MATERIALITY

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DANIEL MILLER

Materiality: An Introduction

There is an underlying principle to be found in most of the religions that dominate recorded history. Wisdom has been accredited to those who claim that materiality represents the merely apparent, behind which lies that which is real. Perhaps the most systematic development of this belief arose over two millennia within South Asia. For religions such as Buddhism and Hinduism, theology has been centered upon the critique of materiality. At its simplest Hinduism, for example, rests upon the concept of *maya*, which proclaims the illusory nature of the material world. The aim of life is to transcend the apparently obvious: the stone we stub our toe against, or the body as the core of our sensuous existence. Truth comes from our apprehension that this is mere illusion. Nevertheless, paradoxically, material culture has been of considerable consequence as the means of expressing this conviction. The merely vestigial forms at the center of a temple may be contrasted with the massive gates at the periphery. The faded pastels of an elderly woman are in stark contrast with the bright and sensual colors of the bride precisely in order to express in material form the goal of transcending our attachment to material life.[1]

But the history of South Asia is not just the history of its religions. There is a parallel history, which tells of the endless struggle of cosmology with practice. This is the history of accumulation, taxation, wars and looting, empire and excess. It culminates in the integration of this region within a

global political economy in which politics is increasingly subservient to an economics whose premise with respect to materiality could hardly be more different. In economic thought the accumulation of material commodities is itself the source of our extended capacity as humanity.[2] Poverty is defined as the critical limit to our ability to realize ourselves as persons, consequent upon a lack of commodities. The focus upon materiality, though here in the form of accumulation, is therefore just as strong in economics as it is in Hinduism. For a discipline, such as anthropology, that is concerned with what it is to be human, we need to therefore start our discussion of this issue with an acknowledgment that the definition of humanity has often become almost synonymous with the position taken on the question of materiality. Furthermore, this has been a highly normative quest, closely linked to the question of what morality is, in the society or period in question.

Even within the most secular and self-consciously modern systems of belief the issue of materiality remains foundational to most people's stance to the world. The first major secular theory of humanity that seemed capable of dominating the world, Marxism, rested upon a philosophy of praxis, whose foundation also lies in its stance to materiality. Humanity is viewed as the product of its capacity to transform the material world in production, in the mirror of which we create ourselves. Capitalism is condemned above all for interrupting this virtuous cycle by which we create the objects that in turn create our understanding of who we can be. Instead commodities are fetishized and come to oppress those who made them. Contemporary critiques, such as Naomi Klein's (2001) *No Logo*, whether expressed as environmentalism or anti-globalism, may be cruder in their philosophical underpinnings, but seem to be just as focused upon the issue of materiality—for instance a loss of humanity in the face of commodities and brands—as is the neoclassical economics they confront. The centrality of materiality to the way we understand ourselves may equally well emerge from topics as diverse as love[3] or science[4] and associated beliefs such as the epistemology of positivism.

This constant return to the same issue demonstrates why we need to engage with the issue of materiality as far more than a mere footnote or esoteric extra to the study of anthropology. The stance to materiality also remains the driving force behind humanity's attempts to transform the world in order to make it accord with beliefs as to how the world should be.

Hinduism and economics are not just beliefs about the world, but vast institutional forces that try to ensure that people live according to their tenets through priesthoods or through structural adjustment programs. In this respect capitalism and religion are equal and analogous. Chapters in this volume will attest to this foundational relationship between the stance toward materiality and the stance toward humanity through case studies ranging from ancient to contemporary practices and based around topics as diverse as theology, technology, finance, politics, and art.

This introduction will begin with two attempts to theorize materiality: the first, a vulgar theory of mere things as artifacts; the second, a theory that claims to entirely transcend the dualism of subjects and objects. It will then engage with theories associated with Bruno Latour and Alfred Gell that seek to follow a similar path, but with a greater emphasis upon the nature of agency. This is followed by a consideration of materiality and power, including claims to transcend materiality, and a consideration of the relativity of materiality where some things and some people are seen as more material than others, leading finally to an exploration of the plurality of forms of materiality. In turn, three case studies of finance and religion are used to explore the plurality of immateriality and the relationship between materiality and immateriality.

Throughout these discussions two issues emerge which are then considered in their own right. The first is the tendency to reduce all such concerns with materiality through a reification of ourselves, defined variously as the subject, as social relations or as society. In opposition to this social anthropology several chapters critique definitions of humanity as purely social, or indeed as *Homo sapiens*, and critique approaches which view material culture as merely the semiotic representation of some bedrock of social relations. This culminates in a section on the "tyranny of the subject" which seeks to bury society and the subject as the privileged premise for a discipline called Anthropology. Finally in the conclusion we return to a metacommentary upon the whole. It will become evident that we can indeed resolve the dualism of subjects and objects through philosophy. But these "resolutions" are so dependent upon the abstract nature of philosophy that in and of themselves they may be of only limited benefit to anthropology. What anthropology offers, by contrast, is not just philosophical solutions or definitions, but a means to employ these understandings within forms of

engagement that yield analytical insight, but which must be realized again and again with respect to each situation, because we live in a changing and varied world of practice.

WHAT IS MATERIALITY?

A volume that spans topics as diverse as cosmology and finance cannot afford to rest upon any simplistic definition of what we mean by the word *material*. It needs to encompass both colloquial and philosophical uses of this term. We may want to refute the very possibility of calling anything immaterial. We may want to refuse a vulgar reduction of materialism to simply the quantity of objects. But we cannot deny that such colloquial uses of the term *materiality* are common. The standard critiques of materialism found in newspapers and everyday discussions take their stand against the apparently endless proliferation of artifacts, what Georg Simmel (1978: 448) termed the "increase in material culture." An anthropological volume devoted to materiality should not ignore this colloquial usage, and I will for this reason, start this investigation with a theory of the most obvious and most mundane expression of what the term *material* might convey—artifacts. But this definition soon breaks down as we move on to consider the large compass of materiality, the ephemeral, the imaginary, the biological, and the theoretical; all that which would have been external to the simple definition of an artifact. So the second theory of materiality to be introduced here will be the most encompassing and will situate material culture within a larger conceptualization of culture.

CAN WE HAVE A THEORY OF THINGS?

Can one have a theory of things where "things" stand for the most evident category of artifacts as both tangible and lasting? Certainly I confess that when I first took up a post as a professional academic in the field of material culture studies in 1981, this seemed to be the limit to the ambition of those studies. At that time I employed two sources in this quest. The first was the book *Frame Analysis*, in which the sociologist Erving Goffman (1975) argued that much of our behavior is cued by expectations which are determined by the frames that constitute the context of action. We don't charge up on stage

to rescue an actress in apparent distress, since there are many elements of theater which proclaim this as "enacted" as against "real" violence. We look for signs by which people distance themselves from the social roles they are playing. Are they being ironic, or wanting to be taken "at face value"? We take note, usually unconsciously, of the place in which the action is set, or the clothes they wear, to give us clues. If a lecturer suddenly started a private conversation with a student in the middle of a lecture, everyone would become acutely aware of the underlying norms of lectures as a genre.

My second source was *The Sense of Order* by the art historian E. H. Gombrich (1979). Unlike all his other books, this focused not upon the artwork, but the frame in which the artwork was set. Gombrich argued that when a frame is appropriate we simply don't see it, because it seamlessly conveys to us the appropriate mode by which we should encounter that which it frames. It is mainly when it is inappropriate (a Titian framed in Perspex, a Picasso in baroque gilt) that we are suddenly aware that there is indeed a frame. A more radical version of Gombrich's thesis could argue that art exists only inasmuch as frames such as art galleries or the category of "art" itself ensure that we pay particular respect, or pay particular money, for that which is contained within such frames. It is the frame, rather than any quality independently manifested by the artwork, that elicits the special response we give it as art. Between them, these ideas of Goffman and Gombrich constituted an argument for what I called "the humility of things" (Miller 1987: 85–108). The surprising conclusion is that objects are important not because they are evident and physically constrain or enable, but often precisely because we do not "see" them. The less we are aware of them, the more powerfully they can determine our expectations by setting the scene and ensuring normative behavior, without being open to challenge. They determine what takes place to the extent that we are unconscious of their capacity to do so.

Such a perspective seems properly described as "material culture," since it implies that much of what we are exists not through our consciousness or body, but as an exterior environment that habituates and prompts us. This somewhat unexpected capacity of objects to fade out of focus and remain peripheral to our vision and yet determinant of our behavior and identity had another important result. It helped explain why so many anthropologists looked down upon material culture studies as somehow either trivial or

missing the point. The objects had managed to obscure their role and appear inconsequential. At a time when material culture studies had an extremely low status within the discipline, it seemed that objects had been very successful in achieving this humility, at least within anthropology.

The work that had established such ideas as foundational to anthropology, and to my mind still one of the premier publications within anthropology, was *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, by Pierre Bourdieu (1977). In this book Bourdieu showed how the same ability of objects to implicitly condition human actors becomes the primary means by which people are socialized as social beings. The foundation of these ideas came from Claude Lévi-Strauss, who played Hegel to Bourdieu's Marx, in the sense that Lévi-Strauss demonstrated at an intellectual level how anthropologists needed to abandon the study of entities and consider things only as defined by the relationships that constituted them. But while for Lévi-Strauss this became a rather grand ordering implying, if not a cognitive, at least a largely intellectual foundation, with myth as philosophy, Bourdieu turned this into a much more contextualized theory of practice. Structuralism was turned into both a material, and a much more fluid and less deterministic engagement with the world. We are brought up with the expectations characteristic of our particular social group largely through what we learn in our engagement with the relationships found between everyday things. Bourdieu emphasized the categories, orders, and placements of objects—for example, spatial oppositions in the home, or the relationship between agricultural implements and the seasons. Each order was argued to be homologous with other orders such as gender, or social hierarchy, and thus the less tangible was grounded in the more tangible. These became habitual ways of being in the world and in their underlying order emerged as second nature or habitus. This combined Marx's emphasis on material practice with the phenomenological insights of figures such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1989) into our fundamental "orientation" to the world.

For Bourdieu, who wore another cap as a theorist of education, it was these practical taxonomies, these orders of everyday life, that stored up the power of social reproduction, since they in effect educated people into the normative orders and expectations of their society. What we now attempt to inculcate in children through explicit pedagogic teaching, based largely in language, had previously been inculcated largely through material culture.

As habitus this became the social equivalent to Kant's system of categories. On analogy with space, time, or mathematics, there exist for each social group certain underlying parameters by which children come to apprehend the world, an order they come to assume and expect in any new set of objects they encounter. So this was a theory of objects, but not as lame, sole, artifacts. Material Culture as a network of homologous orders emerged as the powerful foundation for more or less everything that constitutes a given society. This theory also helps account for the initial observation that even within a religion such as Hinduism, a belief in the ultimate truth as a form of immateriality is still commonly expressed through material forms and practices, such as temple architecture or yogic control over bodies.

