

The title of the National Biodiversity Report evocatively conveys its content: *Living Atolls Amidst the Living Sea*.

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*People and Things: Social Mediations in Oceania*, edited by Monique Jeudy-Ballini and Bernard Juillerat. Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2002. ISBN 0-89089-616-X, xi + 363 pages, tables, figures, maps, photographs, summaries, notes, bibliography, indexes. Cloth, US\$60.00.

This collection offers eleven chapters together with chapter summaries, brief contributor biographies, thoughtful indexes, and both photographs and drawings (quite helpful, given the focus on objects). Noting that English- and French-speaking anthropologists working in Oceania “are somewhat cut off from each other” (xi), this book aims to promote engagement by providing English translations (mostly by Nora Scott and Helen Arnold) of works originally appearing in French from 1994 to the present. All the contributions (Barbara Glowczewski’s excepted) are previously or soon-to-be published book chapters or journal articles; only a couple of these have been revised for this volume.

Jeudy-Ballini and Juillerat’s introduction, “The Social Life of Objects,” begins by distinguishing nonhuman “behavioral” exchange from “organized, intentional” exchange among

humans, who “use . . . objects as identifying or communicational signs” (3). Asserting that the social/symbolic functions of objects are actualized when objects play “mediating” roles, the editors propose that object-mediated exchanges “put what cannot be entirely expressed by body language and speech alone into more tangible form” (4). But because this provocative point is unelaborated, their concepts of “mediation” and “objects” (and their opposites: “direct relations between people,” including sexual intercourse, fighting, talking) remain unclear.

Throughout the introduction a sharp distinction between “traditional” exchange (or “gift economies”) and “commodity economies” (or a “capitalist logic”) is asserted, again without explication. However, while the editors’ implied notion of commodity exchange is unitary and oddly undynamic, their discussion of gift or traditional exchange emphasizes diversity and complexity. They draw readers’ attention to several striking variations evident in the chapters to come: exchange valuables may reinforce conventional significations or else enable people to escape them; the efficacy of objects may be reinforced by their reusable or their perishable materiality; one community may value deferred reciprocation and another may fear it.

Jeudy-Ballini and Juillerat associate “accumulation in itself” (9) with “capitalist” logics of prestige and power. In contrast, in many Pacific societies, “an object stored once and for all is of little value”: its circulation is key. But this emphasis is only apparently familiar. The editors warn

that the collection's case studies question Marcel Mauss's ideas about gift exchange: "[the intention of] giving does not necessarily entail the obligation of receiving or reciprocating" (11). Objects sometimes circulate by violent repossession, and an array of "paradoxical forms of exchange" are evident: receiving without having given, giving without receiving, an absence of obligation altogether, the incorporation (consumption) of objects in acts of identification, and diverse dialectics of displaying/hiding valuables to meaningful effect. These variations are intriguing, however much a reader might object to the editors' reading of Mauss, their approach to commodity relations, and (in contrast to a few of the chapters) their readiness to discuss "traditional" exchange as if it were not entangled with, implicated in, and insinuated around regional and global market relations and meanings.

For better or worse, the expressed purpose of the collection—to introduce Anglophone readers to French work on the social life of objects in Oceania—directed my attention to the citation practices of the editors and contributors. Indeed, my difficulty understanding the rationales for what was or was not referenced just reinforces the editors' point about the need for a denser engagement among French- and English-language scholars. For example, works by C A Gregory, Marilyn Strathern, and Annette Weiner are discussed, while equally relevant collections edited by Arjun Appadurai, and by Jonathan Parry and Maurice Bloch, are not even mentioned; the recent Pacific collection edited by David Akin and Joel

Robbins, *Money and Modernity*, is cited once without discussion. While Freud is engaged extensively, the literature on "consumption" (eg, works by Daniel Miller) is not, despite its centrality to the volume's key focus. Even within Francophone literatures, the editors' and contributors' citation rationales are obscure. Durkheim, Mauss, Levi-Strauss, and Godelier are addressed but De Certeau and Bourdieu, for example, are not.

That is, while the editors alert us to the linguistic wall erected between national anthropological traditions, they leave us in the dark about barriers thrown up around theoretical/ethnographic traditions. Since the chapters are, for the most part, previously published works, they do not address this issue directly. Readers will need to infer how this work is situated with respect to alternative trends in French work on "mediations," gendered personhood, forms of exchange, and the rest.

Nevertheless, the individual chapters are ethnographically rich and analytically interesting. Serge Tcherkézoff provides a theoretically engaged ethnographic discussion of Samoan fine mats that questions comparative constructs of "subject" and "object." Françoise Douaire-Marsaudon analyzes the kava ritual (and related mythology) in several Polynesian communities to demonstrate its role not simply in elaborating ritual hierarchies but also in transmitting idealized or "true" manly identity.

The next four cases all come from Papua New Guinea. Beginning with a discussion of Baruya sacred objects, Maurice Godelier ponders some

paradoxical similarities in forms of exchange among apparently contrastive Pacific societies, in an extended critical reflection on Mauss's "potlatch." Drawing on work among Ankave, Pierre Lemonnier critically engages Godelier's contrast between "Great-men" and "Big-men" societies by considering how money and other valuables figure in "sister-exchange" relations. Stéphane Breton offers a psychoanalytic/philosophic reflection on the constitution of subject/object relations through display, on the basis of a comparison of head-hunting and shell transactions among Marind and Wodani. Similarly psychoanalytic but focused critically on Mauss's notion of "obligation," Juillerat's Yafar ethnography concerns relations among humans, their dead, and their gods (understood as representations of the individual's unconscious).

Shifting to New Britain and paying special attention to metaphor, Jeudy-Ballini describes the forms of cooperation among Sulka that make collectivity and ceremonial exchange possible. Brigitte Derlon's analysis of historical and ethnographic sources concerns New Ireland malanggan, funerary objects controlled by what are here called "copy rights." She demonstrates connections between the circulation of these copy rights, land tenure regulations, and social structure dynamics.

The last three chapters complement one another; their important critical implications for the preceding chapters remain for readers to draw for themselves. In order to understand rather than presume the "efficacy" of Australian Aboriginal (Aranda) ritual,

Marika Moisseff explores relations among the sensory properties and functional roles of objects, notably tjurunga (an Aranda ritual object). Barbara Glowczewski considers the politics of cultural and intellectual property in northern and central Australia. Her analysis of internationalized struggles around the appropriation and reappropriation of "inalienable objects" and cultural knowledge demonstrates complex entanglements among commodity and noncommodity relations. Alban Bensa's nuanced, reflexive account concerns arguments among Kanak (New Caledonia) leaders, museum officials, and anthropologists over the creation of the Tjibaou Cultural Center—conflicting "efforts to take possession of the past," all "subject to the contingencies of the present, and therefore eternally unfinished" (308).

These three chapters are a provocative lens through which to read the collection. They ask readers how we might write about the historically significant hierarchies that order "traditional" and "imported" meanings and relations so that existing conditions do not appear inevitable or fixed. Most particularly, how might we bring together nuanced yet powerful attention to materiality and to socio-symbolic relations? *People and Things* offers a wealth of provocative case materials for pursuing such questions.

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