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The body and its image: reinventing cultural performances in Oceania in an era of globalization

Aurélie Condevaux, Géraldine Le Roux and Laura Schuft

- 1 In an era of globalization and new communication technologies, and in a present profoundly marked by colonial histories, how can we consider cultural performances in Oceania today? What do the staging and broadcasting of Oceanian cultures reveal or convey? What interpretative frameworks allow us to comprehend the social, political and cultural processes taking place both on and behind the scenes? Through these questions, this special issue of the JSO seeks to renew the prism of analysis on a much-studied topic: performances of the body and culture in Oceania.
- 2 In accordance with recent anthropological work, the term “performance” is used here to designate a variety of practices, in particular songs and dances (Glowczewski and Henry, 2007), theatre (Preaud, 2007) and even sequences of words and gestures accompanying the presentation of visual art. Performances can be defined as the “intentional development of expressive skills before an audience” (Castellani, 2007: 74, our translation). These processes can be distinguished from the everyday by diverse means, such as defining a space, “stage”, choice of costumes or other elements that distinguish from the everyday. Performances therefore include a variety of practices, some of which have been elaborated as a response to Western art history and an interpretive framework considered as restrictive (Le Roux, 2007).

Photograph 1. – 10th Pacific Arts Festival, 2008, Pago Pago, American Samoa



(© Le Roux, 2008)

- 3 In this way, and contrary to the definition proposed by A. Kaepler (2002), performances exclude “rituals”, understood as a sequence of formal acts, the meanings of which escape the performers. The performances referred to in the present issue have a human audience (whereas, in the case of rituals, the audience can be divine) and they convey a more or less “encoded” message (Kaepler, 2010b). The contributors to this issue discuss the elaboration or reception of such messages within local or global contexts. In light of this definition of performance, the question of audience is essential and, like A. Kaepler (2010b), we can distinguish between members of the audience who are able to decode the messages, in all of their complexity, and those who are unable, who are simply “spectators”. This latter situation is frequent when the performances are “taken out of context” and produced in the framework of regional or international festivals. The articles brought together in this issue present situations that are characteristic of these different cases. They also highlight what is at stake in the passage from ritual to performance, or the mechanisms of resisting such a passage.
- 4 The body performances and the broadcasting of their images are at the heart of major social processes. They play for example a central role in the elaboration of social and cultural identities. The definition of society as proposed by S. Tcherkézoff, as “expressing and putting into practice a form of belonging to a single entity, the latter being more restrictive than the entity formed by the human race” (Tcherkézoff, 1997: 310, our translation), could also be used to define “identities”. Exploring identities means exploring the processes of identification through which individuals subjectively define, describe and experienced identity (Morton Lee, 2003: 3). These processes are understood as being inseparable from the social interactions that frame them (Goffman, 1973). In addition, the process of identity formation operates through modes of selecting cultural

traits that social actors use as markers of belonging (from an in-group perspective) or assignment (from an out-group perspective). Due to tight links between processes of identity formation and cultural identification, we will speak of “cultural performance” to designate the object of the contributions in this special issue.

- 5 Much research has noted the centrality of the body in processes of identity formation (Le Breton, 2016). In her work on gender, J. Butler (2006) shows how the repetition of uses and actions of the body participate strongly in reifying social identities, characteristics and differences. The fact that the latter are anchored in – and expressed by – the body gives them a “natural” appearance, reinforcing belief in their existence as “natural” as opposed to social. The question of the body and its relations to social structures and hierarchies (Bourdieu, 2000) inevitably leads to that of power. The study of performances in which the body plays a central role allows for understanding ways in which social relations of power or political tensions are reproduced or negotiated. As publicly displayed, visible manifestations which have a “visual and affective immediacy” (Alexeyeff, 2009: 13), cultural performances are also easily transposed within different contexts, where their content and meanings may vary. There is a parallel between the mobility of the body and that of identities construed through social interaction or cultural performance, which can take on differing forms and meanings according to the contexts of staging, diffusing or receiving the performance. The *haka* for example, according to D. Murray (2000), can simultaneously serve as pan māori identification, “tribal” identification (*iwi* or *hāpu*, see below) or family identification (*whānau*). This diversity of meanings also operates on a local level. G. Petersen (1992) examines how a dance can convey multiple messages about the relations that the “groups” or “communities” – in this case in Pohnpei – maintain with each other or others. New means of communication may magnify this multiplicity of meanings. The broadcast of digitalized bodies and performances through these new technologies, broadcast to new and increasingly large audiences, continues to multiply the impact of what the body says about social and cultural identities or differences (Schuft, 2012).
- 6 One of the objectives of this issue is to comprehend what is at stake in this passage “from the body” to its “image”. Do new forms of circulation of performances redefine the place of the body in the definition of power relations and identities? Or rather, do they exacerbate the expression of identities, reducing performances to “rituals of identity” (Kaepler, 2002) at the expense of other social and cultural stakes?
- 7 Before presenting the contributions to this issue and the ways in which they renew the prisms of analyzing cultural performances in Oceania, we propose a synthesis of the vast anthropological literature on the topic, which primarily refers to choreographed or musical performances. We shall first discuss how these studies of performances have allowed for observing social change. We shall then review the analytical frameworks they have used to accomplish this.