What this example hopefully demonstrates is that, yes, it is entirely possible to have a theory of objects as artifacts. Indeed, there are likely to be many of these. A particularly influential example in anthropology was that created by Arjun Appadurai's (1986) book *The Social Life of Things*, in which the editor's introduction in combination with the chapter by Igor Kopytoff (1986) reconsidered objects in respect to a core anthropological dualism between the gift and the commodity. It plotted a trajectory for things in their ability to move in and out of different conditions of identification and alienation. Just as Bourdieu softened and made more applicable the harder structuralism of Lévi-Strauss, Appadurai's work had the virtue of softening the dualistic frame into which this debate about gifts and commodities had become lodged and helping to ease its application to the analysis of exchange and indeed the larger social life of things.

OBJECTIFICATION

As already noted, while it is possible to have theories of things, any such theory seems to ignore the evident lack of any defensible definition of thingness. All may be condemned as "vulgar" because they adopt a commonsense rather than academic presupposition of what we mean by the word *thing*. Is an ephemeral image, a moment in a streaming video, a thing? Or if the image is frozen as a still, is it now a thing? Is a dream, a city, a sensation, a derivative, an ideology, a landscape, a decay, a kiss? I haven't the least idea. But the questions that are left begging indicate that in practice a theory of material culture will tend to stand as a subset of some more general theory

of culture. But the term *culture* when put into the spotlight may be at least as problematic as the term *material culture*. Indeed, it is probably the single most criticized concept within contemporary anthropology. It too seems to be best understood as a pragmatic limitation upon some still larger understanding of the world. So the temptation is to start instead from the top, from the most encompassing definition of our object of understanding, and then to work downward.

I would argue that this philosophical encompassment was first achieved through the work of Hegel, and that some of his presumption in seeing his own contribution as constituting "the end of philosophy" was warranted. The system of thought he developed does, at the highest level, resolve many of the major issues of philosophy, including that of materiality. In his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel (1977) suggests that there can be no fundamental separation between humanity and materiality—that everything that we are and do arises out of the reflection upon ourselves given by the mirror image of the process by which we create form and are created by this same process. Take Bourdieu's (1970) best-known example, the Kabyle house. The house is not some natural emanation. It is created by artisans of greater or lesser skill to become the cultural object within which these same artisans see their own identity as Kabyle reflected and understood. We cannot comprehend anything, including ourselves, except as a form, a body, a category, even a dream. As such forms develop in their sophistication we are able to see more complex possibilities for ourselves in them. As we create law, we understand ourselves as people with rights and limitations. As we create art we may see ourselves as a genius, or as unsophisticated. We cannot know who we are, or become what we are, except by looking in a material mirror, which is the historical world created by those who lived before us. This world confronts us as material culture and continues to evolve through us.

For Hegel this circular process had a particular sequential form: the fundamental process of objectification (Miller 1987: 19–33). Everything that we create has, by virtue of that act, the potential both to appear, and to become, alien to us. We may not recognize our creations as those of history or ourselves. They may take on their own interest and trajectory. A social order, such as a hierarchy, may come to us as immutable and one that situates us as oppressed. It does not appear to have been created by people; it

is experienced as sui generis. Even a dream may be attributed to some other agency and literally "haunt" us. But once we appreciate that these things are created in history or in imaginations, we can start to understand the very process which accounts for our own specificity, and this understanding changes us into a new kind of person, one who can potentially act upon that understanding. As Rowlands notes in his contribution, the critical point about a dialectical theory such as objectification is that this is *not* a theory of the mutual constitution of prior forms, such as subjects and objects. It is entirely distinct from any theory of representation. In objectification all we have is a process in time by which the very act of creating form creates consciousness or capacity such as skill and thereby transforms both form and the self-consciousness of that which has consciousness, or the capacity of that which now has skill.

A society may gradually develop a system of education. By going to school a member of that society gains the ability to reproduce accumulated understandings from the generations. As such education may correspond to an element of our "reason," and in *The Philosophy of Right* Hegel (1967) argues that such an educational system corresponds to what may be called "real" education: that is, one that fulfils the reason behind the idea of education, which is to enhance the capacities of those who are educated. A person is created through such a process. It is not that education *happened* to them; we can't separate out the bit of them that is constituted as educated from some other bit that is not (Miller 2001: 176–183).

But every form we produce will tend to its own self-aggrandizement and interests. Education may become institutionalized as a system increasingly geared to its own interests. It may become an oppressive single-sex boarding school whose sadistic staff cripple rather than build the capacity of its pupils. As such it detracts from, rather than expands, who we may be. For Hegel this would no longer be "real" education; rather, it would be a form of alienation. A similar argument may be made for law, religion, art, or indeed any human practice. Law may be the instrument of the justice it is supposed to represent, or it can become merely the self-aggrandizement and income generation of lawyers. Dialectically we both produce and are the products of these historical processes. On the one hand, we produce religion or finance; on the other, the existence of religion and finance produces our specificity as

a priest in ancient Egypt, or as a Japanese derivatives trader. So our humanity is not prior to what it creates. What is prior is the process of objectification that gives form and that produces in its wake what appear to us as both autonomous subjects and autonomous objects, which leads us to think in terms of a person using an object or an institution.

So there is a level of philosophy at which it is wrong to talk about subjects and objects. These are merely appearances that we see emerging in the wake of the process of objectification as it proceeds as a historical process. All that can properly be privileged at this philosophical level is the process of objectification itself. As anthropologists, however, we will have at some point to descend from this place of ultimate revelation at the mountain's peak. We will have to return to the mass populations who consider themselves to be, in fact, people using objects. It is important therefore to explicitly map the downward path back to ethnography. I prefer to see this as a series of steps leading to the particular place of material culture that I would wish to reside in. In the philosophy of objectification Hegel provides much more than a theory of culture. His primary concern was with the nature of logic and reason. But a subset of this theory may indeed be used as a theory of culture; those forms that are of interest because they produce the capacities of particular peoples in particular space and time. Simmel and Marx in their different ways strive for a dialectical theory of culture, as indeed have others, such as Jean-Paul Sartre (1976) or, to take a recent example, the human geographer David Harvey (1996). In turn, a theory of material culture may be formulated as a vulgarized subset of such a theory of culture. This brings us back down, with a bump, to a site not far from Bourdieu, who took a parallel but recognizable route. In coming down the mountain we need not jettison that which has been given us. There was a reason for going up there in the first place. We now appreciate that whether we are dealing with mundane artifacts such as clothes or statues, or with more complex images and institutions such as dreams or law, there is nothing without objectification. There are no pre-objectified forms, and any romantic claims by, for example, art, primitivism, psychoanalysis, evolutionary psychology, or others that imply such a possibility can be safely rejected. But dialectical theory is by no means the only source of this experience of transcendence. There are plenty of other people who claim to have invented the wheel that rescues anthropology from the simplistic duality of subjects and objects.

AGENCY

The two most recent influential additions to a potential theory of material culture and materiality come from the work of Bruno Latour and Alfred Gell, and conveniently both focus upon the term *agency*. As several chapters in this volume make clear, Latour is equally concerned with lifting anthropology to a height above that of the conventional distinctions of society and its objects. His primary critique has been aimed at the way this dualism has been expressed in the apparently absolute distinction between science and society. By means of a scholarly investigation into the practice of science, he has been able to demonstrate that it actually bears little relation to its own dominant representation—that the reality of the world consists almost entirely of a hybridity within which it is impossible to disaggregate that which is natural and lawlike and unchangeable and that which is human, interpretive, and at times capricious.[5]

Latour regards us as engaged in a constant and somewhat deluded practice of "purification." In our society science routinely ignores the evidence for the hybrid character of practice, and strives to enhance its own status, by a form of self-representation that renders it unequivocally objective and determined. The corollary of this theorem lies in the degree to which the status of our humanity is enhanced by rendering us cleansed of any such deterministic or mechanistic quality. One of his most influential strategies in the war against purification has been to take the concept of agency, once sacralized as the essential and defining property of persons, and apply this concept to the nonhuman world, whether this be organisms such as bacteria or putative transport systems for Paris. Where material forms have consequences for people that are autonomous from human agency, they may be said to possess the agency that causes these effects. A computer that crashes, and thereby prevents a form from being submitted in time, an illness that kills us, a plant that "refuses" to grow the way we meant it to when we planted it, are the agents behind what subsequently happens. In a partial throwback to structuralism, what matters may often not be the entities themselves, human or otherwise, but rather the network of agents and the relationships between them. "The prime mover of an action becomes a new, distributed, and nested set of practices whose sum may be possible to add up but only if we respect the mediating role of all the actants mobilized in the

series" (Latour 1999: 181). People do not fly, nor does a B52 bomber, but the U.S. Air Force does.

To make this point Latour needs to be as firm in his critique of "social" anthropology as in his critique of science. His comments on Émile Durkheim are always to the effect that social science privileges society and regards objects largely as projected representations of society, bracketing culture in opposition to nature. The hybridity that social anthropology recognizes as central to premodern societies is not applied to the analysis of modern societies such as our own, defined as those which fetishize science, nature, and society. He chastises this Durkheimian tradition for missing the profusion of nonhumans and the effects of their agency. By contrast, he emphasizes the agency of this nonhuman world, such as microbes or machines, which cannot be reduced to a mere epiphenomenon of the social.

Latour would never describe himself as a dialectical thinker, perhaps (I am guessing) because of the strident critique of dialectics as "grand narrative" by postmodern French philosophy, or the association of agency with personhood in the existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre, who viewed himself as a dialectical thinker. So "the Hegelian dialectic, according to Latour, expands the abyss between the poles of subject and object that it aims to fill" (Dosse 1999: 99). This is more or less the exact opposite of what I have just suggested. But I see no merit in a dispute where academics influenced by Latour accuse dialectical thinkers of retaining the dualism of subjects and objects they claim to have transcended, and dialectical thinkers make the same accusation of the followers of Latour. In either case we benefit most from those who have used these philosophical ideals to produce ethnography that demonstrates the gains made by a refusal to reduce to subjects and objects. Much of the beauty of Latour's writing comes when he is carefully tracing through the stages of mediation between these two (e.g., Latour 1999: 24–79). Nevertheless, by placing the emphasis on objects of science, rather than on artifacts, we do lose something of that quality of the artifact redolent with prior historical creativity. It is the artifact which is the focus of habitus and indeed much of recent material culture studies.

