

THE MATERIAL SUBJECT: RETHINKING BODIES AND OBJECTS IN MOTION

Talks in Speaker Order for Virtual Book Launch, Jan. 12, 2021, 10am EST (US and Canada)

1. **Urmila Mohan** is co-editor of *The Material Subject* and Honorary Research Fellow at the Dept. of Anthropology, University College London (UCL). She is the founder of 'The Jugaad Project', a working group and publication that supports creativity, diversity and accessibility in material culture and religion studies.

Jugaad-ing the Ideas of MaP

This event marks a milestone that is both personal and professional in a project envisioned 6 years ago. I wanted to compile and share the *Matière à Penser* approach with an Anglophone international audience in such a way that it could both do justice to the theoretical and analytical core as well as demonstrate relevance to a range of domains (that is work, knowledge, technology, politics, heritage, religion, etc.). Because of Jean-Pierre's generosity and encouragement, I am happy to share today that this book was published by Routledge last year in October and is a first in many ways --- an English language compilation of insightful research by earlier and later MaP members and affiliates that is a testimony to the strength of ideas and relationships.

In reflecting on the complex process of editing this book, I find myself sustained by the intellectual and collegial possibilities of the South Asian idea of *Jugaad* or what is framed as frugal innovation. Instead of reducing this to another site for the 'new' at whim to prevailing fashions, I would like to underline how Jugaad processes come out of lived contexts of power inequity, resourcefulness and contingency with many parallels around the world. As such, they illustrate the endless possibilities of learning and living through bricolage and situatedness. Yet, it is not enough to merely study these topics. For creative approaches to world-imagining, generating, and commemorating, one must live this approach. As scholars, artists, and designers --- indeed, as makers of all kinds, our advocacy of, and adherence to the importance of materially-embedded practice must harness our anthropological reflexivity, creativity and ethicality in useful ways. Against this admittedly ambitious goal, my online publication and working group titled 'The Jugaad Project' seeks to decolonize knowledge domains by crossing many different kinds of borders. Part of this issue is of course, accessibility, and through our open access model, we aim to dialog between global north and south.

Any collaboration is only as rewarding as the people involved. In this respect, I have been lucky for the mentorship of Jean-Pierre and the trust shown by MaP's core members and global associates --- Marie-Pierre Julien, Céline Rosselin-Bareille, Agnès Jeanjean, Mélanie Roustan, Geoffrey Gowlland, Hervé Munz, Myriem Naji, Romain Bertrand and my co-editor Laurence Douny. In addition, Nathan Schlanger helped situate this book within wider theoretical developments in the Afterword for this volume.

I owe a debt to Bloomsbury's publication team who helped make this book a reality, especially the Commissioning Editors, Miriam Cantwell and Lucy Carroll, and Editorial Assistant, Lily McMahon. Subsequently, this publication was acquired by Routledge where I would like to thank Katherine Ong, Commissioning Editor for Anthropology; Megan Hiatt, Senior Production Editor; and Kangan Gupta, Editorial Assistant. Last but not least, thanks to Claire Le Pape, textile artist, for the striking image of her artwork on this volume's cover.

- 2. Laurence Douny** is co-editor of *The Material Subject* and a Research Fellow at The Humboldt University in Berlin. She works on the anthropology and history of West African wild silks and weaving techniques.

Laurence Douny talked about the structure of the book, the authors and their chapters. She emphasized the ethnographic content and the 'material' subjects.

- 3. Jean-Pierre Warnier** is Honorary Professor at Centre d'Etudes Africaines, Paris, and founding member of the *Matière à Penser* group. For the last four decades he has researched and taught on the economic and political history of the Cameroon Grassfields, and studied bodily and material cultures as technologies of kingship and power.

