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Foreword from the editors

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Foreword from the editors

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As the reader will rapidly discover, this Special Issue is edited by three of us, but the introduction is single authored. The explanation for this configuration lies in the history, both individual and collective, of the issue.

The story began in Marseilles, at the Centre de Recherche et de Documentation sur l'Océanie (CREDO), where Pascale Bonnemère and Sandra Revolon organised a workshop on life cycle rituals and relational transformations in 2014. They wanted to share the results of the analyses they had undertaken of different life-cycle rituals, in particular male initiations of the Ankave people of Papua New Guinea and mortuary rituals of the Owa people of the south-east of the Solomon Islands. Although these rituals were of different types, the analyses intersected at several points, suggesting the value of a wider discussion.

The rationale of the workshop was to investigate how life-cycle rituals are moments of transformations affecting relations between persons or between persons and supernatural

entities. This argument entailed a second and novel hypothesis: that a relationship cannot be transformed if the terms that compose it are not present, either directly, as in initiations (Bonnemère 2008, 2014), or mediated through objects, as in mortuary rituals (Revolon 2007).

James Leach and Borut Telban, who participated in the 2014 workshop, offered to assist Pascale (Sandra being unable to pursue the project) in proposing a session at the 10th conference of the European Society for Oceanists held in Brussels a year later. Considering the central argument, it was agreed that we needed to focus on *how* these transformations occur. That is, to look for the modalities and devices (material or otherwise) used to enact, operate, stage, and shape the relations. The emphasis that Pacific peoples place on specific engagements to bring about transformation, and to provide relations with the desired shape, gave us the lead.

A great number of people responded to the 2015 ESfO call and gave interesting papers at a lively extended panel. However, we had to limit the number of papers for this special issue and selected papers that most precisely addressed the request for a detailed engagement with the material and processual aspects of transformation.¹ We also decided not to include our own papers, but to write a collective introduction outlining succinctly the ‘state-of-the-art’, including a discussion of our own analyses.

That was the original idea. Because, among the three of us, Pascale was the one who organised the first workshop, and since it was mainly her hypotheses that had been proposed for discussion in both the 2014 and the 2015 calls for papers, we decided that the presentation of the issue should be written by her alone.

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¹We would like to warmly thank Sophie Chave-Dartoën, Ludovic Coupaye, Sébastien Galliot, Pierre Lemonnier, Denis Monnerie, Mark Mosko and Anthony Pickles for having contributed papers to the panel and for their contributions in the discussions. The stimulating role of the audience should also be acknowledged.