Cultural performances: mirrors of society or generative of social change

- 8 Research on musical and choreographed practices in Oceania abound. An exhaustive review of research on this subject seems impossible, as evidenced by the extent of the annotated bibliography by M. McLean (1977). The literature is comprised of Western

researchers and Oceanian authors – choreographers, composers, performers, researchers – who have often shared and published their knowledge as recognized experts of these practices, in particular in contexts where choreographed practices have acquired a significant emblematic status (Armstrong and Ngata, 2002; Gardiner, 2005; Huata, 2000; Kāretu, 1993). We shall review here how the study of musical and choreographed practices has contributed to research areas that are central to Oceanian anthropology. Not included in this synthesis however are ethnomusicological publications (Linkels and Linkels, 1999; McLean, 1999), which have chiefly sought to describe the different genres of music and dance, archipelago by archipelago, and to specify the types of body techniques and movements or even the compositions (words, music, movements).

- 9 Ethnographical work on these practices – at their peak at the beginning of the XXth century (Best, [1925] 1976; Burrows, 1945; Krämer, 1995) – have generated knowledge about the terms used to express ideas about beauty, the ways of manifesting esthetic appreciation and the variety of emotions involved in or engendered by the performance (Konishi, 1999; Kaeppler, 1993; Tamisari, 2000). Yet the analyses have especially underlined how these practices have been tied to social structure, whether religious systems, kinship relations, economic transactions or political organizations. We evoke these areas of social structure here point by point.
- 10 Concerning religion, research has focused on the role of choreographed and musical practices in pre-Christian religious worship, or on the social dynamics stemming from contact with Westerners and Christianization. In Chuuk (formerly Truk), an island of Micronesia, ritual specialists were charged with guiding the spiritual power (*manaman*) through precise recitations (Dietrich, Moulin and Webb, 2011: 83). During ritual possessions, the spirits of the ancestors could intervene in the world of the living, in particular to reveal new songs. In Papua New Guinea, dances and music (in particular the sacred flutes) often reveal the presence of ancestral spirits, whether for example in the Highlands Region (Dietrich, Moulin and Webb, 2011: 88-89) or in the Madang Province (Smidt and Eoe, 1999). Although the embodiment of ancestral or mythical spirits by masked dancers has retained the attention of ethnographers more than the accompanying dances and music (Smidt and Eoe, 1999; Vienne, 1996), some authors have proposed detailed analyses. Through a study of ceremonies marking the end of funerals among the Lak of Northern Ireland, P. Wolffram (2011) shows for example the many ways in which choreographed and musical practices relate to representations of the environment and spiritual world. Spirits appear as the source of musical creation, while the quality and types of movements performed by the dancers confer to them the attributes of the spirits, such as lightness or rapidity. Everything, in the danced performances of the masks, demonstrates the tight cooperation between spirits and humans, the performance itself taking place in a liminal space situated between the home of men and the forest, the home of spirits.
- 11 Despite missionary attempts to forbid them, choreographed and musical practices formerly deployed in religious contexts have at times subsisted, all while taking on new meanings. W. Donner (1992: 74) in particular analyzed the passage from the sacred to the secular. A. Kaeppler (2002) also consecrated several publications to this topic. She argues that sequences of sound and movement that were formerly anchored in sacred spaces have been transformed: from religious “work” they have become the domains of “music” and “dance”, serving as “identity markers” or “ethnic identity markers” (Kaeppler 2002: 8). This is the case of the Hawaiian *hula*, which passed from the religious domain to an

affirmation of identity (Balme, 2007; Kaeppler, 2002, 2010a, 2010b). This change of meaning (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998) and “secularization” of dances are at times tightly tied to the dynamics of diasporas. This is the case of the *bon* dance, practiced by the Japanese and the descendants of Japanese living in Hawai’i. In certain circumstances, the dance tends to lose its initial link to Buddhism (Van Zyle, 1988). However, the participation in national and transnational festivals can be a space of reenacting such former meanings, in this case religious. Beyond these processes of “secularization”, there is also the question of the place accorded to “traditional” dances and song within Christian churches. Based on an ethno-historical analysis of Protestant churches in Polynesia, Y. Fer (2009) shows, for example, that after periods of bans and rejection, Polynesian dances were re-appropriated within certain religious congregations in the context of elaborating “a trans-Polynesian identity”.

- 12 Musical and choreographed performances during large celebrations are also the occasion to activate forms of cooperation within the family, demonstrate kinship networks and at the same time generate diverse economic transactions. For the Yolngu (Australia), the dances and song are the property of specific kinship groups who have the right and responsibility to perform them (Tamisari, 2000). In her analysis of clowning relations among the Murik in Papua New Guinea, K. Barlow (1992) also observes that the performance of certain dances during funerals – particularly humoristic or provocative dances, but also “serious” ones – is obliged of certain categories of individuals, in this case classificatory or fictional kin called *mwara*. These performances are a part of jesting relations that allow for tackling the contradictions of social life and the antagonistic requirements set upon individuals.
- 13 The performance of choreographies or songs can require the payment of a compensation due to an author or group’s “property rights” over certain compositions. This has particularly been evidenced in Papua New Guinea (Smidt and Eoe, 1999) and Vanuatu (Stern, 2013). In Polynesia, the idea of “property” is much less salient and is not expressed in the same way (McLean, 1999: 391). While the composer or choreographer is still recognized for his/her work, through material compensation or social recognition, it is not a matter of ceding property rights for payment. The idea of enacting a sale – in the sense of an alienated transaction – has little meaning for the actors (McLean, 1999: 391). Indeed, dances can be a vehicle of circulating wealth, without the transaction being reduced to a purchased composition or a form of paid work. Rather, a transaction might be a form of “compensating the desire” generated by the esthetic emotion, as M. Jeudy-Ballini (1999) suggests in the case of the Sulka in New Britain, Papua New Guinea. A similar logic exists in Australia among the Yolngu, where the virtuous dancer is pressured by the audience into giving material goods or money, as a way of assuring that he/she will not make excessive use of his/her talent by humiliating the others (Tamisari, 2000). Conversely, a performance can necessitate a gift, as in the case of different archipelagos of Polynesia. In the Cook Islands or in Tonga for example, the performances generate diverse forms of gratuities – objects (cloths of bark, floral necklaces, etc.) or bills – at times even stuck to the oiled skin or placed at the feet of the dancers (Alexeyeff, 2009; Condevaux, 2010). In these different cases, there is a tight link between the esthetic emotion, the interpersonal relations and the circulation of material goods.

