swinging of the mask's arms is also said to sometimes be used in a love magic, meaning "come, come." I add this note because I have just seen a Japanese documentary showing images of the nuptial parade of a New Guinea King bird of paradise (*Cicinnurus regius*) that undoubtedly once inspired the movement of the Ankave *newimbere*'s arms. During this dance, the bird brings his tail feathers above and before his head and swings them in front of the female in a way that I can only equate exactly with what I saw during nights of *songen* (Kobayashi and Ichino 2004).
5. Both the mutilation and the throwing into water recall *ombo'* life habits: they come apart (here the trunk, there an arm, etc.) during the dances they perform at the time of their cannibalistic feasts, and at least some of them are supposed to live underwater, in pools.
6. Children may cultivate their mother's lineage's land, but they cannot transmit this right to their own children.

Chapter 4

1. Since their brutal encounter with the state, the church, and the market in the 1950s and 1960s (and 1970s for the Ankave), the Anga have generally stopped fighting, and war leaders are becoming something of the past. However, the Ankave were still fighting their neighbours in the late 1960s; as for the Baruya, they were still at war between 1983 and 1987. Only a few groups still hold initiation ceremonies

(notably the Ankave), and it is not unusual that some masters of the initiations become evangelical Christians. The past tense indicates that things are currently changing.

2. Needless to say, I doubt that the ritual experts who kindly told me these secret and normally mumbled formulas gave me the right ones.
3. Powers: "*Enga a'nāngen wingiñinge*", translated in Tok Pisin as "strong moa power long em"; that is, "much power enters them." The initiates may then have a wooden plug inserted in their nose. When the septum sore is totally cicatrised, a first-stage initiate's nose plug is made of a bone of wattled brush-turkey (*Aepypodius arfakianus*), which is supposed to be a substitute for the primordial ancestor's own bone: at least this is what I was told.
4. Cordylines and more generally plants that reproduce by cloning have long attracted the attention of anthropologists working in Melanesia (e.g., Haudricourt 1964; Keesing 1982:179; Leenhardt 1946:192–93).
5. On "non-verbal" metaphors—which is what the eel trap is, for instance, but not an Ankave red cordyline—see for instance Roscoe (1995:11, 16), Sillar (1996), and of course Tilley (1999).
6. This parallels Tambiah's example of redundancy in a Sinhalese exorcism rite. In this example, the same goal (making the demons present) is reached by various means: "offerings of food, fire display, whirling convulsive dance, praise songs, flattery, and smutty jokes" (Tambiah 1985:147) (with special thanks to Laurent Berger, who reminded me that there was more in Tambiah's work than what I remembered of this author's strong position on ritual as communication).
7. The cowry is sometimes a symbolic gift offered to the master of the game, but a white cowry is also said to be able to dazzle an approaching cassowary that wouldn't notice the trap set to capture it (Lemonnier 2006b).
8. See Bonnemère (2001) about the compared vocabulary of pandanus juice and human blood on which is partly built the equivalence between the two liquids.

Chapter 5

1. A very different and quite longer version written in French of the argument presented in this chapter as been published in the volume in honour of the late archaeologist Serge Cleuziou, my enduring friendship with whom was in a part based on a common eccentric knowledge and practices about old cars (Lemonnier 2012b). See also Lemonnier (in press) on the material interactions of French car collectors with old British sports cars in the 1970s.
2. There were 350,000 TV sets in France in 1956 (Antoine and Oulif 1962:132). See Schiffer (1991) for the American situation.
3. And Crescent Toys, and Corgi Toys, and Solido, and Norev, CIJ, and Mercury, etc. I use "Dinky Toys" as a general category.
4. There were only 2.7 million cars in 1954, but these figures were to multiply 10-fold in the next 50 years.
5. In Britain, where amateur mechanics were and still are much more numerous than in France, the monthly *Cars and Car Conversions* that appeared in 1965 was largely devoted to maintaining sports cars and improving their performances.
6. Finding, buying, repairing, maintaining, driving, repairing again, and selling an aging sports car is a neurotic endeavour that deserves its own piece of ethnography, and I will not treat it here. I will, however, mention these cars and their drivers whenever their ownership intersects with some of the other practices I allude to in this chapter (but see Lemonnier in press).

