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# Introduction. The Interweaving of Vital and Technical Processes in Oceania

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## ABSTRACT

*Among the diversity of theoretical options applied to study life from an anthropological standpoint, we suggest that it is relevant to use the concepts and methods of the anthropology of technique. In addition to the issue of the relation between living beings – that works on animism or multispecies ethnography aptly tackle – we suggest investigating life as a process of production and the many kinds of interweaving of vital and technical processes. The aim of this dossier is, then, to propose some examples of the insights that this global framework – dealing with life as animation and as fabrication – can bring for the analysis of Pacific ethnographical materials.*

Keywords: life, technology, living beings, artefacts, magic, art, production.

One technique for securing life we call ritual.(...) If we call the theory that underlies that technique the science of life, and that technique itself the applied science of life then we shall feel less alarmed for the reason of our friends if they trace discovery after discovery to this theory of life, discoveries in the life-giving properties of foods, of minerals, of heat and of light, discoveries even in social organization (Hocart 1935:348–49).

The theme of ‘life’ is far from being a new topic in the anthropology of Oceania. On the contrary, it almost appears as a central node around which productive activities, conceptions of people and things, or even circulations of fluxes and substances seem to gravitate. Ethnographies on horticulture, kinship, material culture, exchanges, and values, all seem to delineate the distribution of living beings in a myriad of configurations and at different scales. At first glance ‘life’ seems then to produce its effects everywhere, distributed in all beings, following at times complex networks of exchange, including transfer and conversions. This distribution is such that artefacts themselves, including valuables as Maurice Leenhardt (1937) and Arthur Hocart (1953) noticed, emerge as instantiations of life principles. While Oceania is by no means the only region where this pervading dimension manifests itself, it occupies a privileged position to investigate the bases upon which societies can elaborate their own conceptions and representations about these phenomena.

Anthropology has long studied these concepts of life through a variety of phenomena: rites – which Hocart (1953) called applications of the ‘science of life’ – in particular, rites associated with the ‘cycle of life’; ethno-classifications (Berlin 1992); creation myths; grammar and lexicons; the circulation of substances; therapeutic practices; and so on. Compartmentalizing the study of vital phenomena this way remains problematic: how can life be constituted as an object

for anthropology? Do anthropology's various approaches deal with the same object from different perspectives or, rather, are different objects designated by a vague and shifting term that cannot account for a plurality of phenomena irreducible to one another (Pitrou 2014; Pitrou *et al.* 2011)? The lack of dialogue between methodological traditions within anthropology means no clear answer can be given to such a crucial epistemological question. To complicate matters further, over the past 20 years, the theoretical options for studying life have multiplied: we now have ecological perspectives (Ingold 2000[1988]; Ingold and Pálsson 2013), phenomenological perspectives (Ingold 2011), semiotic perspectives (Kohn 2013), economic perspectives (Santos-Granero 2009b), constructional perspectives (Santos-Granero 2009a, 2012), micro-biopolitical perspectives (Paxson 2013), not to mention structuralist (Praet 2013), cognitivist (Bloch 1998) perspectives, or those drawing on the notion of 'forms of life' or biopolitics (Biehl 2013[2005]; Das 2007; Das and Han 2016; Fassin 2006). If we add the numerous works produced in the field of the Science and Technology Studies (STS) (for instance by Franklin and Lock 2003; Helmreich 2009; Pálsson 2015), we see how life has become an object for anthropology. The same way anthropologists studying non-Western societies (Descola 2013[2005]; Ingold 2000 [1988]; Strathern 1988, 1992; Viveiros de Castro 2012) have greatly contributed to critically examining the notion of nature by establishing a dialogue with researchers in STS (Helmreich 2009; Latour and Woolgar 1979; Mol 2002), the project for an anthropology of life seeks to construct a common analytic framework for studying understandings of life in space and time while avoiding a binary opposition between Euro-Americans and 'Others'.