Artifacts are also very much to the fore within the other major contribution in recent years to a theory of object agency, that of Gell (1998) in his book *Art and Agency.* Essentially Gell's book is a refutation of an aesthetic

theory of art, which is replaced by a theory of the effects that art has achieved as the distributed agency of some subjects upon other subjects. Central to this is a theory of abduction. This is not a theory of causal inference, but rather a theory of inferred intentionality. In short he argues that we naturally tend to imagine there must have been some kind of social agency whenever we encounter an effect. We seem to have a love of imputing agency to other persons and to things. For example, we happily anthropomorphize objects as agents: we may accuse a car of treachery if it breaks down when we need it. Webb Keane (1997) has contributed an entire ethnography based on much the same argument. In Keane's book a cloth does not "tear" merely by accident; someone must have caused this. So we need to attribute the agency that is assumed to lie behind the event. This strikes me as remarkably close to the logic expressed in the newspapers I read everyday. No matter how complex our institutions, no news occurs without the assumption that there must be blame attached, in the form of intentional action. The only difference is that in contemporary journalism we insist the blame must be attached to persons, while other societies would be prepared to blame evil spirits of some kind. So Gell's is a theory of natural anthropomorphism, where our primary reference point is to people and their intentionality behind the world of artifacts. In his final chapter he argues that this provides a theory of the work of art. In effect the creative products of a person or people become their "distributed mind" which turns their agency into their effects, as influences upon the minds of others. I like to think of his book as a prime example of his theory. Tragically, Alfred Gell died before it was published, but the book as an artifact or artwork remains as his distributed mind and continues to create effects that we properly in this case attribute to his wisdom and often his wit.

Gell (1998: 20–21) and Latour (1999: 176–180) have similar discussions of the agency of guns and land mines as against those that fire or plant them, in order to make their points about the centrality of agency. But while Latour is looking for the nonhumans below the level of human agency, Gell is looking through objects to the embedded human agency we infer that they contain. In this sense Gell is closer to the core of recent British social anthropology, which seems to have gravitated around an axis that leads from Durkheim to Marcel Mauss. For Marilyn Strathern (1988) the form of objectifica-

tion that dominates in Melanesia is that of personification, where it is a person that becomes the object through which people read the prior agency that created them.

To conclude this discussion of the philosophical resolution of materiality I want to suggest its limitations. It seems as though all theorists of materiality are doomed to reinvent a particular philosophical wheel. This wheel consists of the circular process at which level we cannot differentiate either subjects per se or objects per se. There exists therefore in philosophy a "solution" to the problem of materiality, which consists of the dissolution of our "commonsense" dualism in which objects and subjects are viewed as separate and in relationship to each other. This was evidently the conclusion of dialectical theory and was also found in the work of Bruno Latour. An alternative which I have not chosen to discuss here might have been phenomenology. Obviously such philosophical debates never really end, and many of the contributions to this volume may be seen as trying to put various spokes into this philosophical wheel or remove various spokes from that one.

While it is possible to thereby transcend the vulgarity of our dualistic apprehension of the world through engaging with it only at the heightened and abstract levels given us in philosophy, I would argue that this can never fully constitute an anthropological approach to materiality. Anthropology always incorporates an engagement that starts from the opposite position to that of philosophy—a position taken from its empathetic encounter with the least abstracted and most fully engaged practices of the various peoples of the world. In this encounter we come down from the philosophical heights and strive for the very vulgarity that philosophy necessarily eschews. We may often find ourselves conducting research among people for whom "common sense" consists of a clear distinction between subjects and objects, defined by their opposition. They may regard any attempt to transcend this distinction as mystificatory and obfuscating. As part of our own engagement we will necessarily attempt to empathize with these views. Furthermore, we will strive to include within our analysis the social consequences of conceptualizing the world as divided in this way. For example, we might find that those who strive for more abstract resolutions, as in philosophy, tend to denigrate others as deluded, vulgar, or simplistic in their preference for more pragmatic and less abstract perspectives. Philosophy can become simply a tool for describing others as false or stupid.

So our role is one of mediators. First we take these commonsense apprehensions and draw analytical and theoretical conclusions from the particular places they hold in particular worlds. We try to recognize that in a given time and place there will be a link between the practical engagement with materiality and the beliefs or philosophy that emerged at that time. A wonderful example comes from James Davidson's (1998) success in linking the modes of consumption, such as the eating of fish, in fifth-century B.C. Athens, with the rise of certain political and philosophical systems of thought. So having acknowledged this linkage, we mediate between the poles of philosophy and practice. At the same time that we have shown it is possible in philosophy to transcend the dualism of subjects and objects, as anthropologists we need to be aware of whose interests are served by making this claim. As Jürgen Habermas (1972) argued in *Knowledge and Human Interests*, we cannot, in anthropology, separate our stance on the veracity of such representations from our study of the consequences of those representations. Having shown that we can be philosophers, we need the courage to refuse this ambition and return to ethnographic empathy and ordinary language.[6] I will return to this theme at the end of the chapter.

MATERIALITY AND POWER

I began with the observation that the search for immateriality has dominated the engagement between cosmology and materiality. This is demonstrated in the first chapter of this volume. Our continued fascination with ancient Egypt rests in no small measure upon its monumentality. These people were so successful in their obsessive concern with preserving themselves for the afterlife that their remains permeate our own lives. We remain entranced by the trilogy of mummies, statues, and pyramids. What Lynn Meskell forces us to acknowledge is that this encounter immediately implicates two stances toward the nature of materiality itself: that of the people who created these forms, and that of our apprehension of these forms. Through her investigation of the sources Meskell reveals how each of this trilogy of fascinating objects was founded upon a set of beliefs about mate-

riality, including particular philosophical assumptions about preservation, scale, and mimesis. They required an imagination of what precise material form is appropriate for a deity, or for the soul in its afterlife. For the gods, the correct form of statue was actually life-giving. For the living, much of their time on earth could be spent in trying to secure their subsequent preservation through constructing the materiality of the afterlife as mummies. Sheer materiality expressed as one of the great pyramids gave the very sense of "being" a precise shape and form.

Along with Hinduism or Christianity, this cosmology rested upon a belief in the inherent superiority of the immaterial world. But it was the ancient Egyptians' faith in the potential of monumentality to express immateriality that has created their legacy as a material presence in our own world. We continue to be enthralled by statues, mummies, and pyramids because of the very exuberant faith that the Egyptians put into the process of materialization as a means for securing their own immortal transubstantiation. They thereby created among the first monuments to humanity's search for a means to transcend our own materiality. The very scale and temporality of ancient Egypt seems to diminish us as mere individuals in much the same way it was intended to diminish the population that built it. The central paradox continues within modern consumerism, where the pyramid stands both as a symbol of massive consumerism (the pyramid of a Las Vegas casino) and as a key sign (or, as often, key ring) of that New Age spirituality which imagines itself in opposition to this consumerism.

Central to Meskell's analysis is the evidence that through monumentality the divine could be apprehended and both society and nature controlled. The issue of monumentality thereby foregrounds humanity's attempt to control the degrees of materiality. With monuments some things seem more material than others, and their very massivity and gravity becomes their source of power. This point can be generalized well beyond the case of monuments, as demonstrated in the next chapter by Michael Rowlands, for whom the key distinction in materialism must be not between "ready-made" subjects but between relative materiality. That is the degree to which some persons and things may be seen as more material than others. Appropriate metaphors abound: some persons and objects are seen as weighty with gravitas, others are superficial and slight. Some people loom large, even

when we had rather they didn't. Others, however hard they try to gain our attention, we manage to leave at the periphery of our vision

In his key example, one particular person, the Fon (a chief in Cameroon), and all those objects that are understood to emanate from his presence, have considerable density. Materiality is gained by substances through the process of circulating through his body and presence, so, for example, his spit is itself efficacious in changing the order of things. By contrast, his subjects strive to have a presence as persons, but they simply do not possess the reality granted to the body of the Fon. All other bodies are mere shadows of the one real body. While Meskell indicates the extraordinary gulf between the godlike and ordinary in death, Rowlands draws our attention to the assertion of such distinctions in life.

Rowlands uses the example of the Fon to indicate why, for Marx, the stance to materiality was central to both his philosophy and his politics. Here we are trying to recognize persons' materiality in order to prevent their reification into a subject, a thing purified of objects. But under the lens provided us by Marx this takes on a particular nuance. For Marx, the proletariat under capitalism was reduced to a mere thing, stripped of its personhood. But this was *not* based on a dualist separation—subjects with personhood and objects with materiality. Quite the contrary. For Marx, the dialectical philosopher, the workers lost their humanity precisely because what was denied them was their material being as people who made themselves through their own labor, in their transformation of nature. Under capitalism nature itself was alienated as private property. So in dialectical thought, proper materialism is one that recognizes the irreducible relation of culture, which through production (I would add consumption) creates persons in and through their materiality. Capitalism splits culture and person apart into commodities separated from their intrinsic person-making capacities, and the illusion of pure humanism outside of materiality. For Marx, materialism is an acknowledgment of the consequences of materiality. Owners of private property could, like the Fon, have greater consequences as a result of their extended presence in the material world; those who do not possess property are by comparison rendered insubstantial. Colonialism, for Rowlands, becomes the larger instance of this same point. The colonial powers took upon themselves the ownership of most of the world as prop-

erty, such that persons and things now existed differentially. Substance resided in those or that which possesses what colonialism recognized as form, or quite often literally as "forms" that had to be filled out for one to be "recognized." Some people had access to this acknowledged materiality and thus to themselves; others were alienated from both. They were estranged from their own materiality and thus rendered insubstantial. The implication of Rowland's chapter is that we need to have much greater sensitivity to relative materiality.

This in turn leads us to the central point in the chapter by Fred Myers, which takes us from an insistence upon relative materiality to an emphasis on plural materialities. In Myers's chapter there are at least three different ideological dimensions, each of which would contest this attribution of substance to persons and things. First, there are the ideological underpinnings of what has become the conventional conceptualization of art. Art is founded in the Kantian aesthetic, which attributes greater material presence to some images than others. While our consciousness (or indeed unconsciousness) can quickly assimilate and dismiss mere ordinary objects, a work of art is said to resist any such easy or quick apprehension. It forces itself upon our attention. This is seen as universal, a property of the image, irrespective of who produced it. An artwork is defined by its density, an opacity we cannot simply gaze through without seeing. Art is the image that returns the investment of our gaze with interest.

But Myers then introduces a second ideology, that which generates the law of private property, which is invoked by concerns over copyright and the rights over images created by Aboriginal artists. Private property introduces a distinct legalistic form which insists that if an object has a relationship to a particular person or corporation, that relationship gives it fixity and solidity. It gives that person or corporation the right to claim the image as an instrument in its own self-creation and may deny that right to others. These laws can be used to protect the rights of creators, but only to the degree that the authority and principles that lie behind such a law are accepted. The problem faced by Myers is not that the Aboriginal people do not have a system of aesthetics and law, but precisely—as evident in all Myers's previous work (1986, 2003)—that they do. So the first two ideologies interact with a third. For these painters, some things have always been more material than others. Some have considerable solidity, power, ritual authority, and identity as

collective property, while others do not. Among the Aboriginals as in any society, some things matter more than others. So at the heart of Myers's chapter is the potential for conflict between three systems, each of which would hierarchize some images as more material than others. The universality of art, the universality of property law, and the universality of Aboriginal cosmology (what Myers calls the "revelatory system of value"), are all contending for the same field of practice. Power relations may cause a movement from one register, which determines how solid a thing is, to another.