7. In Britain, *MotorSport* has existed since 1924. *Thoroughbred & Classic Cars* was launched in 1973. In France, *RétroViseur* and *Auto Passion* arrived in the 1980s. More recent is *Rétro Course*, published every two months but entirely devoted to the "historic cars" competitions.
8. In this chapter, I limit myself to what is at stake in the present book (i.e., non-verbal communication and social links) and do not enter *per se* the anthropological theme of "car culture" (e.g., Boltanski [1975]; Dant [2004, 2005]; Featherstone [2004]; Miller [2001]; Post [1994]).

Chapter 6

1. The polysemy of ritual items and situations has been the focus in various ritual situations (e.g., Munn 1973:588–92; Stasch 2003; Turner 1974). However, Tambiah (1981:140) insists that redundancy in ritual produces "a single experience" and "message." Similarly, in his study of "figures" rendered tangible during ceremonies at Arama (New Caledonia) Monnerie refers to the "demultiplications of a *same* meaningful *theme*" in a series of various material actions or objects (dances, ambulations, spears, house posts, words; Monnerie [2010:203], his italics).
2. In particular, these artefacts themselves do not show any formal (or so-called "structural") pattern that is purported to appear regularly in other artefacts or actions, and they are not *redundant*, in Chris Hardin's (1993) sense (which is inspired by Bateson's "Style, Grace, and Information in Primitive Art" [1972]). Compared with Hardin's proposition, what I am talking about does not deal with the repetition of similar patterns or forms in various domains of production and experience, nor is it linked with any evaluation or validation of some aesthetic performance or object.
3. A perissology is a "Procédé de style qui consiste à insister sur une idée en l'exprimant plusieurs fois en des termes différents" (Rey 2005:1571).
4. This is not unlike Tuzin's "latent level" of communication, which adds an "unspoken message" to the immediate meaning of various ritual and nonritual activities of the Abelam and Arapesh (Tuzin 1995:294, 300). However, what I stress here is the unique role of one object in that process.
5. See also Miller (2005:15–20) on those things that "seem more material than others" and Keane (2003:420–23) on the "critical role" of language in "consolidating" social objects, and, again, Hutchins (2005) on the "conceptual stability" or the "conservationism of cultural beliefs over time" resulting from "conceptual blends."
6. This analogy may not be all that arbitrary. In a marvellous book, Lortat-Jacob (1998) demonstrates how, during the Friday night of Holy Week, the harmony between the voices of four Sardinian singers generates a *fifth* artificial voice, "*la quintina,*" which is the voice of the Virgin Mary.
7. These views are also somehow in line with the notions of "inertia" or "redundancy" within cultural systems developed by Maranda (2005:187–88): "Redundancy makes people believe in reliability."
8. Again, Hutchins similarly stresses the "conservatism of cultural beliefs over time" (Hutchins 2005).
9. For instance, "stories about houses that remember their owners, islands that float adrift on the ocean or mountains that breathe" (Boyer 2000:142).
10. Gell (1980) on vertigo, Morphy (1989) on brilliance, and his own paper on infrasound (Tuzin 1984).
11. Things are already complex enough, but the relationship between the variety of the sensory channels put into play and the notion of "costly signals" developed

by Schaeffer (2004) should be explored. Some are meaningful iconic or indexical signals, others are akin to counterintuitive representations (e.g., Boyer 2000), and some comprise the core of fundamental messages (Lemonnier 2006a:389–90).