In this introduction, and in this dossier, our aim is not to repeat this epistemological reflection that has already been carried out elsewhere (Coupaye 2013; Pitrou 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017a, 2017b; Pitrou *et al.* 2016). We wish to formulate some hypotheses about how a pragmatic approach, based on the concepts and the methods of the anthropology of techniques, opens up new leads for describing and analysing. We would like to present some methodological precautions that we think might help to refine the ethnographic description of the facts, in order to avoid using 'life' as a vague term comprehended as a universal substrate.

To do this, we set out by stating that it is not 'life itself' but above all the plurality of *vital processes* – such as growth, reproduction, regeneration, interactions with environments, or death, to name but a few examples – that humans observe in their bodies and in nature. Except for a few borderline cases, these phenomena are usually conspicuous but their mechanisms – organic and ecological alike – that produce them remain concealed to human eyes. This is why all human societies develop what we call 'life theories' that seek to account for these processes. These theories, more or less formalized and systematic, do not necessarily take the form of propositional knowledge as it exists in biology: they do, however, attest to an effort to articulate the various orders of facts (medicine, agriculture, child care, *etc.*) in which vital processes are observed. As far as causality goes, we do not refer to a single material or mechanical causality, but rather to the fact that living beings are often thought of as the result of a combination of actions by various agents who use various forms of agency in carrying out intentional (material or materially oriented) processes. This causality may originate in different sources, such as a demiurge's action or, instead, be an internal causality at work among living beings, the same one alluded to in Alfred Gell's idea that 'all living things are agents with respect to themselves in that their growth and form may be attributed to their own agency' (1998:41). While most vital processes are universally perceived in bodies and environment – a proposition which should also be refined, as far as the perception of these phenomena can vary according to ontological background –, explanatory models, 'theories of life' vary in time and space, in a similar way as the concept of Nature (Descola 2013[2005]).

That is why, in order to avoid creating a false uniformity, our first methodological proposition starts with de-essentializing the concept of 'life', and distinguishes between, on the one hand, 'living beings', their 'vitality', and the processes they are associated with and,

on the other hand, ‘life’ as the series of causes that produces living beings. This distinction avoids confining the reflection to the, albeit fundamental, question of animism, in which our discipline meddled a great deal. Firstly, because ‘being animated’ and ‘being alive’ cannot be synonyms: the vitality of a being manifests itself in a plurality of processes, irreducible to animation. Secondly, because taking into account concepts related to the arrangement of ‘what makes life’ complicates the understanding of the vital phenomenon. The challenge is not simply to study the ways in which living beings interact with each other – as multi-species ethnography does, for example – but, in addition, to highlight theories relating to the production of living beings and vital processes. In this perspective, Eduardo Kohn’s ‘anthropology of life’ (2007) project – abandoned in favour of an ‘anthropology beyond the human’ project (2013:223) – proves to be partial. While the ethnography of the Runa of Ecuador provides insight into indigenous understandings of relationships and communication between living beings, nothing is said of local theories about how they are shaped and maintained in existence. However, as the work of Fernando Santos-Granero proves, particularly in *The Occult Life of Things* (2009b, see also 2012), life theories not only consist in explaining the interactions between living beings, but they are also concerned with making the construction of organisms intelligible. Instead of importing a universal theory – namely biosemiotics – as Kohn does to account for morphogenetic mechanisms, the study of local techniques (pottery, painting, basketry, cooking, *etc.*) thus offers, by analogy, an interesting way of approaching the diversity of processes at work in the production of living beings.

Our hypothesis is that in Oceania – just as in Amazonia or Mesoamerica – it is also sensible to adopt an approach combining consideration of the interactions between living beings – in particular to examine the aesthetic dimension of these relations – and investigations into ways of looking at the mechanisms of their production. Before explaining how Oceania’s theories of aesthetics and production can prove to be useful tools in enlightening our understanding of life, we shall outline three other advantages brought by the pragmatic approach, which relies on the resources of the anthropology of techniques and material culture, to explore the theories of life.