Many approaches to power acknowledge the ways in which certain forms are privileged as categories, or indeed discourses, while others are neglected as detritus. Not for nothing did Foucault choose titles such as *The Order of Things* (2001) and *Archaeology of Knowledge* (2002) for books which documented historical shifts in the way people have thought about materiality and allocated certain orders and objects this or that way accordingly. These juxtapositions are often fortuitous rather than deliberate. Often what anthropologists such as Myers encounter is simply the struggle to make sense of, and establish some kind of consistency between, these different registers of materiality within particular conditions of power. The responsibility of the ethnographer is to document the way these seem to pan out in practice. So the study of material culture often becomes an effective way to understand power, not as some abstraction, but as the mode by which certain forms or people become realized, often at the expense of others. While Rowland's chapter demonstrates how materiality, in general, is relative to power, Myers's chapter complements this by showing how materiality is relative to specific regimes, each of which attempts to command our apprehension of this relative materiality.

At the beginning of this introduction two primary linkages between materiality and humanity were noted. The first is associated with the religious repudiation of mere materiality as a facade that masks reality, and the second with an economics that sees humanity as a capacity that is developed by its possession of commodities. The former leads to the concerns in Rowlands's and Myers's chapters with the plural forms of materiality and their relative degree. But anthropology has also been deeply engaged with the implications of the latter for the study of power. This has arisen partly from its critique of an increase in possessions per se being used as a sufficient measure of welfare. At least since Marshall Sahlins's (1974) essay "The

Original Affluent Society," anthropologists have insisted upon a more relativistic notion of human welfare. Typically anthropologists insist that it is not merely the possession of objects that determines well-being but the capacity for self-creation by a society or individual that is created through objects' appropriation.[7] A focus upon persons and their capacities could easily have led from a crude materialism to a crude humanism. Instead anthropologists and some economists work with a wider sense of capacity.

This perspective can be reincorporated within the more general concern for power found in the chapters of Rowlands and Myers. It is ethnographic encounters in Central Australia and the Cameroonian grasslands that demonstrate just why we need to replace simplistic "measures" of welfare. It is also often when dealing with such development organizations and other bureaucracies that the contradictions of materiality emerge more clearly. The ethnographer sees how the agency of persons becomes mostly an expression, rather than a source, of the aesthetics and structures of those institutions. People in institutions such as bureaucracy appear mostly as the product of the sheer density and authority constituted by institutionalized materiality—that is, as subjected to forms, regulations, conventions, and procedures (e.g., Riles 2001, Miller 2003, but also Rose 1990 and others influenced by Foucault). It is at this institutional level that the general point becomes remarkably clear: that power is, among other things, a property of materiality.

IMMATERIALITY

Kaori O'Connor, a recently completed PhD student of mine, wrote her thesis (2003) on immaterial culture. Many studies within material culture reveal the way groups come to understand themselves and become what they are through their appropriation of goods—for example, the use by subcultures of motorscooters and clothing styles. She argued that the cohort of baby boomers might have been similarly transformed into a more appropriate identity than merely that of "faded youth" if there had been goods through which such a self-transformation could have been conducted. But the appropriate goods do not exist, and therefore they remain baby boomers. Her question was why these goods do not exist. In contrast to most historical research, her perspective is that of a counterfactual history to

explore immateriality as the absence of material culture. It is not simply a case of market failure to produce the goods that this group wanted; it is, rather, the absence of a coming into being of both producers and consumers through a failure in objectification, which becomes evident only when we trace through what otherwise might have happened. This is one of several ways in which immaterial culture as the other side of the coin to materiality can be productive. Victor Buchli and Gavin Lucas (2001), for example, consider the premises of archaeology as based on speculation on what materials have not survived and what objects have not been left behind.

A theory of objectification leaves very little space to a concept of the immaterial, since even to conceptualize is to give form and to create consciousness. At the most we can recognize that people regard some things as less tangible or more abstract. Nevertheless, as we come down from that philosophical peak we meet many different dualisms which oppose the material to the immaterial. To return to my initial example, in Hinduism the route to immateriality takes many "forms." In India we find a hierarchy from the mass of small and disparate images of regional spirits and divinities who have been incorporated into the larger pantheon of Hindu deities. These deities are in turn often viewed as "avatars," expressive manifestations of the major deities such as Siva and Vishnu. The major deities in turn are seen by some as aspects of the one supreme deity. At higher philosophical levels the idea of a deity is seen as itself a vulgar rendition of a more transcendent sense of enlightenment for those whose consciousness can achieve such heights. So one can correctly label Hinduism as polytheistic, monotheistic, and even atheistic, partly because each is seen as appropriate to the capacity of certain kinds of people to apprehend the "reality" behind mere materiality. In turn these different understandings of immateriality become expressed through material forms. Consider how in Buddhism enlightenment is indicated by icons ranging from aspects of the Buddha to the impression of his feet. As a primary example of what Latour (2002) calls Iconoclash, the Taliban destroyed the Buddhas of Bamiyan, but as Jean-Michel Frodon (2002: 221–223) notes, they thereby in a sense betrayed themselves, because thereby they too "did politics with images." For this reason Latour (2002) argues for a greater acknowledgment of the materiality implicit in the technology by which images are created and destroyed.

If there is an inherent cultural trajectory toward immateriality implicated

in most religious belief and practice, then it is not surprising that from time to time we see this trajectory break free to become a dominant imperative of particular religious groups. The chapter by Matthew Engelke concerns a population that seems to exist in large part in order to clarify the logic of this position. The original break between Protestantism and Catholicism contained some fascinating debates about the materiality of religion. Ever since then there have been movements within Protestantism that have tended toward iconoclasm and asceticism as attempts to foreground the importance of immateriality to spirituality. The Masowe apostolics studied by Engelke take this to its logical conclusion in several respects. In Engelke (2004) the importance of repudiating the Bible as a material book is found to be central to this mission toward immateriality. In his chapter we see this extended to their repudiation of the church as a building, and to their preference for objects whose mundane form, such as unexceptional stones picked from the ground, are selected in order to repudiate the symbolic legacy of specific material objects within pre-Christian religious life. Most anthropological analyses seeks to link such communities, even instances of rupture (Sahlins 1985), with the rich or dense symbolic contexts given by their history and cosmology. But this is exactly what these people systematically attempt to repudiate.

Once again the very clarity within this mission toward immateriality brings out the inherent contradiction that follows from the impossibility of ever transcending the process of objectification itself. Just as there is no pre-objectified culture, there is no post-objectified transcendence. So the passion for immateriality puts even greater pressure upon the precise symbolic and efficacious potential of whatever material form remains as the expression of spiritual power. Thus Engelke notes the ambiguity surrounding honey and the temptation to use this lapse of immaterialism as a conduit that as it were brings spiritual power back down to our instrumental earth. The temptation is to turn the honey into something more like the amulets studied by Stanley Tambiah (1984) in Buddhist Thailand, where again asceticism and immaterialism become a resource for capturing spiritual power that can then be transmuted through material forms such as amulets into temporal efficacy.

There is, however, more than one cultural logic leading to immateriality in religion. In Meskell's chapter we have seen monumentality employed as a

resource in this regard. In Islam and Judaism there seems to be a sense that the transmateriality of the deity is such that the superficiality of mere human reproduction would be a slight upon them, a failure to properly grasp what they are, reducing them to mere idol as fetish. This produces a radical immateriality which in turn informs Bill Maurer's chapter: Maurer seems to me to be embarking upon an important project which could be termed the study of comparative immateriality. His starting point is that there is more than one reason why form itself might be refused, avoided, or transcended. Set alongside his other recent articles, which focus upon equivalence and upon rhetorical aspects of finance (Maurer 2002, 2003), this chapter, which lays stress on substitutability rather than abstraction and representation, has combined with them to set out an array of such processes. Abstraction, substitutability, equivalence, and rhetoric are all processes that are employed within the larger project of relating the material to the immaterial.

The premise of Maurer's chapter is that we almost always respond to money as a project of abstraction in which the key question is whether money as material form is adequate to its task in representation. We hierarchize the relationship such that money as the more abstract and immaterial seems to look down upon the mere material assets it represents. He argues that this perspective misses the critical point of Islamic finance, where the issue is not one of what he calls adequation, but rather of forms of substitution whose ultimate aim is sometimes theological, not pragmatic. Some were (and are) ultimately much more concerned with ways of objectifying and thus coming to understand the oneness of creation, here reflected in the substitutability of its various elements. Others have far less of a problem with abstraction. As such their theological arguments reflect our current academic arguments, which may turn toward abstraction, or toward alternative logics of immateriality, or toward ways of avoiding such debates altogether.

In the early caliphate a consequence of the replacement of the caliph's head, on coins, by Qur'anic inscriptions is the subordination of the issue of representation in coinage to that of the technologies for the imagination of the divine. The way a coin faces both sides, upwards to the transcendent and downward to functionalism, is utilized to give words themselves (as in calligraphy) a role in objectification. The coin helps the believer to conceive of this Janus-faced relationship, through giving a form to the process of

the emptying out of form itself—(compare Coleman 2000 and Keane 1997, 1998 on the word in Protestantism). We are no longer concerned just with whether coins are adequate to their role in representing assets. Rather, if there is an issue of what he calls adequation, it is whether they are capable of capturing the subtlety of these theological debates. Maurer argues that the effect of the new coinage is to bring down the issue of how one understands the deity to the somewhat safer question of how one understands the coinage. At the same time this secures the authority of coinage, since in their attempt to do what Maurer calls "hedging" this issue of divine representation, they thereby "leveraged" their coinage as value by giving it divine authority. Through the removal of the face, the coin is actually "countenanced" by the word.[8]

The implication of this becomes clearer in Maurer's second example of the securitization of Islam. Once again, securitization would seem to us a problem of increasing abstraction. In securitization some lower form of asset, such as the medical fees for hospitals, or the future profit stream from household mortgages, or the risk involved in currency transactions, are reconceptualized as a financial instrument. A trader turns this future profit stream into a "package" that can be traded. At least this is how I would have understood such processes. As such one can see how this could become a problem within Islamic theology, since it might be viewed as representing an entry point for forbidden principles of increase. These higher-level packages might appear to facilitate illicit forms of increase by coming "over the top" of simpler financial instruments, which can more easily be controlled. But for Maurer this is once again to focus upon the wrong end of this particular stick, since for some the concern is not to find theological justifications for secular practice, but to use financial practice as a means to objectify and thus come to understand theology. So securitization is here used as a means to think through analytical issues of substitutability, and its virtue as practice is that it shows how this comes to be done. In both these case studies Maurer reveals how what we reduce to a single trajectory leading to immateriality can be the product of alternative logics or debates about their relative probity. With this chapter and his other publications he has opened up to this pluralism the issue of immateriality. So in the previous section the chapters by Meskell, Rowlands, and Myers demonstrated the variety of different forms of materiality, each with their own consequences for power. In this

section Maurer's research on finance acclimatizes us to the idea of plural immaterialities, again each with its own consequences not only for power but also for analysis. By showing how the internal debate within Islamic banking itself questions the logic of representational adequacy for analysis, Maurer also begins a critique that will be taken up later by Keane.

