

fabricated and used, through contact with the matter—making the drums, beating the drums, singing, waving the ‘hands’ of the masks, walking in line for hours—that various aspects of Ankave social life are made present to the minds of the participants. These various domains of social action are: the ambiguity of maternal uncles (both cherishing and devouring); the reason shamans have to treat the *ombo*’s victims and the physical damages to the latter’s innards; the necessity of performing *songen* ceremonies to manage mourning; the local representation of life and the overwhelming importance of maternal blood; the origin of the drums, etc.

With regard to the general ‘message’, ‘meaning’, or ‘social value’ that is common to these various instances of social life, these domains are redundant, for they all refer to the idea that you will never be able to repay ‘the life your maternal kin gives you, thus, the maternal kin will take it back in the guise of the cannibal *ombo*’s involvement in mortuary procedures’, say the Ankave. It is this same message that is spoken, illustrated, and put into objects and actions in various ways. The drums themselves, making the drums, and thinking about the drums, as well as beating the drums in general, all signal in a non-verbal way the reasons why and when these domains have to be evoked together—when the *ombo*’ recapture the life they have given. It is a reminder that some artefacts, ideas, social hierarchies, narratives and gestures have to be thought together. And, most importantly, it evokes the very reasons why they have to be linked.

The difference with the case of the Baruya fence is that the meaning brought to the minds of the participant of a *songen* ceremony cannot be put in words. This particular technical device, a drum used in a ritual context, illustrates these ‘implicit non-verbal statements’, ‘unspeakable truths’, as well as the ‘blurring of boundaries’ (between the living and the dead) that Tuzin (2002) linked with the ‘crafting of an illusion’ in art objects.

It is worth pointing out that I have not merely hypothesized a vague ‘agency’ of drums in Ankave culture. Rather, I have explained what that agency is about, and how it works. Also, rather than adding more vehement paragraphs on the necessity of burying all dualisms—nature/culture, spiritual/material, style/function—I have documented two ethnographic cases, paying attention to the actual physical making and using of things in the embedding of meaning and physical actions.

Regarding the two Anga examples above, the new questions that arise are: what are the differences between an art object, a ritual object such as an Ankave drum, and a non-ritual and non-art object like a Baruya fence? The answers to these questions would be established only by careful observation, description, and analyses of artefacts and technical behaviour comprising their whole social context, in the widest sense; and linguistics has a key role to play here.

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13.5 Linguistics and Technology: Field Questions and Methods

Besides reflections on the links between the evolution of human ability to develop technical actions on the material world and the origin of language (Leroi-Gourhan 1993[1964]; Ingold 1999), the theoretical relationships between technique and speech that have been studied take several forms, all related to the various ways techniques and objects are associated with ‘meaning’ or, more generally, some kind of information. But these relationships between linguistics and the anthropological study of technology are paradoxically poorly developed. On the one hand, it is obvious that no technical action can be understood as part of a global social system without paying utmost attention to hours of spontaneous speech or comments on that action; on the other hand, field studies linking the two fields of research are in fact extremely rare.

With the exception of vague and superficial propositions, considering technical actions on matter as some sort of speech, i.e. using language as an analogy to understand some aspects of techniques, has given poor results. For instance, Baudrillard’s mention of weird elementary ‘technèmes’, the combination of which was