The first one emphasizes how categories of actions and agency can be valuable devices to describe vital processes. Even if a questioning in terms of essential properties (‘What is life?’) has been at the core of Western philosophy and science for a long time, it ought not to be forgotten that questions about living beings are usually highly contextualized and that the inferences that humans make about vital processes and their causes are closely linked to the actual relationships they establish with living beings. In the Proceedings of the Conference of Living Beings & Artefacts (Pitrou et al. 2016), we suggested that the description of these relationships would benefit from considering at least two poles of agency: that of entities (material or personified, internal or external to organisms) that ‘make living beings alive’ and produce vital processes; and the agency of humans when they seek to control or influence vital processes that they know they cannot produce by themselves. In this sense, any *operation on* the living is always an *interaction with* the living, which requires the setting up of procedures and devices (bodily, mental, artefactual), which aim to coordinate different agents’ participation in a joint action. In short, the exploration of these ‘agentive configurations’ (Pitrou 2017a) implies taking into account the diversity of techniques (bodily techniques, tools, machines, *etc.*) that humans develop in their actions with and on the living (Coupaye 2013; Descola 2013[2005]:91–111; Ferret 2014; Haudricourt 1987[1962]).

When they are conducted properly, investigations examining this type of coordination will not satisfy themselves with identifying how the agency is distributed within a configuration: they are interested in the way in which the actions of human and non-human agents are temporally and spatially organized, through sequences or synchronized moments of

participation. In *Growing Artefacts* (2013), Coupaye thus shows the analytical performance of a re-evaluation (and re-elaboration) of the methodology of the ‘operational sequences’ (*chaîne opératoire*) in order to thoroughly describe the horticultural practices of the Abulès – speakers in Nyamikum, Papua New Guinea (Coupaye 2015, this issue). Contrasting with an Ingoldian folding of ‘making’ into ‘growing’ (Hallam and Ingold 2014; Ingold 2012), Coupaye examines the process of growing tubers as a form of ‘making’. This allows us to rethink the ways in which we deal with technical activities and approach living processes such as growing as the combination of a diversity of actions, from a multiplicity of agents. By making possible an expanded mapping of the coordination between human and non-human agents, between living beings and beings who ‘make them be alive’ (or grow, rain, *etc.*), the author contributes to the redefining of the analytical categories in which Oceanist ethnography has been engaged for several decades. Thus, using Marcel Mauss’s definition of ‘effectiveness’ (1973[1935]; see also Sigaut 2003), he described how both ritualistic and technical performances should be apprehended at best from a common analytical framework – as it is the case in distinguishing ‘people’ and ‘things’, or ‘living beings’ and ‘artefacts’.

In this effort to rework certain dichotomies and, above all, to better understand the complexity of the vital phenomenon, the notion of ‘process’ occupies a central place in the approach we uphold. Whether it serves to think the similarities of technique and life – the fact, for example, that pottery can be a metaphor for imagining morphogenetic processes – or, on the contrary, to study how living beings are treated as artefacts – child viewed as a pottery, yam as a form to be modelled – it is fruitful to explore the plurality of imagery modalities. Having devoted a colloquium to the study of this question (Pitrou et al. 2016), there can be no question of returning to the detail of this methodological proposal, which we conceive above all as an invitation to refine the descriptions of the technical devices that humans invent to interact with living beings. In recalling these hypotheses, our intention is to point out some conceptual and methodological tools that would help us to better understand the conceptions of life that prevail in a given society.