Photograph 2. – Former students of Tupou High School from Tonga and its diasporas accompany their gift by a sitting dance (*mā'ulu'ulu*) during the 50th anniversary of the institution, July 2013, Tonga



(© Condevaux)

- 14 Choreographed practices also represent a useful means of studying politics. In Papua New Guinea for example, while “festivals” (ceremonies marking an important moment in the life cycle) are central to musical and choreographed practices, they also offer occasions for “big men” to reaffirm their social prestige (Smidt and Eoe, 1999; Wolfram, 2011). The virtuosity in the dance can represent both the presence of ancestors and the position of authority of certain individuals (Tamisari, 2000: 281). In the Polynesian region there are also tight connections between dance, music and political structure. The use of chanted recitations to celebrate the accomplishment of chiefs is an example, as in Hawai’i where these may also celebrate chiefly beauty or reproductive capacities (Sahlins, 1989: 29-33). In Tonga as well, the dances and music (*faiva*) often use texts that praise the lineage of the “kings” or “chiefs”. In this archipelago of Western Polynesia, the dances are visual representations of social hierarchy through their very structure and organization, and their preparation is a space of learning assigned statuses ascribed by birth (Kaepler, 1993: 58). In Micronesia, choreographed and musical practices are also tightly linked to the affirmation and/or reproduction of hierarchical political structures. In Pohnpei, one of the Federated States of Micronesia, political interactions are highly valued, whether between its five independent chiefdoms or with the colonial administration. Dance songs (*koulin kahlek*) – still sung during important social events – tell of these interactions (Diettrich, Moulin and Webb, 2011: 24).
- 15 Enabling one to consider a social organization in its entirety and, more particularly, its hierarchical structures, the study of dance has been a means for understanding social change brought about by diverse factors. As K. Nero (1992) states in her introduction to the special issue of *Pacific Studies: The Arts and Politics*, neither should the link between esthetic productions and the political system be reduced to a “reflection” of the latter by the former, nor should music or dance be reduced to a role of legitimating power. On the contrary, performances often constitute the spaces or means of delivering subversive messages.

- 16 In this perspective, K. Alexeyeff (2009) views artistic productions as generative forces rather than as mirrors of social life. According to the author, artistic practices contribute to forming the frameworks of political, economic or social action (2009: 12). R. Henry (2000; 2007) suggests similar arguments. She underscores that the body is the surest means of agency. Cultural performance can call into question the social structure or dominant paradigms. The notion of agency, or one's intentionality or capacity to act (Butler, 2006), aims to consider how actors are able to play with or challenge social relations of power. In this light, dance is not only an expression but also a practice of power (Henry, 2000: 324). In parallel, the body in movement has the capacity to destabilize social norms (Butler, 2006) all while being determined by the social structure (Bourdieu, 2000). R. Henry's perspective therefore complements and completes work in Oceania that has shown the complexity of relations between representations and work of the body, on the one hand, and politico-religious relations of power, on the other. These empirical works have underlined how initiation rites, fattening processes, ornamentation practices, etc. enable the "inscription of individuals' superiority or subordination upon the body" (Godelier and Panoff, 1998, our translation). In parallel, the body, its components and substances are also used to symbolize social relations of power (Godelier and Panoff, 1998: 23). R. Henry's approach to body practices, considered as power practices, is therefore a paradigm shift. Ethnographical work has indeed shown that performances can be means of subverting power structures, as in Western Polynesia where individuals referred to as "clowns" in the English literature (Hereniko, 1994), and who are generally close to the chiefs, take on the role not only of entertaining but also preventing possible abuses of power (Hereniko, 1994). This subversive aspect of performances is particularly prominent in power relations inherited from colonization (Henry, 2000; Mageo, 2008).
- 17 Musical and choreographed practices have also been privileged mediums for studying "identity politics" within complex social and political dynamics. The majority of case studies examined in recent works have shown situations in which dance and music are components of a presentation or representation of collective identity. This act of presentation or representation implies for the actors a certain distance or reflexivity regarding their culture, which favors the (re)definition of cultural identities. We might tend to think of these phenomena as proper to "modern" Oceania or else as a product of recent colonial history. Yet, as suggested by A. Kaeppler (2002) or M. Jolly (1992), this is not manifest. It seems that, even in a precolonial period, musical and danced representations of culture, in exchanges between archipelagos, were hardly void of a conscious distinction between an "us" and "them".
- 18 Today, musical and choreographed practices in the framework of festivals or manifestations commissioned by cultural or political institutions convey forms of identity and belonging on local (Teaiwa, 2012), regional, national (Bossen, 2000; Sissons, 1999) or transnational levels. In these festivals we may hear about identities termed as Pan Melanesian (Kupiainen, 2007), Polynesian, Micronesian or the more englobing Pacific Islander (Condevaux, 2015). The performances can be destined to an audience sharing the same language and the same esthetic codes as the dancers, such as in the framework of national festivals (Teillet-Fisk, 1996), or otherwise destined to an audience of "outsiders", as in the framework of regional festivals or tourist performances (Alexeyeff, 2009; Condevaux, 2009; Desmond, 1993, 1999; Kaeppler, 1977, 1988, 2010b; Sanger, 1988). In all of these cases, the performance entails, for those who produce it, discussion and thought