Although Maurer is concerned with the theological concerns that lead to a quite different logic and imagination of immateriality, when considered in terms of the consequences of these logics, these various routes toward immateriality still end up having to contend with the issues raised by their specific materiality. As was the case for Engelke, the greater the emphasis upon immateriality, the more finessed becomes the exploitation of the specificities of the form of materiality by which that immateriality is expressed. The significance of this observation has been clarified by a series of recent ethnographic studies of finance in practice. Caitlin Zaloom (2003) shows that while we talk in terms of a rather general concept of "economic rationality," financial practice may be conditioned by a very immediate set of objects. By comparing screen-based trading to the "pit" of human traders, we find that it is the very specific aspects of these particular materialities, by which numbers appear and are expressed, that actually dominates activity. It is the precise nuance of voice and call in the pit, and the way screens appear and can be read, that becomes the relevant skills. Within global financial trading (see Hasselström 2003) we find a triangle made up of the propensities of the new technologies, the ways people find to exploit their strengths and weaknesses, and the social relations that thereby arise. Several other chapters within Garsten and Wulff (2003) reveal a fourth factor: the discrepancies between the practice of technology and the ideals it was intended to express.

An examination of the precise relationship between materiality and immateriality leads us to Hirokazu Miyazaki's contribution to this volume: a focus upon the material effects of theory. More specifically, he shows how finance seeks out ways of making the materialization of theory productive. Money is made by exploiting a critical relationship between the increasingly immaterial conceptualization of what's being traded and the quasi-material forms by which this is expressed. So, for example, a common contemporary financial practice is arbitrage. This is a technique whereby traders exploit any discrepancy they can identify between an actual price and what a price

"should" be. The normative implication of the word *should* is a property of theories about how perfect markets determine proper price. These are theories which, as Maurer (2002), MacKenzie (2001), and others have shown, try to reach up to the highest abstractions of theoretical physics, and which appeal because of their purity. In the unsullied world of pure probability is found the "real" market, which is the source of their models. As in all attempts to adhere to the project of immateriality, the real is equated with that which transcends the merely actual. For these traders the real market is not the sullied version they trade in, but the pure version they model. They import mathematicians and engineers in order to learn finance theory. All of this is fundamental to arbitrage trading, which operates in the momentary discrepancy between the theoretical price given by these models and the actual price. But by identifying and exploiting such discrepancies, it also removes them from the financial system. So it is also a corrective mechanism that makes money at the same time that it makes the market appear to fulfill this ideal about itself: "The act of arbitrage reduces arbitrage opportunities" (Miyazaki 2003: 256). It brings the mere reality of financial practice closer to the perfection of the "real" market, in which there could be no arbitrage because there would be no imperfections to exploit.

Miyazaki stresses the utopianism to these beliefs. Everything in the world ought to accord with this virtualist (as in Miller 1998b) conception arising out of theory. In one respect what Miyazaki describes is instantly recognizable because it is so quintessentially academic. And like most academics, traders hold a strong belief in their disciplinary legitimacy and underlying epistemology. So after the financial crash in Japan, these traders wrote papers defending arbitrage as legitimate market activity. Clearly they did not see themselves as only exploiting the weakness, that is, the materiality of trade. Rather, they saw themselves as exposing that weakness and making it accord with its "real" form, which is its higher immaterial theoretical form. This is why for them the discovery of a discrepancy is just that—a scientific discovery—and their utilization of this discovery ought properly to be "risk free." What the public see as theory or as immaterial for them is the site of reality, the holy grail of the true market. These Japanese traders actually work on fixed salaries; their delight is in the refinement of economic theory backed by the belief that, like science, this work brings the world closer to a higher truth.

What Miyazaki sees as utopianism is no doubt for the traders simply evident in the fabulous productivity of applied financial theory. Finance is a dialectical process of imagination followed by its realization. Key processes in contemporary finance, such as securitization and leverage, start with reconceptualization. Once the initial stage of securitization is secured, the next stage becomes the creation of derivatives. If securitization turns a potential future profit stream into something that can be traded, then a derivative may be formed by trading the risk involved in speculating on what that profit stream will be. A new way of conceiving something as tradable becomes a new form of value. Similarly, in leverage a smaller financial asset is used as a kind of collateral to bring to bear much larger sums, as in buying out a company. In both cases theory can be incredibly productive. In securitization and leverage, trading on them "as though they existed" is sufficient to make them exist. A million units can thereby be traded as a billion units. Well, more, actually. "By June 2000 the total notional amounts of derivatives contracts outstanding worldwide was $108 trillion, the equivalent of $18,000 for every human being on earth" (MacKenzie and Millo 2003). Pryke and Allen (2000) suggest that derivatives may be thought of as a new form of money based on a new conception of incredibly fast space-time, which as Miyazaki argues elsewhere makes arbitrage essentially a sensitivity to a particular form of temporality (2003). Anthropologists should not really have a hard time in understanding such activities, because this dialectic between the development of the immaterial and its dependence upon materiality may be viewed as an expansion of what we have already learned about the potential expansion of space-time in Munn's (1986) analysis of fame or Simmel's (1978) *Philosophy of Money*. Theory here is an example of culture as process, something that expands our space-time. Theory/cosmology creates a kind of super fame/money that now has materiality, at least sufficient materiality, to be traded. We don't need to understand the more exoteric modeling that produces this effect. We need only see that it can be realized as something we certainly do recognize—loads of money. The subsequent lifestyle of financiers thereby confirms another side to this dialectic: the material productivity of this expanded immaterial or theoretical work.

Maurer's and Miyazaki's observations show why the world of finance is such an integral part of this volume as a whole. Finance is the contemporary

version of the same phenomenon that is being tackled by other chapters using mainly historical and religious examples; indeed, Maurer's chapter combines the two. Humanity constantly returns to vast projects devoted to immateriality, whether as religion, as philosophy, or, for Miyazaki, theory as the practice of finance. But all of these rest upon the same paradox: that immateriality can only be expressed through materiality. In each case its theologians, or theorists as financial experts, become intensely skilled in the finessing of this relationship. For them immateriality is power. In arbitrage the theories have the authority of the belief in the market and so the legitimacy to punish/make money out of those who fail to accord with market principles. This is analogous to the way that, during the Protestant Reformation, populations were slaughtered because of debates over whether the bread and wine in communion was actually the body and blood of the Christian messiah. In both cases the assumption was that material practice should always accord with the proper vision of the immaterial, the market/the divine, which was its source of authority. The reason it is useful to bracket the chapter by Engelke with those on finance is that both attest to what happens when groups such as Masowe apostolics or institutions such as derivatives traders are committed to following through this logic of immateriality with its consequences for residual materiality.

So we approach a kind of general rule: the more humanity reaches toward the conceptualization of the immaterial, the more important the specific form of its materialization. This is appropriate to a wide range of other areas. Modern art depends on a very similar strategy. The more esoteric the conceptualized, the more value its performance. The more we come to believe that art is actually transcendent, the more its material form is worth in dollars. Similarly in the field of religion, the more we feel the deity is beyond our comprehension and representation, the more valuable the medium of our objectification, whether sacrifice or prayer. Religions such as Islam and Judaism, which are stridently resistant to representation, become stridently legalistic about practice. In all such cases, what makes materiality so important is very often the systematic cultivation of immateriality.[9] Humanity proceeds as though the most effective means to create value is that of immateriality.

This conclusion begs (at least) three further questions. The first is that since these are dialectical processes they are always subject to potential reification, what I would call "virtualism" (see Miller 1998b).[10] Indeed, for the skeptic they amount to nothing more than evidence for actual reification. They claim to reveal reality, but actually mask it. This is the way the secular sees all religion; the way the "philistine" regards the cult of modern art; and the way most of us regard, not just stock market bubbles such as the dot.com fiasco (Cassidy 2002), but quite possibly (following Marx and to an extent Keynes) the whole phenomenon of the stock market. The second issue, which is the subject of the next section, is the relationship between these levels of representation as theorized in semiotics. The third issue, which is the subject of the final section of this introduction, focuses upon the single most privileged moment in this allocation of relative materiality: the assumption that objects represent people, or what I will refer to as the *tyranny of the subject*.

WHY THE CLOTHES HAVE NO EMPEROR

Having debated the pluralism of materiality and the pluralism of immateriality, we find, not surprisingly, that there is also a plurality to their relationship. One example of the relationship between materiality and immateriality is evident in a common technique of representation: we often assume that a material form makes manifest some underlying presence which accounts for that which is apparent. The classic anthropological portrait is of the shaman, an individual who, faced with a body suffering from illness or witchcraft, finds an object such as a stone and draws it out, thereby making the cause of the affliction manifest. The appearance of the object demonstrates that which must have been responsible for its existence. There are echoes of this in Strathern's (1988) analysis of Melanesian society. Strathern argued that in Melanesia persons are the manifestation of a prior cause, their presence gives account of what must have taken place for them to be the consequence. As objects they make manifest what otherwise might be hidden or obscure.

Not surprisingly, there are equivalents within our own society. Psychoanalysts often take a problematic symptom, such as a debilitating or compulsive habit, to be evidence for some underlying cause that has so far remained hidden. The process of analysis brings forth language as a complementary manifestation. This has the merit, when revealed by the analyst, of

providing a fuller account of the hidden cause. So a "proper" manifestation replaces an improper one. In what is probably the fastest-growing religion of our time, Pentecostalism, the externalization of "The Word" is the evidence for the proper and prior internalization of God's word (Coleman 2000: 171). So for a wide spectrum of cultural practices, from shamanistic healing and psychoanalysis to Melanesian religion and Pentecostalism, making manifest is itself the practice of explanation which becomes tantamount to cure or to being saved.

Another cultural logic that connects materiality and immateriality has emerged in recent work on the concept of fetishism. This explores how societies try to police the boundaries between where and when materiality should be manifest (see Spyer 1998). As Keane (1998) noted, colonial authorities saw fetishism as implicit in tribal people's respect for the autonomy of things, analogous to a sense of objects having "agency" in the contemporary theories of Gell and Latour. But to call indigenous peoples fetishists was to claim that these were misunderstandings, certainly not to regard them as philosophers blessed by a better appreciation of the agency of things. Foster (1998) notes the colonial authorities' desire to represent the use of money as body decoration by New Guinea highlanders as a kind of naive misunderstanding of what money properly "is." Similarly, there is our own sense of threat when derivatives traders seem too far removed from recognizable assets, or when we read how Islam creates banks with different principles of interest and accumulation. These all seem to threaten accepted conventions about what is the sign and what is the signified. We want to regard other people's delineation of the materiality and capacity of money, not as different, but as wrong (Maurer 2003). This leads us in turn to a more general consideration of semiotics, and also to a greater concern with the moral dimension that seems to constantly permeate these assumptions about what is sign and what is signified. We can discern a consistency in these discussions, a desire to protect one particular signified, which is ourselves. It is as though the proper hierarchy of representation needs to be maintained as a semiotic dualism: on the one hand, the material sign that gains autonomy as mere representation; on the other, the human signified that gains authenticity to the degree that it transcends the paltry attempts by objects to signify it.