Even if the four texts that we have collated in this dossier do not necessarily use our concepts and the methodological positions that we defend – ‘agentive configuration’, ‘operational sequence’, ‘interweaving of vital processes and technical processes’ – it seems to us that they each are good examples of how technical and ritual action and artefacts – including their roles in mythological narratives – shed light on indigenous conceptions. In particular, we would like to stress, by briefly presenting them, that they have the advantage of addressing several dimensions of the vital phenomenon. Thus, in addition to the angle of life as production or life as animation, some papers help to understand that a consequent reflection on the interweaving of vital processes and vital processes must approach life from an ecological perspective, as a system of relations. After having indicated what these case studies bring to the understanding of life theories, we will conclude by suggesting that, conversely, the better understanding of these theories makes it possible to better understand the specificity of the Oceanian conceptions of technique.

#### THE COMPLEX NATURE OF ‘LIFE’ AND ‘TECHNOLOGY’ IN OCEANIA: FOUR CASE STUDIES

All four papers of this issue deal with the different configurations of the relations between imbrications of vital and technical processes and between modalities of production modes of figuration.

Drawing on his ethnographical fieldwork on horticultural practices of Abelam of Papua New Guinea, Ludovic Coupaye explains why it is fruitful to contemplate yams as artefacts

that are ‘grown’ (2013). He presents his method on the basis of a reflection on the concept of production, based on a dialogue with Gilbert Simondon (2016)[1958], Peircean Semiotics, the Maussian, and the Strathernian tradition. The challenge is to think ontogenesis as the result of the interweaving of technical processes and vital processes, and overcome the old debate between order/form and flux/process. The restitution of technical processes in the shape of *chaînes opératoires*, which makes it possible to follow the temporal development of these processes and the heterogeneity of the agents (human and non-human) involved, constitutes a good methodological tool for ‘mapping agentive configurations’. While pointing out the complexity of analytical categories, such as ‘efficacy’, ‘actions’, or ‘process’, Coupaye demonstrates that the emergence of forms rests upon the necessary heterogeneity and sequentiality of operations executed within these configurations.

Beyond the dynamics of fabrication, his aim is also to highlight the interactions established with the beings produced. This is why he examines the dynamics by which ‘image making’ brings out ‘living images’, that is to say, artefacts possessing specific properties, able to generate special effects (illusion, imitation) that make artefacts appear as if they were living beings. So the twofold analysis developed in this paper demonstrates that any theory of ‘life’ or of ‘techniques’ implies practices and theorization referring to, at least, two connected levels: production/fabrication and perception/animation.

Sandra Revolon addresses this articulation by examining the conceptions underlying vernacular theorization forged by the Owa of the Eastern Solomon Islands who perceive this luminous phenomenon – which appears, for example, in visible reflections on the aquatic surfaces – as a sign of ‘life’ – that is to say, here, animation. According to an analogical principle, Owa fishermen thus consider that the iridescence observed on the flesh of the fishes at the very moment they are slit open and killed is an indication of the presence of animistic entities in their bodies. Beyond the apparent passage from life to death, this manifestation is conceived as the trace of a less visible process by which part of the vitality of a living being can be reinserted into another being, once its decomposition has begun. These inferences, more or less explicit, are also mobilized to account for the power imputed to the ancestors who, even after their deaths, continue to possess an energy and capacity to act on the world. The production of artefacts, made of mother-of-pearl and shells, which possess qualities of iridescence is then conceived as a means to make these objects alive. Again, this implies a double dimension. On the one hand, their production is treated as a way of reiterating the technical gestures made by the ancestors.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, through the power of iridescence, artisans attempt to create objects animated.

There is another proof of the interest of addressing life neither as a substance, nor as an isolated phenomenon: indeed, it is always through techniques – intellectual, artisanal, ritual – that humans establish relations with living beings and seek, if necessary, to capture animistic entities that they think are being held in the bodies of these beings. These examples emphasize that agentive configurations cannot be thought of independently of the dynamics – whether they are operational sequences, cycles, or transformations – in which they appear. In other words, in addition to a theory of animation and a theory of fabrication, anthropology of life must seek to describe ecological theories – emic or etic – from which the relational dimension of living beings is made intelligible.