about what constitutes their “identity”. Therefore, large international events in Oceania, such as the Pacific Arts Festival – where actors of very diverse geographical and cultural origins meet – also become rituals of identity (Kaeppler, 2002), largely debated by the members of the group and their society before and even during the event. On more local levels, “tribes” or families (New Zealand) or neighborhoods, villages or islands (Tonga) assert identities, during *kapa haka* competitions in New Zealand or during musical or dance performances during royal ceremonies in Tonga. In this way, in Nuku’alofa, capital of the Kingdom of Tonga, identification to different neighborhoods – which is both strong and strung with rivalries – is expressed through wearing T-shirts and tattoos bearing the symbol of the neighborhood (eagle, ‘*ikale*, lion, *laione*) or through participating in emblematic dances which also bear the name of this symbol (‘*ikale*, *laione*). Whatever the scale, relations of power are frequently at stake in these assertions of identity (Butler, 2006; Teaiwa, 2012). This becomes clear in the opposition between “cultural identity” and “ethnic identity” as proposed by H. Morton Lee (2003). The author uses “cultural identity” to designate how Tongans define themselves, while “ethnic identity” is used to designate their response to ideologies and practices of multiculturalism which lead to ethnicity being “represented in the public sphere primarily by the outward markers of cultural difference, such as food, music and dance, clothing, and so on” (Morton Lee, 2003: 5).

- 19 Through cultural performances, the body sets on stage social identities that are cultural, ethnicized and/or gendered (Schuft, 2012). Choreographed and musical performances are therefore also a privileged means of studying gender relations. They can for example bring to light tensions between gendered categories viewed as exogenous and endogenous (Alexeyeff, 2008, 2009), such as the *fakafefine*. The latter is a Tongan term that has various meanings according to the language, such as *fa’afafine* in Samoan, and can be understood as a man adopting female ways (Douaire-Marsaudon, 2008: 285), category which is present in many Polynesian archipelagos (Besnier, 2002; Douaire-Marsaudon, 2008). The study of dance can also indicate transformations in gender relations, as in the work of A. Tonnaer (2007) in an Aboriginal community in the Northern Territory, Australia. By comparing the same dance performed at several-year intervals, she shows how the transformations of the dance are signs of changes in gender relations, namely due to the departure of men to work in the livestock industry starting in the 1950’s.

Photograph 3. – Rapa nui dancers (one hidden) in costume posing at the request of a group of Samoan volunteers, 10th Pacific Arts Festival, 2008, Pago Pago, American Samoa



(© Le Roux)

A change of paradigm for rethinking cultural performances?

- 20 The study of performance has used diverse theoretical frameworks. As H. Tateyama underlines in this issue, the analysis of festivals in Oceania has been especially inseparable from the concept of the invention of traditions. This concept has marked anthropology in Oceania since the work of R. Keesing and R. Tonkinson (1982) and has nourished abundant literature until recent years (Babadzan, 1999, 2009; Friedman, 2002; Hanson, 1989; Jolly, 1992; Thomas, 1992). Work in this direction, broaching cultural renewal, political movements and identity assertions in Oceania (Babadzan, 1999, 2009; Hanson, 1989; Keesing and Tonkinson, 1982; Webster, 1998), generally has not specifically studied musical and choreographed practices. However, the latter have often been used to illustrate processes of objectifying or reifying culture. The concepts of reification or objectification imply that “cultures” or “traditions” are defined through deliberate selections of behaviors, practices, ways of speaking or living, considered as emblematic of the groups concerned. The reified culture is consequently partial or limited, yet musical or choreographed performances remain at its core. As T. van Meijl highlights, for example, in the Māori political movement in New Zealand, culture is generally defined as:

“the ceremonies around which social gatherings (*hui*) are organised; the expression of kinship solidarity at funeral wakes (*tangihanga*), religious services and other assemblies; arts and crafts; and songs and dances” (1996: 311).

- 21 Analyzing the performance processes during the Pacific Arts Festival, A. Babadzan (2009: 58) argues that the work of reification is materialized by culturalist displays, which are often presented by a series of “disjointed items which, catalogued as folklore, are used to represent the custom of each ethnicity: dances + songs + sculpture + craftsmanship + architecture + costumes, etc.” (2009: 57, our translation).
- 22 These approaches point to a first theoretical frame of reference, which accentuates the fabricated, (re)constituted nature of these practices, and on the strategic motivations behind them. As A. Babadzan points out:

“One cannot help but make a parallel between these ceremonies, tropical replicas of folkloric festivals and other ‘invented traditions’ in Europe at the end of the XIXth century.” (2009: 58, our translation)
- 23 According to Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983), the invention of traditions is above all a concept referring to the manipulation of cultural symbols for political gain, generally for the benefit of an educated elite, to the detriment of the people. The concept can be applied to Pacific societies. Due to their ancient and more recent history (including colonization, political reconfigurations and the emergence of new elites), they present profound socioeconomic inequalities. This is the case for example in New Zealand, where the economic benefits of development or compensation politics are unequally distributed. The compensation politics offer payments and land returns that exclude Māori in urban areas, in particular laborers, benefitting rather an educated elite having maintained strong ties with rural territories (Babadzan, 2009; van Meijl, 1999; Webster, 1998). “Invented” traditions often entail the purge of any trace of Western influence (Hanson, 1989; Kempf, 2007). J. Sissons (2005) observes this concerning indigenous peoples who, to assert their political rights, often must show that they are radically “others”. The author describes this as “oppressive authenticity”, while other authors use “folklorization” to designate this process of erasing all supposed traces of cultural contact, thereby freezing a cultural form in an imaginary precolonial past (Balme, 2007: 119).
- 24 The “invention of tradition” approach is an extensive topic that we will not discuss here in its entirety. The principal point of criticism has concerned the fact that, although the majority of authors have resisted judgement on the “authentic” character of “invented traditions”, a form of “suspicion of inauthenticity” has prevailed. Researchers using this interpretive framework have been accused of abusing their intellectual authority to distinguish between the “true” and the “false”. They have also been accused of caricaturizing the leaders of political movements – as strategic, Westernized, capable of “falsifications” or “Machiavellian rhetoric” – to enforce their interests (Wittersheim, 1999: 189-190). This criticism has led to a wariness of anthropologists, at times accused of neo-colonialism (Tengan and White, 2001).
- 25 A second essential point of criticism has concerned the fact that the supposed “inventions” often were not inventions. For example, J. Friedman suggests that what was qualified as invention by Trevor Roper (1983) concerning kilts, or by J. Linnekin (1983, quoted by Friedman, 2002) in the case of Hawai’i, were rather social transformations that fall within social continuity rather than rupture (Friedman, 2002: 223; 225; 243).
- 26 These debates are also central to the study of musical and choreographed practices. Firstly, the question of authenticity has been central in this field of research. The “authentic” nature of a performance may be called into question when the performance leaves its usual context, losing for example its “religious” aspect to become “identity

emblems” or transforming from a local to a tourist performance (Henry, 2000; Kempf, 2007; Kupiainen, 2007; Mackley-Crump, 2016; Stevenson, 1999; Stillman, 1988). However, the expression “invention” appears as unsuitable in the cases treated by Friedman (2002). In the epilogue of the aforementioned special issue of *Pacific Studies* (1992), A. Kaepler rejoices that the majority of contributors to the issue rarely use the concept invention of tradition, which she judges as ineffective in the framework of the Pacific. She points out instead the use of the following expressions: “transformation”, “re-contextualization”, “re-creation”, “resurrection”, “revision” and “negotiation”. The author deems these terms as more appropriate than “invention” in that the dynamics described in these contexts are far from being “pure inventions”. A few cases appear however as exceptions, such as the Banaba dances entirely “created” in order to reinforce requests for the independence of Banaba (Kempf, 2007), or the case of dances in Sikaiana, in the Solomon Islands, studied by Donner (1992: 71). Donner remarks that the majority of dances considered as “traditional” at the time of his fieldwork in the early 1980’s were adopted at the beginning of the XXth Century during contact with Polynesians. Despite this fact, the author prefers to speak of reconstructed rather than invented tradition (1992: 79).

- 27 Furthermore, contrary to what has been stressed by analyses using invention of tradition, musical and choreographed performances – including those used as emblematic of the identities of political movements – are not systematically devoid of outside influences. Their performance can constitute a space of negotiating counter-balances of power, which cannot be reduced to a form of domination by an intellectual elite. We can take the example of the *kapa haka* (Māori performing arts) in New Zealand. The national competition of *kapa haka* (*Te Matatini*) tends to reinforce an “ethnic” model of Māori society, reinforced by the Māori renaissance and the political compensations carried out under the auspices of the Waitangi Tribunal¹. In this way, Māori groups come to consider themselves in terms of “ethnic”, family or “tribal” (*iwil hapū whānau*)² ties, which also determine the formation of dance groups. In addition, the competition rules encourage maintaining styles, accessories and costumes deemed as “traditional” rather than encouraging innovation. However, there are diverse initiatives that construe another image of the indigenous peoples of New Zealand, and which are a far cry from the image of a group prisoner of its past, grappling with unbending social norms. Another competition, called *2 degrees kapa haka super 12*, less known than *Te Matatini*, is a good example. All while displaying artistic practices anchored in Māori performance arts, the contest rules do not encourage the formation of groups along “tribal” or “family” lines, and performers are free to innovate, whether in terms of costumes, accessories or choreographies. These performances are no less surrounded by discourse asserting one’s pride in belonging to a specific cultural group or identity (whether Māori, Māori woman or a specific *iwi* or *hāpu*). Māori musical and choreographed practices are therefore spaces of asserting multiple forms of social belonging, which are at times at odds with “oppressive authenticity” as previously evoked. The actors’ discourse shows visions of “culture” or “tradition” that extend well beyond the idea of a transfixed entity or one that is protected from outside influences (Condevaux, 2009).
- 28 This observation is also the case for other contexts. The video entitled *Zorba the Greek Yolngu style*, filmed in Arnhem Land (see below), is another example of these attempts to break from assigned stereotypes and identities. Contemporary artists denounce the latter throughout their work, attempting to negotiate a unique place in the interstices of rigid

categories imposed upon them, whether “Aboriginal artist” or “Māori artist” for example, or, concerning their productions, “traditional”, “authentic” or “urban” (Le Roux, 2007; Sissons, 2005). The expression “creative re-appropriation” (*réappropriation créative*) is used by B. Glowczewski and J. de Larcy-Healy (2014) to take into consideration these productions which counter images stemming from historical appropriations of Oceanic “patrimony” by Westerners. The term re-appropriation is justified in that the social groups take back the objects or practices once presented as prime signs of primitivism (the *haka*, the didgeridoo [*yikaki*]), defining their own image and the manner in which they wish to experience and convey their traditions.