These issues are brought out with particular clarity by the contributions

of Webb Keane and Susanne Küchler. Both of them recognize the underlying problem within semiotics itself and the assumptions behind continuing to privilege ourselves as the subject. Fortunately both of them discuss this issue with respect to the same intimate relationship: the one between ourselves and our clothing. Without Keane's contribution the edifice of argument being constructed by this volume could not be maintained, because he speaks directly to this issue of implied systems and levels of representation. We cannot escape the dominant relationship between immateriality and materiality being understood as one of representation, where we tend to speak of coins and statues as signs or tokens. But if our very understanding of the nature of representation is such that it privileges the immaterial, it is that much harder to give respect to the nature of human action and history as merely material culture. Fortunately, Maurer's chapter has already demonstrated the parochial nature of our treatment of representation, by showing how in Islamic finance there are very different ways in which this relationship is seen—not as a hierarchy based upon abstraction but more as an alliance between the material and immaterial as means to conceptualize the divine. In a very different but parallel argument Keane suggests it is entirely possible to construct a theory of signification in which materiality is integral, not subservient. Following Charles Sanders Peirce he constructs an approach to the sign that takes the tangible and sensual aspect of our engagement with the world and respects its evident centrality to the way we think and practice in the world. He acknowledges the role of materiality in causation whether or not we notice its effects. Often this consists of the copresence of qualities, that happen to go together in a particular object, like lightness and wood in a canoe, or of what is taken to be a significant resemblance between things. We subsequently have to come to terms with convention, which orients us toward some things and some resemblances and not others, constraining and inviting possible ways of acting. Finally his chapter speaks to the essential historicity of interpretation, which takes its orientation from the past and creates a propensity toward the future, often acting through expectation and modes of acceptance. Within this it is what Keane calls the openness of things, which makes them so proficient to guiding our futures. So signs cannot be considered immaterial representations of a lower material presence. Rather, they are themselves what he calls the semiotic ideologies that guide practice.

To appreciate the significance of these rather abstract ideas, it is worth reflecting upon that common story about the emperor who has no clothes, because in many respects the gist of Keane's argument is that we also need to finally acknowledge that the clothes have no emperor. We assume that to study texture and cloth is by default to study symbols, representations, and surfaces of society and subjects. In an older social anthropology, clothes are commonly signs of social relations. Anything else would be a fetishism of them as objects. But as he shows, if you strip away the clothing, you find no such "thing" as society or social relations lurking inside. The clothing did not stand for the person; rather, there was an integral phenomenon which was the clothing/person. This same point is then generalized into a critique of what he sees as a misguided rendition of semiotics itself. Just as clothes are not a cover for subjects or society, the "sign" is not necessarily a vicarious representative of society. In one blow we eliminate not just the emperor but also our status as mere "subjects." The reason is simple. These material forms constituted and were not just superficial cover for that which they created, in part through their enclosing and giving shape. The subject is the product of the same act of objectification that creates the clothing. A woman who habitually wears saris as compared to one who wears Western clothing or a *shalwar kamiz* is not just a person wearing a sari, because the dynamism and demands of the sari may transform everything from the manner in which she encounters other people to her sense of what it is to be modern or rational (Banerjee and Miller 2003). Social relations exist in and through our material worlds that often act in entirely unexpected ways that cannot be traced back to some clear sense of will or intention.

Different people have an extraordinary power to delineate surface and substance differently. I was brought up with a concept of superficiality that denigrates surfaces as against a greater reality. I was taught that "the real person" was supposed to lie deep within oneself. It is a very common mode of denigration to call something or someone "superficial" (though see Wigley 1995). But as Strathern (1979) argued for Mount Hagen (see also O'Hanlon 1989) and I have argued for Trinidad (1995), other people simply don't see the world this way. They may regard the reality of the person as on the surface where it can be seen and kept "honest" because it is where the person is revealed. By contrast, our depth ontology is viewed as false, since for them it is obvious that deep inside is the place of deception. There are many versions

of this cosmology of depth and surface. The Aztecs (Moctezume and Olguin 2002) removed the surfaces of bodies by flaying their victims and gave priests these skins to wear as clothing. One person's skin became another person's . . . skin, expressing mutability in what we deem immutable.

The power of Küchler's contribution lies in the depth of the wound that she strikes against the apparent unassailability of conventional humanism. Her target is not the superficial materiality of the body and person, but that which is usually held as transcending this—that is, thought itself. She strikes at the self-definition of *Homo sapiens* as sentient, as the thinking being. It is not surprising, therefore, that having made her strike deep inside the head, she claims to have landed a mortal blow. Like Keane, she shows that once the emperor humanity lays slain, we can welcome a more modest, but more genuine representation of our humanity—one that respects rather than denies the materiality of thought. She argues that the significance of new intelligent fabrics, ones that appear in some sense to be able to "think" for themselves and start to take responsibility for their actions and responses, is that in their light we can see how many precursors already existed with these attributes. Küchler examines clothing that has inscribed upon its surface forms that are simultaneously the sign of what they can do and the means to do it. As such she confirms precisely Keane's point about transcending any simple representational form of semiotic.

More than this, Küchler forces us to confront not just ordinary thinking of the kind we might undertake in day-to-day calculations but also the pretensions of the most esoteric forms of thinking: the previously introduced mutual relationship between high art and high mathematics. In, for example, drawing or modeling a Klein bottle we can give form and give mathematical substance to an idea that is otherwise quite difficult to conceive of—something that has neither an end nor a beginning. Not even mathematics can ever transcend the process of objectification which allows it, quite literally, to think and thereby to be. So for Küchler mathematics is as much a product of art as art is the product of mathematics. Both are forms of thought in their concrete aspects, which is essential to all forms of thought. Once again their quest for immateriality exacerbates the importance of their materiality. Curiously, in her chapter, clarity of mind turns out to derive from being tied up in knots, knots which speak to the tactile nature of connection and relation, as well as their necessarily formulaic propensi-

ties. For Küchler it thereby makes sense to think in terms of the sapient tool as well as *Homo sapiens*. Between them, Keane and Küchler—through their emphasis on clothing, in particular—make sure that we do not allow a proper consideration of the body and the mind to become a return to the privileging of the purified subject. On the contrary, both body and mind are seen are routes that lead us to the same conclusions as these other studies, because among other things our concern with their materiality both internally, as with mind, and externally, as with the clothed body, forces us to acknowledge the centrality of materiality itself to the constitution of humanity.

Keane and Küchler prepare us for the larger realization of the extent to which, as Nigel Thrift puts it, we have accepted approaches that are falsely "predicated on stable conceptions of what it is to be human and material." We need to recognize not only the significance of new developments that Thrift then documents in the very possibilities of what it is to be material in the future; equally, as Mauss helped us to understand, we need to be reminded of the very different understandings other peoples may have of this centrality of materiality to the sense of what it is to be human in the past. Having dethroned the emperors, we are in a position to give credence to the increasing impact of sapient materiality (while acknowledging that objects are as plebeian as we are—they are not alternative emperors). This is precisely the purpose of Thrift's chapter. His chapter follows neatly upon that of Küchler in helping us think through the very concept of sapient objects. He indicates this through a return to a forgotten contribution by the psychophysicists. Their theories as to the impact of screens brings us back to a time when it was regarded as much more obvious and pertinent that both consciousness and cognition were bound to the specifics of materiality rather than defined by their opposition to the material world. The specifics of screens matter—a point we have met earlier in the consideration of finance (Zaloom 2003). If psychophysics was concerned with the anticipatory nature of consciousness, then Thrift's next example, that of software, is concerned with the anticipatory nature of materiality. For software to work properly it has, in effect, to become the material anticipation of its users. Software, for Thrift, is important, as are clothes for Küchler and Keane, in that it does not mesh with our dominant academic concerns over representation. Material forms such as screens and software are best understood as mediating in our lives through becoming a kind of personal infrastructure. This is quite

different from the more simplistic ideas of representation that Keane has also just critiqued. This is why, as Thrift shows, they are often apprehended with analogies and metaphors that are more fundamental and increasingly taken from biology.

Thrift weaves back and forth between the present and the philosophical discussions that generally accompany the first appearance of some new surface as people try to envisage its future consequences. There seems to be an almost standard sequence. First the material innovation is subject to heated debate, which often makes wild claims of technological determinism and how our essential humanity has now changed forever. Then typically there seems to be a long period of relative lack of regard and theory as the new forms become naturalized into the taken-for-granted background to our lived experience. Only later do we seem able to once again detach ourselves from our own acceptance of this new world to reinvent these explicit discussions about the consequences of technologies, as more modest acknowledgments of what this subject or object has subsequently become. Perhaps this is consistent with Thrift's emphasis upon a phenomenological concern with the sensuous nature of these material mediations, their visceral character as becoming ingrained into our feel of the world both as the world and as our apprehension of it, all of which creates what he calls the lyrical and wondrous form of intelligibility today. Thrift shows how phenomenology needs to look forward as much as backward. A twenty-year-old Londoner with a devotion to makeup, techno music, and multiple orgasms is probably rather more in touch with the world through her body than was your average Scandinavian peasant chopping logs. We gain nothing from that form of phenomenology that continues to romanticize a diluted conception of *Heimat* as the only authentic relationship to the world (Ingold 2000, see also Gell 1995).

Thrift ends on larger issues that speak to our capacity to envisage futures. His theme, starting with psychophysics, concerns our ability to predict and apprehend changes in stimuli. His chapter can be read as an attempt to do the same thing intellectually. For example, I believe the fact that I had to read *Brave New World* at school could be seen as a kind of "inoculation" that helps prepare me for the possible advent of what Thrift predicts as a brave new body of the future. Ideally his chapter help us to steer a course for that future politics of the sensory which Thrift regards as essential.

The chapters by Keane, Küchler, and Thrift have cut down the pretensions of both the somatic and the cognitive as constituting a humanity defined in opposition to materiality. They have thereby hammered in what should be the last nails in the coffin whose contents I now propose to consider. Who or what is it exactly that we propose to inter? It is perhaps the most fundamental burial that a discipline called Anthropology could ever contemplate, and one that has considerable implications for our understanding of what the discipline has been and could be. Although I concede that things never were quite this simple, for a moment let us reduce the foundations of contemporary social science to one particular set of ideas: Durkheim's *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*.[11] The possibility of modern anthropology was at the least secured with the radical secularism that viewed religion as the emanation of the social collective. At the same moment that Durkheim desacralized religion, he sacralized the social. The social sciences become devoted to the study of all phenomena that stand for what we now call society, social relations, or indeed simply the subject. By whichever name, these are the terms that describe the contents of the coffin we are about to bury.