It is in a myth of origin told in Fiji that Allen Abramson deciphers a complex indigenous theory, expressed in a narrative that describes living beings interacting in a global system. While Judeo-Christian myths have accustomed us to think of the appearance of the world and its inhabitants as an act of creation realized by a demiurge, it is an inverse process that this ethnography suggests for us to imagine. Abramson explains that, for the Fijians, the world results from the decomposition of a primary unity, that of an original paradise where a perfect organization allows for different life forms to co-exist in good

harmony. Therefore, thinking of life as it appears in this world implies representing a process of dissociation – both of energies present in the bodies, and of harmonious relations between living beings – which must be grasped as a system of relations to the world at the interface between the biological and the social. In this context, political rites can be considered as Deleuzian ‘paradise machines’. These machines are not only artefacts carrying a vitality similar to that of living beings, they also reassemble the elements of the world in an organized way. Practices of witchcraft are also modes of action which also intervene on these two levels, but in a negative way: while attacking the vitality of the bodies, inflicting death and disease, they also threaten to destroy the relational order of a collective.

On the basis of an analysis of rites linked to the life cycle of the Ankave, Pascale Bonnemère highlights the complexity of the conceptions of ‘life’ in Papua New Guinea, evidencing how crucial it is to go beyond substantialist approaches of vital phenomena. By studying four domains (kinship, growth, gender, personhood), she, with great perspicacity, establishes the plurality of principles that organize relationships with the living, especially when human existence is at stake. Although the notion of ‘life cycle’ has made it possible to study cultural variations in the ways of treating the biological transformations of humans, it has sometimes simplified the conceptions of life treating the succession of stages (birth, initiation, marriage, death) as a sort of biological universal substratum. In truth, even if these stages are to be found in all societies, this must not obscure the fact that vital phenomena are continually reworked according to a plurality of principles that open to distinct practices that humans exercise over individuals. Thus, Bonnemère examines three ‘registers of expression’ (substances, actions, relations, and transformations) and enumerates four principles that guide the ritual intervention on the person. In this carefully crafted framework, we discover that the theories of ‘life’ forged by the Ankave – but this is probably the case in all societies – articulate a distinct idea about similarity and difference. Through the analogies between substances, it is the relations between dissimilar beings that are established (for example, the blood of humans and the juice of pandanus). The idea of metamorphosis, by contrast, is a concept that allows us to understand how the same individual can become different in the course of their existence.

Consequently, the restitution of vernacular theories of ‘life’ implies that ethnographers must engage in the empirical complexity of *emic* explanatory practices and systems. Speaking of animation or vital substances is certainly indispensable, but it is only of interest if the investigations explore the different aspects from which life is thought: production, relationship, evolution, similarity, and difference – just to name some dimensions of this phenomenon. In this undertaking, one will not forget to take into account the capacity of humans to model the systems of relations that they observe in the living world. It is what Jadran Mimica (1988) illustrated in demonstrating how the study of numbers and counting systems offers new insights in understanding better the cosmivision – that is to say the fundamental principles of organization – of Iqwaye. In the same manner, we suggest that several features of life – such as homeostatic principles or organizations of the relation between living beings – can be better understood by investigating arithmetic and topology (see for instance Kuechler 1999).

## PRODUCTION, AESTHETICS, AND MAGICS

In their own way, the texts gathered in this issue provide empirical data to approach the theories of life in Oceania. Symmetrically, the better understanding of these theories offers insights into the *emic* conceptions of techniques. Although the following remarks open the path to developments that go beyond this issue, we would like to explain how investigations

into the interweaving of technical and vital processes can redefine the conceptions of two dimensions of artefacts: their production and the aesthetic effect they produce. This will allow us to sketch a hypothesis about how the anthropology of life may contribute to the (re)definition of magic.