- 29 Some have considered these renewed frameworks of analysis as a change of paradigm:
“ [...] many research works on indigenous peoples produced these last years, namely in France and in other French-speaking countries, have shown a change of paradigm (Glowczewski and Henry, 2007; Gagné *et al.*, 2009; Bosa and Wittersheim, 2009). The current question for the anthropologist does not consist, in our view, of evaluating the authenticity of traditions but of analyzing the existential efficiency of the new arrangements (Guattari, 1992).” (Glowczewski and de Larcy-Healy, 2014: 189, our translation)
- 30 This transformation of the theoretical framework implies new means of broaching social relations of power, without denying the asymmetry of the relations or the inequalities engendered by colonial history, political movements and unequal access to resources. Although “traditions” may often be manipulated by a dominant elite for political purposes, musical and choreographed performances can also be vectors for expressing social conflicts and tensions, for example in the divergent ways of viewing the relation with the past and “tradition” as shown in the Māori competitions. In this perspective, the concepts “resistance”, “strategy”, “tactic” or “existential efficiency” (Glowczewski and de Larcy-Healy, 2014; Le Roux, 2012) take on an important role. The concepts of “tactic” or “strategy” are in particular defined by de Certeau (1984). Basing his work on that of M. Foucault, de Certeau distinguishes between tactic and strategy, tactic being an isolated calculus occurring within the power locus of the latter:
“I call strategy the calculation (or manipulation) of power relationships that becomes possible as soon as a subject with will and power (a business, an army, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated [...] from “environment”. [...] I call ‘tactic’ [...] a calculus which cannot count on a “proper” (a spatial or institutional localization), nor thus on a borderline distinguishing the other as a visible totality. A tactic insinuates itself into the other’s place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep the distance” (1984: 36-37)
- 31 The anthropologist Franca Tamisari (2007), borrowing this distinction from de Certeau, underlines that Aboriginal artists act as agents with a distinct position:
“[...] indigenous art has always been a performative tactic, a struggle where the indigenous protagonist, constrained to play in enemy territory, seizes the smallest occasion to display or provoke a confrontation” (2007a: 41).
- 32 The analysis of tactics used to “resist” the dominant actor, all while playing by his rules, is similar to that of certain authors of postcolonial or subaltern studies. H. Bhabha’s concept of mimicry illustrates a tactic used by subaltern groups; the term designates the imitation of the colonizer, yet a subversive imitation, because disloyal.
- 33 To what extent do the contributions published in this issue reflect the evolution of these theoretical frameworks? Do they lead us to conclude as to a “change of paradigm”?

Photograph 4. – Demonstration of the construction of a house, Tonga Institute of Sciences Technology and Monfort Technical Institute, Day of Education, ceremonies for the crowning of King George Tupou VI, June 2015



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Presentation of the contributions

- 34 This special issue aims to pursue these considerations in three directions: redefining the frontiers of a multi-faceted field of study; questioning the transformative role of contemporary transnational phenomena in cultural performances; and renewing and discussing the theoretical prisms through which to better analyze the latter. Firstly, we expanded the range of expressive practices, considered as distinguished from the everyday by diverse means (decorations, costumes, welcoming rituals, etc.), which have a deliberate communicative dimension, are based on the mobilization of various techniques of expression and have an esthetic aspect. We sought in particular to take into consideration the performances or expressive events which are specifically based on relations between different “teams” of social actors (in the sense of Goffman, 1973), in which one plays a representation or “role” for the benefit of the other, in so doing asserting or reiterating cultural identities. As indicated earlier, choreographed practices – and by extension musical ones – occupy an important place in expressive events. They are also often indissociable from body esthetics (Pollock, 1999), or more largely from material esthetics. The *Máli* dances of the Huli in Papua New Guinea, involving elaborate body ornamentations (Timmer, 2000), are good examples, as are the mask dances in Papua New Guinea (Smidt and Eoe, 1999; Wolffram, 2011). Certain practices lead to the observation that artistic productions and cultural expressions in the Pacific largely transcend Western categories (Nero, 1992). As an example, the demonstration of the construction of a house during the ceremonies marking the crowning of King George Tupou VI in Tonga in 2015 (photograph 4) took place during a day dedicated to demonstrating musical and choreographed performances. This inclusion, and the fact that all the practices could be included under the term *faiva* – which can designate work, play, dance or musical, theatrical or cinematographic performance requiring certain abilities – informs us on the specific ways in which Tongans conceive “performances”.

- 35 Reflecting this diversity of performance, the contributions in this issue discuss a variety of performances in terms of their scale, art forms, artists, spectators, spaces and contexts. Some discuss shows (the *Water music* presented by T. Dick) or prose set to music and dance (F. Aurima-Devatine, E. Castro-Koshy, M. Tehei'ura et al.). Others discuss sports performance in terms of a cultural practice (J. Lemarié) or artistic festivals on local, national or pan-Oceanic levels (D. Monnerie; C. Graille; J. Kupiainen).

Photograph 5. – Spontaneous dance intervention by oceanic performers during a Black Rose concert at the Jam House, 10th Pacific Arts Festival, 2008, Pago Pago, American Samoa



(© Le Roux)

- 36 Secondly, several decades after the first work on festivals (Craig, Kernot and Anderson, 1999), this issue seeks to understand how contemporary social dynamics – including the development of mobility and new communication technologies – necessitate renewing the analysis of cultural performances. The question of circulations is not entirely new; we can evoke for example the study of the circulation of drum dances in East Polynesia (Lawrence, 1992; Moulin, 1996) and that of many genres of dance in Western Polynesia – between Samoa, Tonga, Fidji, 'Uvea, Tuvalu and Tokelau in particular (Moyle, 1991). Contacts with Europeans have participated in transforming these circulations, due to – among other important factors – new means of transportation and communication, but also new barriers and constraints. Research on contemporary circulations of music and dance in the Pacific (and beyond) have explored different ways of “making society” and constructing a sentiment of belonging or “connecting” to a homeland, despite geographical dispersion (Dietrich, Moulin and Webb, 2011; Stillman, 1999). Circulation also points to questions of relocation or re-contextualization of the practice. The meanings and practices of the Hawaiian *hula* depend for example on the contexts of learning, its success having grown from it being learned – and now also taught – by non-Hawaiians (Stillman, 1999). A. Kaeppler (2010b) shows for example how certain

performances, considered as theatre in their homeland, become a form of “show” when moved out of context. For example, while the *faiva* convey a message that the audience in Tonga is able to decode, the audience at the Pacific Arts Festival is unable to interpret the original/ endogenous meanings of the words and gestures (Kaepler, 2010b: 12).