12. In the case of *ritual* actions this particular aspect—multiple senses being simultaneously activated—has often been stressed (e.g., Kapferer [1983:178–206], Monnerie [2010]). As for the relationship between the heterogeneous references of a ritual and the reinforcing effect it has on a system of thought, it has been remarked notably by Leach (1976:41), Munn (1973:592), and Strathern (1996:522–23). For Severi (2007), establishing such relations between diverse ontological domains is one of the reasons why "chimeras" (incomplete images) are long-term memory-enhancing devices. Putting together heterogeneous features is one of the characteristics of "chimera-objects." However, the examples in this book show that memory (see also Malafouris 2004) is not the only phenomenon at work.
13. On artefacts and cognition from a theoretical and, quite often, practical point of view, see Hutchins (1994, 2000), Ingold (2000), Keller and Keller (1996), Knappett (2005), Norman (2002), and Schiffer (1999).

Chapter 7

1. ". . . gestures and objects are *in loco verbi*; they are a substitute for words" (Lévi-Strauss 1981:671).
2. This new trend is for instance illustrated by Gosselain (1999), Govoroff (2011), Mahias (2002), Martinelli (1996), and Sillar (1996); see also Latour (1993) and Lemonnier (1993a).
3. "There is an insensible transition between the mundane activity which is necessitated by the requirement of subsistence production and the most overtly magico-religious performance" (Gell 1992:59). This sounds like Leach's "technique and ritual, profane and sacred, do not denote types of actions but *aspects* of almost any kind of action" (Leach 1954:13).
4. This was considered almost heretical in the 1970s, as Coupaye (2011:193) rightly remarks.
5. Gell's provocative views on art have sparked many comments, sometimes extremely critical (Bloch 1999; Bowden 2004; Campbell 2002:70, 207 note 4; Derlon 2007; Derlon and Jeudy-Ballini 2010; Layton 2003; Morphy 2009; Severi 2009:11–12, 47). In itself, the abundance of these comments pays respect to the inestimable contribution of our late colleague to the anthropology of objects.
6. For Gell, "technology" is whatever "is necessary to produce, distribute and consume goods and services using 'technical' process" (1988:6).
7. One function of magic that is explored for instance by anthropologists and archaeologists working on African metallurgy (Childs and Killick 1993; de Maret 1985; Haaland 2004; Martinelli 2008; Schmidt 1996), and already hypothesized by Tambiah regarding the magic associated with the making of a Trobriand canoe: "More important, is not the expanding meaning of the magical ritual an imaginative, prospective, and creative understanding of the very technological operations and social activities the Trobrianders are preparing to enact?" (Tambiah 1968:200).
8. ". . . the [traditional actions of technique] are felt by the author [of the actions] as *actions of a mechanical, physical or physicochemical order* and that they are pursued with that aim in view" (Mauss 1934[2006]:83, Mauss' italics). By contrast, "magic is the domain of pure production *ex nihilo*. With words and gestures it does what techniques achieve by labour" (Mauss 1972:141). I have already stressed

that, despite this etic view, Mauss nevertheless crucially pointed to the mélange of domains in the actor's head (Mauss 1934[2006]:82).