The question of relations between technical processes and vital processes pervades Pacific anthropology. For Melanesia only, since Bronislaw Malinowski's analysis of Trobriands gardening (1978[1935]), Maurice Leenhardt's discussion of personhood in New Caledonia (1937), or Arthur M. Hocart opus on 'life-giving' myths in Fiji and elsewhere (1953), one can follow the topic through renewed forms in analyses of linguistics, rituals, gender, and exchanges. Benefiting from these elaborations, the examination of material activities, or 'technology', also a pervasive theme in Oceania ethnography,<sup>2</sup> has focussed on the making and the use of artefacts (e.g., Bell and Geismar 2009; Blackwood 1950; Kaufmann 1968; Lemonnier 2012; Pétrequin and Pétrequin 2006; Sillitoe 1988), subsistence activities, particularly gardening (Barrau 1965; Bonnemaïson 1991; Godelier 1982; Juillerat 1986; Leach 2003; Steensberg 1980), architecture (Morgan 1988; Hauser-Schäublin 2015[1989]), or navigation (Feinberg 1995; Guiot 2000; Hocart 1935; Lebar 1963), as well as engaging with discussions of art and magic (e.g., Firth 1925; Gell 1988, 1992; Weiner 1995).

However, the casting of such activities under the term of 'technology' also had some particular consequences. As a proper object of study, technology occupies an awkward position, either undeveloped (Ingold 1997; Lemonnier 1986, 2012; Pfaffenberger 1988), or on the contrary often replaced by a more metaphorical understanding of social (re)production, inspired directly or not by Michel Foucault (1988[1977]). For instance, Gell's discussion of 'technology' (1988, 1992) presents English-speaking readers with a definition which oscillates between a Marxian understanding of 'modes of production' and a Foucauldian extension of the term towards the social apparatus of control. In most of these discussions, actual actions on materials seem lost in theoretical metaphors. In fact, it seems we should go further than simply extending the concept of 'technology' beyond the confine of its productivist temptations. But by making it solely a metaphor for (re)production, we run the risk of falling into a conceptual trap, often subsuming vital processes into what is, ultimately, a very modernist notion (Marx 2010[1997]; Schatzberg 2006). Instead, remaining at the level of techniques, as modalities of actions, might help controlling the analytical consequences (see Coupaye this issue).

On the contrary, it is more relevant to speak about techniques following Mauss, as learned and transmitted actions that are considered as efficacious (for the actor): (1) It allows to concurrently tackle patterned practices of making and using without grounding our analyses on Modernist economic paradigms of 'production' or 'consumption', which imply a productivist frame; (2) it remains empirically grounded, allowing the attention paid to actions performed and how they are evaluated, imagined, and discussed; (3) it reasserts the ways in which time (temporality, velocity, rhythmicity) and spaces (workshop, gardens, hunting ground, sea) are both created and striated by the ways in which actions are performed and experienced; (4) by shifting scale, it also allows the revealing of the role of many other analytical domains such as kinship, politics, religion, cosmology, exposing how any technical process are profoundly heterogeneous and ontogenetic.

Focusing on technical activities helps revealing the coordination of actions and the different agentive configurations which combine living beings and artefacts. It is from these processes – which we can approach either from the porous categories of production or reproduction, that entities can emerge as living and animated beings. This is where we can return to the question of the aesthetic synthetic mode of *making visible*, through two related aspects. First, how the sources and causes of vital processes become visible, in reverse, through the technical processes used to engage with them, through the choices of efficacious

actions and the type of configurations these require. Second, and in relation to the previous point, how things and artefacts are not solely ‘representations’ of what gives life, but can also appear as themselves animated – that is as living beings in an ‘artefact-shape’.