- 37 The contributions in this issue raise the question of the changes in performances and their meanings, in particular when they pass from a religious context to a secular context and identity uses, as mentioned earlier. Based on the Vanuatu women’s water music in Mwerlap, and taking into consideration multiple scales of social meaning and mobility, the contribution of T. Dick in this issue shows how the diasporic imagination refers to a localized identity in a founding place. He underlines the effects of the circulation: the changes in rhythm (more in terms of day-to-day life and performance than in terms of the music itself), or the necessity to recreate bearings or the physical spaces of the performance during tours abroad. H. Tateyama also considers the question of re-contextualized practices in his subtle analyses of the stakes and meanings surrounding the *Tubuan* performance by the Tolai at the national mask festival in Papua New Guinea. The author shows how the motive for the Tolai is less to assert a particular cultural identity than to assert their “superiority” over other groups within the country. Foreign tourists may miss the meanings attributed to the performance, the latter being directly tied to the history of power struggles between communities. Foreigners may even be asked to leave the audience, as certain elements of the performance must be hidden from exogenous viewers. The re-contextualized performances are in this case more of a continuity than a break. Lastly, tourist mobility and the tourist industry participate in the shift and redefinition of cultural performances. M. Tabani shows for example how, in the case of the John Frum ceremonies in Tanna, the performance symbolizing an instrument of resistance to colonial power became a major attraction for tourist operators and foreign visitors, transition which was accompanied by the institutionalization of these festivals, redefined as “patrimony”.

Photograph 6. – *Zorba, the Greek* performance by the Chooky Dancers, 11th Pacific Arts Festival, Honiara, Solomon Islands, 2012



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- 38 The question of circulations – of humans, goods, practices and images – is inseparable from that of new media. A number of authors have noted the increasing significance of new this. For example, Diettrich, Moulin and Webb (2011: 1) indicate that for the first time, during the ninth edition of the Pacific Arts Festival in 2004, giant screens surrounding the exterior stage broadcast the festival live. The authors point out the complexity of this organization, which confirms the now significant role of technology in these events. B. Glowczewski and J. de Larcy-Healy (2014) show how Oceanic peoples use Internet to enhance their “performative traditions” and to voice their political demands on an international level. These authors view the use of new means of communication as a means of taking back control over the ways in which one’s “traditions” are conveyed and exposed, and in which one’s group is portrayed. Choreographed practices, now amplified by the use of Internet and social networks, can thereby become an instrument for undoing prejudice about the supposed fixed nature of indigenous “traditions”. The authors give the example of the video *Zorba the Greek Yolngu* style in Arnhem Land. With humor, the video unravels prejudice through the burlesque (Glowczewski and de Larcy-Healy, 2014: 197). Although the subject is not totally new, the role of these means of communication in the transformation and broadcast of danced and sung practices deserves further research through ethnographical fieldwork. The contribution by J. Kupiainen in this issue develops this question, analyzing how the production and broadcast of visual images, by cultural groups in the Solomon Islands during the eleventh Pacific Arts Festival, participate in constructing and reconfiguring identities and cultural agency.

Photograph 7. – The media space of the 11th Pacific Arts Festival, Honiara, Solomon Islands, 2012



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- 39 The circulation and broadcast of musical and choreographed practices also poses the question of intellectual property. Based on the study of exchanges between the Cook Islands and French Polynesia, J. Moulin (1996) shows how, in the 1990's, the distinction was at times blurred between legitimate artistic inspiration and borrowed aspects experienced as a dispossession. As the author suggests, this question has continually gained in importance, each country, for economic and political reasons, demonstrating attachment to the specificity of its dances (Moulin, 1996: 142). The article by M. Forsyth and K. Alexeyeff presented in this issue also broaches this question, analyzing the new legislation on the property of cultural performances in the Cook Islands, and their origins in sociopolitical tensions and anxiety around identity. These “politics of creativity and tradition”, aiming to control danced representations of identity and the economic benefits they can generate, in turn impact the production and circulation of artistic practices.
- 40 Thirdly and lastly, this issue seeks to discuss the analytical frameworks used to study performances. The contributions brought together here do not allow us to conclude as categorically as B. Glowczewski and J. de Lary-Healy (2014, see quotation above) as to a change in paradigm. The articles show rather the significant heritage of the analytical framework surrounding the invention of traditions or, in any case, its discussion, all while showing the necessity of surpassing the opposition between authenticity and inauthenticity. The term “invention” appears as too strong in many cases, as the practices in question are not purely “inventions”, but rather the transformation of older ideas or practices, linking them more to continuity than to break (Friedman, 2002). Several contributions in this issue demonstrate this cultural continuity, despite political and colonial breaks which have profoundly modified the practices as well as the forms of

authority or control that the actors hold over them. The article by D. Monnerie underscores for example the continuity of Kanak practices and expressions specific to the North of New Caledonia (among the Arama), thanks to resolve to develop them in spite of colonization, and to protect them from exposure to the outsider's gaze. Showing cultural continuities and breaks in ceremonial practices, M. Tabani is able to transcend the opposition between "indigenization of modernity" (Sahlins) and "modernization of tradition" (Babadzan). Ultimately, whether through revitalizing precolonial cultural elements or by borrowing exogenous elements, links of continuity with the past are established on an ideological basis, as C. Graille shows in her study on the Melanesia 2000 festival (New Caledonia) and its reinterpretations over the last 40 years. Lastly, J. Lemarié shows how the concept of "invention of tradition" is unsuited for analyzing Hawaiian practices of surf, his historical analyses showing that surfing represents rather a form of cultural continuity.