In a recent volume Adam Kuper (1999) castigated American anthropology for its reification of the term *culture*. What he entirely missed was the degree to which a parallel tendency to reification exists within British social anthropology, but around the twin terms *society* and *social relations*, which are just as subject to reification as is the term *culture* in the United States. Even in the heydey of 1970s structuralist and Marxist approaches to anthropology, writers such as Mary Douglas (1978) insisted that structural analysis must always return to its vicarious role as the order of signs that stand for social relations, and even Althusserian modes of production were seen as only properly grounded in these same "social relations." This may well explain why, as discussed earlier on, Gell (1998), working within this tradition, permits agency for objects only as a matter of inference not as an inherent property of objects themselves.[12] It is not surprising, then, that Durkheim stands as the bête noire of Latourian science studies, a bastion of the dualism he wants to confront, or that Strathern excavates the reification of both society and culture implicit in the concept of "context" (see also Dilley 1999), or that Ian Hacking (1999) targets its philosophical foundations

in his recent *The Social Construction of What?* In this volume we are concerned with the rites of burial of the subject, and its consequences, but plenty of others have already had a hand in the death. Indeed, the term *culture*, where this means the anthropological study of the normative (rather than a classification of people), could be said to be less naturalized or apparently neutral. We are rather more readily aware that we have constructed culture than that we are dealing with a constructed subject or society.

We can hardly be surprised that a discipline called anthropology for so long encouraged the social subject to retain a reified position to which all else should be reduced. Behind this may lie an assumption that our ethical stance to the world depends upon retaining some fundamental allegiance to ourselves and our essential humanism. Yet just as the secular believe that the dethronement of the previous essential guarantor of morality—that is, the deity—released, rather than suppressed, the development of a modern ethical sensibility, so also it could be argued that the dethronement of humanity, or "social relations," can be the premise for the further development of modern ethics, not its dissolution.[13] So if the first revolution consisted of Durkheim enthroning society in the stead of religion, we now look to gain maturity by burying the corpse of our imperial majesty: society. In both cases revolutionary action is premised on a refusal to have our morality gilt-edged by an emperor.

But then who or what climbs up upon the now empty pedestal? It is essential that the pedestal remains empty. As Keane shows, the clothes should have no emperor—no emperor society, no emperor culture, no emperor identity, no emperor the subject, and certainly no emperor the object. There could be candidates who would like to seize this throne. For example, some postfeminist vision of a New Age "Gaia," even less sullied by materialism, a vision of earth mother as "super(ior)-man," that heals without conventional medicine, cures poverty without industrial agriculture, and communicates pure thoughts of caring motherhood. But the future is no more the female subject than the male subject: the future lies in human modesty about being human. Upon abdication of this throne we can lower our sights and face up to that which created us—that is, the processes of objectification that create our sense of ourselves as subjects and the institutions that constitute society but which are always appropriations of the materiality by which they are constituted. Ultimately, as argued at the beginning of this chapter, the con-

cepts of subject and object are always failures to acknowledge this process of objectification.

The idea is not to swing the pendulum too far toward materiality either. It would be easy to conflate Thrift's discussion of screens and software into a return to some kind of technological determinacy, but only by ignoring the much larger picture. Rather, I think what Thrift documents is a return to the centrality of materiality that anthropologists have encountered in most societies, but in the form of canoes, landscapes, or cultivation. Technology does have an impact, Thrift is indeed asserting that new materialities such as screens and software have consequences, sometimes unprecedented consequences, because they are unprecedented materials, but these consequences are as much a product of our history of self-regard, now viewed as part of the history of our materiality. Thrift's discussion of software can be compared with Strathern (1990) on artifacts. *Unprecedented* does not mean *unanticipated*, and software in many respects merely makes explicit a common property of artifacts as forming our anticipatory infrastructure. Having dethroned the emperor's culture, society, and representation, there is no virtue in enthroning objects and materialism in their place. The goal of this revolution is to promote equality, a dialectical republic in which persons and things exist in mutual self-construction and respect for their mutual origin and mutual dependency.

Sociology and anthropology have usually been strongest and most effective when the emphasis has been on what makes people rather than what people make: on the frames rather than what's inside them. Consider Goffman's various essays on how roles as the identity of persons are constituted by institutions or Bourdieu on socialization through the practical taxonomies of everyday things. One of the reasons anthropology still needs to return to writings such as Bourdieu to make this point rather than only to, for example, Latour's is that we need our ethnographies to focus upon how precisely our sense of ourselves as subjects is created. Bourdieu's sensitivity to the process of socialization becomes a vital piece in this jigsaw. It is not just that objects can be agents; it is that practices and their relationships create the appearance of both subjects and objects through the dialectics of objectification, and we need to be able to document how people internalize and then externalize the normative. In short, we need to show how the things that people make, make people.

It is perhaps worth ending this section with an illustration that can help address the obvious question. What does an anthropology that does not privilege social relations as the core to our own authenticity actually look like? In my previous work on modernity in Trinidad (Miller 1994), I argued that the best way to understand kinship in Trinidad was through seeing the way kinship was used to express certain key systems of value that had emerged through a historical process that started with slavery and was now increasingly directed toward the issue of being modern. But I then argued that after the oil boom Trinidadians started to put increasing emphasis upon the more flexible possibilities of mass consumption goods such as cars and clothing, rather than kinship, as a means to express these contradictions in value. So, for example, the kinds of freedom that were previously expressed by an antipathy to marriage, which was seen as leading to relationships being "taken for granted," were now being expressed through a very intense relationship to cars as vehicles for achieving freedom.

Now the obvious reaction to such a trajectory is to see people as losing their authentic sociality as they become more obsessed with material things. But this is to miss certain major advantages of such a shift. It was not just kinship that was used to express values in the absence of consumer goods; ethnicity, class, and age were used too. As a result, individual persons had previously been very commonly judged as tokens that embodied those particular values. There was abundant discussion on how "Indians" are mean, or engage in violent disputes over inheritance, or how "men" tend to be feckless and unreliable. All such stereotyping derives from the use of social relations and distinctions as a medium for expressing values. As consumer goods started to take over more of the burden for objectifying and thus creating the way values were visualized and understood, there was less of a tendency to use people as, in effect, the objects for objectifying such values. To indicate transience one referred to the unreliability of car parts rather than the unreliability of women. In short, anthropologists tend to forget what might be called the downside of the Maussian equation: that in a society where objects are reduced to their personlike qualities, people also tend to be reduced to their objectlike qualities, as vehicles for the expression of values.[14] The work of ethnography is to reveal these reductive processes.

All of this argument for a resolution, or republic of mutual respect, between what colloquially are thought of as objects and subjects may appear

rather too neat —which is precisely the point of the final chapter in this collection, that by Christopher Pinney. It seems to me to entirely befit a dialectical perspective that we end with a chapter, part of whose purpose is to negate this introduction through critique. It is a critique whose principal contention is that this introduction simply does not go far enough. It is clear that Pinney agrees very strongly with the importance of removing the tyranny of the subject. His chapter is in part an assault on what he sees as a continuing tendency to reduce objects to their "social lives," or the contexts of social relations. Pinney gives full blessing to the Latourian refusal of purification in terms of subjects and objects. He strengthens the case by his excavation of the implicit contextualizations found in the form of temporality that underlies most narrative history. History, he argues, makes assumptions that mere contemporaneity is enough to reduce materiality to its position as a representation of its time and, by extension, its social context. His critique of temporality is analogous to Keane's critique of semiotics. Both materiality and immateriality do more than simply stand as representations of the social. While the focus of this volume has been on the implications of this observation for anthropology, it may well be, as Pinney suggests, that this critique is even more pertinent when directed against the tradition of historical studies, with its reliance upon a simple notion of events in sequence. Pinney is trying to move us away from our assumption that images simply exist within a given sequence of time, to a sense that images by their very materiality, for example recursive nature, may contain within them their own relative temporality (compare Gell 1992).

Where he parts company from my arguments is the conclusion that he draws from this intransigent aspect of the image, which is argued to derive from its multiple temporalities. I suspect we are trading here in implied accusations of romanticism. Pinney sees my emphasis upon resolution and the smoothly turning wheel as a reflection of the romanticism that comes out of the German romantic tradition that strongly influenced Hegel. I would throw this accusation straight back into Pinney's court. Pinney wants to see more jolts and dislocations in the wheel, but I suspect that the philosophers and cultural theorists he cites want to read into images their own romantic ideal of the image or art object as a work of resistance. What is termed figural excess or "radical exteriority" becomes celebrated, precisely as radical. Such theorists as Theodor Adorno and Georges Bataille and Jean-

François Lyotard had an abiding horror of the merely mundane, and they project a radical potential upon the significant image. They celebrate, as does Pinney, the disruptive quality that can put spokes into smoothly turning wheels. But what fascinates me is quite the opposite. I am drawn to the ethnographic experience of the mundane, to the constant encounter with juxtapositions in people's lives which, for cultural theorists, ought to be incommensurable and contradictory, yet appear to be lived with and through, accompanied by little more than a shrug of the shoulders. Perhaps things "shouldn't" be this smooth. Most ethnography no doubt appears as terribly irritating or even infuriating for such cultural theorists and their attendant artists, but notwithstanding their protests, I contend that for the most part, from the perspective of ethnographic observation, that old wheel just keeps on turning.

CONCLUSION

This volume is intended to contribute to three interrelated projects. The first is to acknowledge the central role played in history by the desire to transcend and repudiate materiality. The second is to consider the consequence of acknowledging this fact and subsequently accepting materiality and to go on to explore the nuances, relativism, and plural nature of both materiality and immateriality. The third is to follow through the most radical of these implications, which leads us to repudiate the privilege accorded to a humanity defined by its opposition to materiality as pure subject or social relations. In addition to these three projects, this introduction has proposed a kind of meta-commentary upon them all. It has been suggested that in order to carry out these projects we are likely to embrace various forms of philosophical resolution to the problematic dualism between persons and things. While this resort to philosophy is essential to our academic purpose, the integrity of anthropology demands another commitment: a promise to betray such philosophical resolutions and return us to the messy terrain of ethnography.

Meskell has provided this volume with its ideal first chapter. Her case study establishes some basic parameters for the whole. The remains of ancient Egypt present us in spectacular form with the initial paradox that the whole volume must contend with: that throughout history there have arisen

systems of belief that are founded upon a fundamental desire to define humanity through the transcendence of the merely material and to relocate us within a divine realm which alone is understood as "real." Yet in many cases the way this sense of immateriality has had to be expressed is precisely through the efflorescence of the material. Her sensitive analysis of the theologies of practice implicit in these remains are then linked to the degree to which we still today use "pyramids" both to express the monumentality of commodification in Las Vegas and our increasingly desperate appeals to some transcendent New Age spirituality that defines us against the material.