Arguably, it is when the origins of a process are hidden, that the work of imagination comes into play. ‘Imagination’ here refers to how one identifies the source of agencies and to the actual *dispositifs* of image-making, which renders visible these hidden sources. Identifying and making visible the sources and causes of vital processes are thus a proper human concern, particularly crucial when one wants to harness or have a form of control over them. But the question of visibility of these relations is also crucial for anthropologists, as the papers in this dossier illustrate. By actualizing presupposed relations between things in the worlds, technical activities make visible the causes that produce life. In this sense, they mobilize aesthetic processes, not as a simple perceptual relationship to the world, but as a modality for modelling relationships, in a Strathernian sense. As James Leach and Roy Wagner note (see Coupaye this issue), compared to the Euro-American setting, in Oceania, or at least in Melanesia, ‘production’ and ‘aesthetic’ switch positions, and it is the latter which becomes the main mode of revelation, granting technical activities a renewed analytical position: the emergence of ‘forms’ or ‘images’, as the rich anthropology of Oceania’s ‘arts’ has taught us (*e.g.*, Forge 1973; Gell 1992; see Coupaye 2017).

All these examples – and some reflections contained in the papers of the dossier – illustrate perfectly the ways in which aesthetics, as a form of synthesis, participates in the ontogenesis of persons, figures, politics, myths, affects, human, and non-human beings, and invites us to reflect upon both the enchanting nature of (material) actions and the pragmatic nature of magic (see Tambiah 1990), at a wider comparative and theoretical level. In sum, just as artefacts and living beings benefit from being approached from a double perspective as produced beings and as animated beings, we would like to suggest, finally, that what is commonly referred to by the general term ‘magic’ actually refers to two relational dimensions, complementary but distinct. While explanations of magic in rituals and processes such as gardening or canoe-building, have sometimes been interpreted as ways to cope with the uncertainty associated with technical processes (*e.g.*, Gell 1988), a pragmatic perspective endows it perhaps with a more crucial role. Precisely because magic shares characteristics of being efficacious and using traditional actions (see Coupaye this issue) with both body techniques (Mauss 1973[1935], 2003[1909]), it appears as a specific modality of relatedness which manifests itself as soon as humans seek to act upon the world – and such, also informs about vernacular conceptions of actions.

There are, however, two specificities in the ways in which magic operates. In particular, when mobilized alongside material activities, as it is often the case, it focuses on mobilizing specific non-human agents that often belong to the wider cosmological setting. In horticultural practices (*e.g.*, Malinowski 1978[1935]), canoe-building (Barlow and Lipset 1997) or the carving of motifs onto artefacts (Campbell 2002), magic formulae act as *an organizational power*, through which the agency of heterogeneous entities can be coordinated. When images offer to the senses a synthesis of socio-cosmological principles, their enchantment (Gell 1992) indeed *resonates* with the power of magic, as both art and magic help the recruitment and mobilization of procreative powers, out of a background of moving relations.

In addition to participating in the association and coordination processes of (re)production and making, magic also manifests itself – by creating continuities – in the effect these processes have on any entity who appears to possess a form of interiority – be they humans, non-humans, things, or artefacts. This two aspects, ‘production’ and ‘animation’ of the imbrication of vital and technical processes are in fact complementary, as it is because some beings are animated that humans can elaborate specific *dispositifs* to recruit them onto a common project. Thus, even if humans are aware that they are making artefacts, they also

can develop interactions which make them appear as having their own autonomy (see Gell 1998/Latour 2009). This is where the entanglements between technical and vital processes also actively contribute to the apparition of new agencies – including in a context of uncertainty. The ontology of ‘living beings’ and/or ‘artefacts’ thus emerges out of the processes by which human action aims at coordinating and recruiting complex and heterogeneous relations. Unveiling these mechanisms could well help thinking about the ways in which the resulting ambivalence of artefacts, the uncertainty about the capacity of controlling their agency is mirrored in the ways in which all living beings manifest their autonomy – but also their alterity. Therefore, this is why the cross-fertilization of the anthropology of life with the anthropology of technique may well be so promising.

## NOTES

1. See Fortis 2016 for a similar phenomenon among the Gunas.
2. A full literature review is beyond the scope of this paper, but overviews can be found in Douny and Naji 2009, Coupaye and Douny 2010, Lemonnier 2012, and Coupaye 2013:60–91.

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