- 41 Furthermore, the contributions presented in this issue show the agency of subaltern groups, artists and spectators, for whom the performances transform the social, identity, political and economic stakes framing their production. This agency, as a willingness to act and define the social world and its categories, meanings and analyses, is evident in the resistance to colonization in New Caledonia (Monnerie) or in the identity productions surrounding the broadcast of digital images in social networks (Kupiainen). It is also evident in the contribution in this issue by Estelle Castro-Koshy, Flora Aurima-Devatine, Moana'ura Tehei'ura and co-contributors, on the topic of the cultural event *Pina'ina'i* in Papeete. Their discussion analyzes the artistic and sociopolitical meanings of the performance produced in Tahiti through the voices and perspectives of multiple categories of participants: creators, contributors, artists and spectators, some of whom are researchers, asserting various categories of belonging. Their discussion brings to light a new way of relating to performance as well as a unique process of co-developing and interpreting performance, involving a heterogeneous group of persons united to convey, to an audience of Tahitian and outsider spectators, the social, cultural and political meanings attributed to this artistic performance. Their contribution resonates with the debates on the legitimacy of non-indigenous researchers in the Pacific, legitimacy that continues to be questioned (Smith, 1999; Teaiwa, 2006), and encourages re-thinking how researchers conduct research in the Pacific or speak "of" or "for" "others". T. Dick discusses the place accorded to subaltern voices through a different angle. He comments explicitly on the co-presence and co-production of different types of knowledge, situating his own reflections within the context of those with whom he exchanges. D. Monnerie also considers the co-production of knowledge, after being requested in the 1990's by members of the Hoot ma Whaap council to document the stories, acts and perspectives of the Arama (New Caledonia), their culture and language, especially for younger generations. In this way, he engages in ethnographical work that was requested by and for the Arama.
- 42 Overall, the contributions in this issue address these questions through diverse theoretical and empirical approaches in multiple contexts of Oceanian islands. The order of the contributions is as follows. The first contribution, by Hirokuni Tateyama, broaches the *Tubuan* performance by the Tolai at the national mask festival in Papua New Guinea and how this could be interpreted as a ritual of superiority over the other Papuan groups. T. Dick's contribution then brings us to a village in Vanuatu and beyond. The author analyzes the deliberate creation of diasporic identities through the performances of

cultural patrimony by a troupe that often tours abroad. This “identity” dimension of performance then gives way to its “resistance” dimension. Denis Monnerie discusses the ways in which the people of Arama and Hoot ma Whaap (New Caledonia) resist the “patrimonialization” of their culture by social and cultural creativity. Caroline Graille then analyzes the showcase of Kanak identity as a form of political resistance, by reviewing the political and sociological conditions leading to the birth of the *Melanesia 2000* festival. The analysis of discourse *a posteriori* to the event shows how it has become, forty years later, the cornerstone of a nationalist ideology.

- 43 This contribution is followed by a multi-voice discussion on *Pina'ina'i*, co-authored by Estelle Castro-Koshy, Flora Aurima-Devatine, Moana'ura Tehei'ura and eight co-contributors. *Pina'ina'i* represents an innovative performance in Tahiti that mixes the body and the literary through dance and poetry. Following this contribution is an article by Miranda Forsyth and Kalissa Alexeyeff who analyze the laws and regulations that structure the intellectual property of cultural performances in the Cook Islands, as well as the identity tensions which result from or nourish them. The contribution by Jari Kupiainen continues in this line, analyzing the use in Oceania of communication technologies and the broadcast of digitalized images at the Pacific Arts Festival in the Solomon Islands, and in particular their role in constructing cultural identities. Marc Tabani's article tackles the theoretical question of continuity or cultural change through the empirical case of the John Frum ceremonies in Tanna, Vanuatu. The significance of an approach in terms of invention or continuity is also central to the sociohistorical work by Jeremy Lemarié, showing the continuity of Hawaiian surf as a form of cultural performance and identity question.
- 44 Overall, the articles in this special issue underline the importance of the social, identity and political stakes in the constant renewal of cultural performances in Oceania. The latter are inseparable from the social and political relations and struggles that both transform performances and that are, in turn, transformed by them. In addition, the contributions show how, while the use of recent technologies of communication and circulation strongly participate in faceting contemporary cultural performances, the latter are also strongly anchored in historical continuities and are at times a means of reproducing social relations in a context of globalization. Through these empirical case studies in diverse territories in Oceania, this issue presents a selection of works with diverse theoretical approaches, presenting differing angles to how such transformations and continuities are expressed by cultural performances in Oceania.

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NOTES

1. Put in place in 1975 to examine the complaints filed by the Māori regarding the spoliations of land or other resources of which they were victims during colonization. This policy has led to reparations in the form of financial compensations or the return of lands or other resources (fishing quotas namely).
2. The terms utilized to designate these social units, including tribe, ethnic group or extended family, bear the name of a real or mythical ancestor with which the individuals claim a matrilinear or patrilinear line of descent. This does not however signify necessarily that real lines of descent determine the group (see for example Schwimmer, 1990).

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