9. Contrasting "technical operations" with "ceremonial operations" around the grave in Tikopia.
10. In ritual, "the gestures are not being performed, or the objects manipulated, as in ordinary life, to obtain practical effects resulting from a series of operations, each following on from the preceding one through a causal link. Instead, ritual uses gestures and things to replace their analytical expression" (Lévi-Strauss 1981:671–72).
11. For example, see Akrich (1992), Bijker (1997), Latour (2000, 2005), Law (2002), and MacKenzie (1990).
12. For this specialist of the anthropology of techniques, "the identity link is looser in case of low frequency (of a given technical activity), very tight in the contrary for automatic (and frequent) practices, (that are) the most revelatory of an ethnic belonging" (Balfet 1975:55; the frequency of "automatic activities" is stressed by the author on page 53).
13. I do not come back to the ambiguity of the term "polysemous" discussed in the previous chapter.
14. This position often stressed nowadays (e.g., Boyer 2000:230–31; Houseman 1993:218; Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994:12, 74, 85; Lewis 1980:6–38) is well summarised by Houseman (2004): "Ritual performances do not so much tell stories as they create experiences." Leach (1968) or Tambiah (1985:128–29, 138) however, considered ritual to be about communication. See also Rappaport (1999) and Wagner (1984). It may well be the case that some or many rituals are meaningless (which seems to be the case in the *puja* described by Humphrey and Laidlaw [1994]), but in the case of the Anga ceremonies addressed here, what they do for individual and groups as well as the way they do it is intimately bound up with the communication of a meaning.
15. For example, Pâquet (2003) on cinema and Pitt-Rivers (1987) for air travel.
16. "Juan Manuel Fangio, 84, died yesterday morning. . . . But the legend of the Argentinian champion, the holder of the most titles in the history of sports car will live for ever" (*L'Equipe* 1995:1).
17. Goody (1961). See also Boyer (2000:232), Fortes (1966), Gardner (1983:349), Humphrey and Laidlaw (1994:2), Rappaport (1979:192), and Whitehouse (2002:95).
18. This is a book about artefacts in social life, not a book on the specificities of ritual action. But, in accordance with what I have argued earlier in this book, a ritual would be a particular moment when condensation happens, notably with the crucial participation of objects and material actions, and allows a relational transformation à la Houseman and Severi (1998).

Chapter 8

1. Actually, the first and tricky problem would be to trace the entanglement of psychological and sociological factors at hand in a car passion that is shared by very different people, rich and poor, highly educated or not, and belonging to all kinds of professions, etc.
2. Interestingly enough, closed bamboos still play a role in Ankave mortuary rituals. As the end of the drum-beating period approaches, the organiser of a *songen* throws into a bonfire an internode, which rapidly explodes (because of the expanding air). Bamboos are clearly another sound-producing device that contributes to the expulsion of the spirits of the dead.

3. Oral history recalls that the Ankave modified the attachment of the mask on the bearer's head and that the device came from the south. There are also some indications that ready-made drums were still coming from the south coast to neighbouring Kapau (Naotije) country via intertribal trade in the mid-1960s.
4. Although it is impossible to document it, for lack of precise historical data, the process by which new functions of a drum or magical bundle appeared among the Anga are like the "stabilizations" analysed by Akrich (1992, 1993).
5. If I may be so bold as to quote myself, strategic operations "cannot be (1) delayed, (2) cancelled, or (3) replaced without jeopardizing the whole [technical] process or its final result" (Lemonnier 1992:21; see also 1976).
6. I evoked this optimistic system-mania in Chapter 1. Needless to say, I shared this obsession for the consequence of tiny modifications.
7. This paragraph offers me an opportunity to thank Heather Miller and Roger Lohmann, who have both given me useful comments about a paper of mine dealing with the role of the Ankave's drums in the stability of their mourning system.
8. In other words, it may be the case that, in general, the "openness of things to further consequences perpetually threatens to destabilize existing semiotics ideologies" (Keane 2003:419), but particular objects—those I have described as resonators—do make systems of thoughts and actions very resistant to change.
9. Which means that, in this case at least, there is no bricolage or invention (Barth 1987; Keesing 1982:209) to fill the gap in ritual knowledge.
10. For the preeminence of funerary rituals in local social life in Melanesia, see for instance Battaglia (1990), Bolyanatz (2000), de Coppet (1981:179), Damon (1990:225), Damon and Wagner (1989:9), Eves (1998), Foster (1995:1), Keesing (1982:19), Maschio (1992), Stasch (2001:321), and Weiner (1980:80–1).
11. For example, see Battaglia (1990:176), Breton (1999:96), de Coppet (1970:31, 1981:189, 190), A. Strathern (1981:212), and M. Strathern (1984:165-169).
12. Outside of Melanesia, Warnier's (2007) research on a Cameroon grasslands society deserves a special mention here as it is another rare and good demonstration of the irreplaceable role of things and body techniques in the making and sharing of a particular social world.

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