The chapters that follow reveal increasingly complex and nuanced logics by which these contradictions have played themselves out. Rowlands and Myers start to construct an anthropology of the relativism and then the plurality of materiality. A case study in the field of finance by Maurer and Miyazaki, in conjunction with Engelke on apostolic repudiations, constitutes an anthropology of the relativism and pluralism of immateriality. Together they present some of the cultural logics that arise from these pluralisms and also the relationship between materiality and immateriality. Whether we are considering Aboriginal artworks or financial instruments such as arbitrage, it is extraordinary to observe just how much of what actually takes place is based on the creative exploitation of the material expressions of the immaterial ideal.

By exposing the necessity of the material, these chapters lead us to some of the fundamental issues at stake in confronting the underlying contradictions of materiality and immateriality. Above all they reveal a core, or kernel, to these entanglements. As Keane, Küchler, and Thrift reveal, we are not just clothed; rather, we are constituted by our clothing. Getting tied up in knots by the very idea of intelligent fabrics, or Peircian semiotics, or an anticipatory carapace, is precisely where we should seek to be: at the place where we confront the materiality of our own intelligence. At this stage we are doing precisely what has been so uncharacteristic of the approaches to materiality documented here. Our aim is to consider materiality directly, not vicariously through the quest for immateriality. But as these chapters have shown, this has important consequences, since it forces us to face up to the very reason why this quest for the immaterial is so driven. To acknowledge materiality amounts to a refusal to retain that reification of ourselves which has

sustained anthropology since its inception as the very point (both purpose and pinnacle) of this discipline.

The intention is to create conditions for a mature anthropology that will also provide the impetus to tackle areas where these issues of materiality continue to dominate. If historically it was religion that constituted the most consequential arena of debate, today it is probably economics. As the chapters by Maurer and Miyazaki reveal (and in a different way also that of Myers), anthropology lies in pole position to lead an assault upon an economics where, as Miyazaki suggests, its practice is its precept. Lévi-Strauss stressed the materiality of philosophy for "tribal" peoples; his heirs today recognize that finance is equally "tribal" in that it does philosophy through the construction of its own mythic realm, which is its own field of practice. Such an anthropology can freely reengage with a world dominated by mass consumption, poverty, and economics without seeing these merely as the forms of diminished sociality.

This is precisely why we cannot follow this trajectory without also taking into account a final project, a meta-commentary upon the others. We recognize that we can indeed resolve many of the issues at stake here, but at some cost. As was stated early on, all approaches to the problem of materiality are to some extent inventing and reinventing the same wheel. One can follow the writings of Latour, or one can take up a dialectical position, or one can translate the legacy of phenomenology. All of these will make claims to have finally and fully transcended the dualism of subjects and objects. At the level of philosophical discourse this claim seems tenable. Instead of a dualism, we have an endlessly turning process that spins off what, at a lower level, takes on the appearance of more vulgar forms—that is, things and persons. So it should now be apparent what was meant by characterizing these chapters as busily putting spokes into (e.g., Pinney) and taking spokes out of (e.g., Küchler) this philosophical wheel.

But a wheel, however finely crafted, is not in and of itself a vehicle. To take us anywhere, a wheel must be hitched to some mechanism that does more than just turn in circles. We achieve a philosophical resolution only if we forget the vehicle and its journey and contemplate the turning wheel as an autonomous force. To conduct anthropology we need to hitch the wheel back to a vehicle that returns us to the muddy paths of diverse human-

ity. Philosophy is therefore not (I hope) what anthropologists want to do; rather, it is our insurance policy against doing badly what we do want to do. A focus on the particular in ethnography sometimes obscures the larger horizons which help us assess wider reasons and consequences of that ethnographic experience. Anthropology in its own practice returns us to the practice of others, to an ethnographic engagement with people who generally think of themselves these days as subjects, living in societies, having culture(s), and employing a variety of objects whose unproblematic materiality is taken for granted. Not always. Every chapter in this volume has documented instances where the issue of materiality is problematic for those being studied as much as for those writing about them. In almost every case we have encountered philosophical engagements with this issue as something practiced or implicit in the ideas and actions of those being studied. But many of these cases also have their own equivalents of the vulgar or colloquial arena, so evident in our own largely secular society, where a dualism of subjects and objects is merely presumed.

So there are times when we directly employ a philosophical argument to prevent the reification of either subjects or objects. While early uses of objectification (as in Marx) concentrated upon production, I would argue that today consumption is at least as important as the practice through which people potentially make themselves. For example, in the intensely nationalistic and normative environment of contemporary Trinidad, individuals' sense of themselves is saturated with the self-consciousness of being "Trini." But ethnographic research (Miller and Slater 2000) made clear that "being Trini" had manifestly changed as a result of the way "being Trini" could be performed on the Internet, a technology Trinidadians took to with particular alacrity. So this could not be a study of the "Trinidadian appropriation of the Internet," as though it was an encounter between two separate entities, the Trinidadian and the Internet. The very concept of "the Internet" dissolved from being a given thing into the specificity of its local consumption. There is no such thing as the Internet, it becomes what it is only through its local appropriations. So what we studied was not for us "the Internet," nor "Trinidadians"—it was the process of objectification that created what subsequently came to be understood as both contemporary "Trinidadians" and "the Internet" in its wake.

It is therefore entirely possible to hitch the philosophical wheel that

transcends dualism to an analytical vehicle in order to interpret an ethnographic study. But while this becomes an insurance against reductionism or reification, the point, once made, would quickly become tedious if claimed to be the sole point of philosophically informed anthropology. The term *mutually constituted* is much overused in contemporary anthropology. Furthermore, the abstractions required to attach ourselves to this wheel also limit the ability of anthropology to engage with colloquial and empathetic understandings and language. Terms such as *culture* and *society*—or, indeed, *cultures* and *societies*—can all become entirely justifiable shorthands for our necessary generalizations. But we need to bear in mind that ultimately they are heuristic terms anthropology needs to use, or terms used by those we study. They are not ultimate foundations to which all else can be reduced. Once all such terms are recognized as merely our subjects, and no longer our emperors, they become quite useful vehicles that, with the proper wheels attached, will safely take us somewhere. So in my current research project on poverty and communications in Jamaica, I imagine that my analysis will commonly use terms such as *social relations*, *subjects*, and *objects*. Partly because I want to reflect the way the people I work with think and talk, but also because I will want to find ways to convey my research both to the people I am working among and very likely to policy-related institutions working on issues of poverty and development. Where philosophy and theory makes anthropology too "precious" or "pure," it changes from something facilitating understanding to a force preventing engagement. This should not detract from the intellectual agenda of this introduction. To expose the "tyranny of the subject" is still important as a bulwark against reification within academic discussion.

An essential part of anthropology, then, is a commitment to betrayal—a promise to betray the philosophical understandings we strive for in gaining our intellectual purchase, as we return to the vulgarity of our relativism and our empathy with the world. Philosophy is useful, but necessarily obfuscating and abstract when brought down as tablets of stone to people whose philosophy emerges essentially as a practice. We may want to bake our philosophical cake, but we hope for a much wider commensality than merely with those few others who would wish to consume it. As long as it is clear that the usage is heuristic or intended to reflect colloquial language, we all need to talk and write in terms of subjects, objects, and social relations. But

none of this, I believe, gainsays the importance of what the contributors to this volume have tried to do singularly and collectively. At the end of the day we still think we have invented a better wheel.

NOTES

1. See, for example, Banerjee and Miller 2003: 137–147.

2. Such levels of generalization hugely simplify this opposition. Indeed, although theology and economics may be in direct opposition as abstractions, in the world of practice, and even within theology itself, each may become the vehicles for the expression of the other—for example, in Parry 1994.

3. See, for example, Miller 1998a.

4. See later discussion of Latour.

5. See in particular Latour 1993, 1999, and for a case study relevant to this volume, Latour 1996.

6. There are, of course, as many variants of philosophy as of anthropology. Furthermore, my working definition is to a degree tautologous, given the point I am making. I take as philosophical that which is both more universal and more abstract, and as anthropological as that which is more ethnographically based and specifically engaged. Clearly there are variants of both philosophy and of anthropology for which such assumptions are quite unwarranted.

7. Compare Sen 1987, 1999, but also Nussbaum's "neo-Aristotelian" position (2000; Nussbaum and Sen 1993).

8. For other contradictions based on the two sides of coins see Hart 1986, 2000: 235–256.

9. Many other examples come to mind: for instance, Zelizer's (1987) work *Pricing the Priceless Child* is based on a very similar logic, as is Campbell's (1986) historical study of why it was that the ethos of Puritans and later Californian hippies became the necessary foundation for what we see today as the most elaborated versions of contemporary commodity materialism. Many times in the history of Christianity it was these same beliefs in the greater reward of asceticism through Christ that allowed the leaders of the church to amass considerable wealth from family inheritance (Goody 1983).

10. In the theory of virtualism (Miller 1998b) I have tried to produce a more general theory as to the effects of these tendencies to reification, but I have also tried to show why these are extremely important for understanding the particular moment of history we are living through. I don't have space to reiterate those points here.

11. This is not intended to be so serious a claim as could be subject to argument. If someone would rather latch on to Kant's universalism, or British ethnography, or Boas, or Vico, that's just fine. Durkheim is simply a representation of the trend I am concerned with excavating.

12. A tendency to use the term *social relations* in a reified or reductionist manner is not to imply that all uses of the term lead in this direction. Indeed, one of the bastions of British social anthropology, the study of kinship, has perhaps been one of the least reductionist, as kinship became progressively understood as an idiom or homology of other cultural genres (e.g., Strathern 1992).

13. This doesn't happen to be my own view. I suspect that both humanism and religion itself can thrive on the ethics that is set free by this kind of radical or material doubt—but that, as they say, is another story.

14. That is, before one comes to Mauss's discussion of the Maori *hau* and *taonga* in *The Gift* (1954: 8–10), there is a section on the Samoan *tonga*, the giving of a child as a piece of property (ibid.: 6–8).

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LYNN MESKELL

Objects in the Mirror Appear Closer Than They Are

For many people, to reflect on a culture such as ancient Egypt is to invariably conjure up three of the most distinct arenas of Egyptian materiality: pyramids, statues, and mummies. Their evocative and concrete images have a great deal to do with their "affecting presence" (Armstrong 1981) for contemporary culture. In turn each also implicates a particular theory of materiality as held by their creators. In this chapter I explore these philosophies of the material in an ancient context and try to reflect forward to contemporary culture to assess the linkages and legacies of ancient materiality. This is part of a larger project (Meskell 2004) that seeks to map the constitution of the object world, the exploration of the situated experiences of material life, and concomitantly its shaping of human experience. Through this triad we might challenge our own understandings of subject-object relations as discrete and essential entities that inhabit particular, impermeable worlds. Recent writing on the specific contours of agentic objects or fetishes, as interlocutors between persons, things, and worlds, undermines the fixity of our imposed boundaries. Materiality represents a presence of power in realizing the world, crafting things from nothing, subjects from nonsubjects. This affecting presence is shaped through enactment with the physical world, projecting or imprinting ourselves onto the world (Armstrong 1981: 19). Such originary crafting acknowledges that there are no a priori objects. They can never be simply inferred as axiomatic;