environment (Ingold 2000; 2004; Warnier 2001; 2007). We are still far from the comparative studies of body techniques which Lévi-Strauss (1987[1950]: xxiii–xiv) asked for almost sixty years ago! But at least the physical engagement of the actor with the material world has now become part of the picture.

Further good news for the anthropology of technology is that real interdisciplinary cooperation is now becoming more common. The old ongoing exchanges between archeology and anthropology are now joined by disciplines such as art history, history of material culture, anthropology of art, cognitive anthropology, primatology, and philosophy which share questions with the anthropology of technology. In particular, many scholars agree to concentrate on the 'agency' or 'materiality' of objects with a growing interest in the role of objects and technical action in non-verbal communication.

Following Gell's (1998) book *Art and Agency*, the 'agency' of objects has become a fashionable idea in anthropology today. Furthermore, Gell's (1996) proposition to blur the border between art objects and utilitarian objects, as well as the unconventional usage of the word 'technology' in his paper on 'technology of enchantment' (1992), are incentives to ask crucial questions about the very nature of objects. However, as Munn (1970) remarked long ago, the idea that objects have an agency of their own is far from new—it was clearly mentioned in that seminal anthropological text, 'The Gift', by Mauss (1954[1923–3]). This 'was concerned with social relationships in which people are bound together through the agency of things and in which, therefore, the things are imbued with notions of persons' (Munn 1970: 141). In other words, to say that objects have some sort of agency is just another way to remind ourselves that material culture can be the object of anthropological investigation. Once this 'agency' is acknowledged, we are beholden to document it, by understanding the relationships tying human beings to material objects. I would add that not only artefacts but also actions on the material world in general should be studied.

By referencing Gell's work, new and good things result in the anthropology of technology, as it makes dozens of scholars ask the same series of questions about artefacts. For instance: in what respect does an 'ordinary' object differ from a seemingly similar artefact, locally considered as a piece of art (or as a ritual object, a relic, etc.)? Is there a difference in the way these various things are produced and physically used? What do people *do* with objects, including 'merely' (if one dare say) building or reinforcing social relations through the use of artefacts? What kind of efficacy do they attribute to the object: a real or imaginary physical action on the material world or an inbuilt power of its own? In what respect does an object lead
p. 305 people to act on one another? Particularly, to evoke Mauss' (1954[1923–4]), Munn's ↳ (1970), and Strathern's (1988) intuitions, how and when is an artefact considered to be a person or an extension of a person? Needless to say, this fundamental question is deeply embedded in our own conceptions of 'person' and 'object' (Keane 2006a).

'Materiality' is another fashionable catch-all term today (Miller 2005). On the one hand, it rightly leads us to ask what it means to invoke the association of social relations and shared ideas with a material object (and I would add, body technique). It also leads us to a hackneyed theme in anthropology: what does 'objectivation' mean? This adds another important question: how is the materiality of things involved in the thoughts and actions of people when they make or manipulate objects? For instance, what do people perceive of their physical characteristics or, as Keane (2006b) would put it, of their 'bundle' of qualities? On the other hand, as Ingold (2007) remarks, understanding the materiality of things implies first and foremost a description of what happens to materials when they are transformed and experienced by those who manipulate them. That is, to 'return to the messy terrain of ethnography' (Miller 2005: 41), and take seriously the 'imperative to get back to material things, and not to surrender physicality and sensuous experience to an exorbitation of language and the sign' (Thomas 1998: 108).