On the Productive Incompleteness of MaP

My intention is not to tell the history of the MaP group. I have sketched it in the foreword of the edited volume on *The Material Subject*. Instead, I wish to mention the most significant steps in my own trajectory towards the group. In 1976, I met with Mike Rowlands and we started working together. At the time, material culture studies were becoming a kind of trade mark at UCL. Ten years later, I was recruited at Paris-Descartes. Marxist anthropology was looming large in France. It advocated a materialist approach to societies. Yet it cared more for the contribution of techniques to the forces of production than for material culture studies as such, to which I had become interested thanks to UCL and Mike. I tried to introduce it in the curriculum, calling on French authors such as Leroi-Gourhan and Baudrillard through which it was possible to establish some sort of consensus and a connexion with UCL.

Accordingly, the first step in my long march towards the MaP adventure was British, the second one French. The third one was to be African. In Cameroon, as a university lecturer, my former students had become my teachers and masters, especially three of them, Séverin Abega, Dieudonné Miaffo and Francis Nyamnjoh. I am pleased to salute the virtual presence of the latter with us today. Miaffo taught me something essential with his research on vernacular autopsy: the centrality of the body and the fact that the body was perceived as keeping the archives of everything that had happened to the subject, so much so that, upon death, you could cut the belly of the corpse and read its contents. Similarly, the king's body was the receptacle of ancestral gifts. Miaffo had written his dissertation in the mid-seventies, in a peculiar context, that of the introduction, in the African Catholic clergy, of the theology of liberation developed in Latin America. Miaffo – a convinced Catholic – was deeply influenced by it. It advocated the translation of

Christianity into the categories of local civilizations. It was crucial in suggesting an original interpretation of the vernacular autopsies. I am determined to write this story and to publish it, as a tribute to Dieudonné Miaffo and an important step in the intellectual and religious history of Africa and a contribution to the anthropology of the body and of the MaP approach.

Miaffo's contribution impacted me around 1990. In the meantime, at Paris-Descartes, Céline, Marie-Pierre and others met together, each of them with queries and contributions that dovetailed to produce the MaP group. After the UK, France, Africa, Marie-Pierre brought the Chinese into the picture with her work on the manufacture of Chinese furniture in multiethnic Paris, while Céline brought the French case with her enquiry on inhabiting in a single room in Paris. Their contributions were crucial in putting the body, its dynamics in motions and emotions, and materiality into the picture, much to my benefit.

The network expanded over the next twenty years. Laurence and Urmila came into the picture. Urmila's contribution was crucial in two ways: she brought India, and more recently the US into the picture. Also, she set religion squarely into the agenda although, in 2006, we had already glossed over the topic in Paris. Our London conference in 2014 made it clear that the questions of action and agency, power, the subject and subjectivity and the body were at the core of what we tried to elaborate, with a clear-cut disagreement with approaches where bodily conducts are de-emphasised or non-existent.

Whereas material culture studies at UCL became more and more attracted by the impact of digital high-tech on material culture, it looks like the MaP network remained on a more conservative, humanist (as against post-humanist) line. In that respect, I wonder what will be the impact of the Covid crisis on bodily and material culture studies. One thing seems to be clear: the lock-down has revealed the crucial importance of bodily, face to face, interactions with fellow humans. Zoom conferences, phone calls, tweets, facebook or Instagram posts, and the internet expose the radical incompleteness of such interactions and call for a constant shuttle between the two registers: the cyber-subject, and its corporeal counterpart. The cyber-frustration is felt all over the world, since the crisis is a global one. The mask, the living conditions in crowded tenements, the permanent negotiation between the danger embodied by other people and the desire for being close together in cafés, restaurants, movie theatres and football stadiums are pushing aside all the high-tech communication cyber-technologies as things that do not answer all the drives of the subjects, including their erotic dimensions. We can speak of the formation of 'digital subjects' where bodies do not simply comply to this technological regime but bounce back and reinsert themselves squarely into a bodily-and-material frame.

Since the experience triggered by the crisis is a global one, the *Material Subject* calls for a universal theory of the subject. I cannot see it as a Western theory inherited from the Enlightenment extended or translated for the benefit of the world at large, but as a platform where local theories would get together unmasked. I can already see a strong convergence between what Francis Nyamnjoh, following Amos Tutuola, words in terms of incompleteness. The lock down is a spectacular and sometimes tragic experience in incompleteness. It fits perfectly with what Lacan and Foucault have elaborated in terms of division, frailty, instability and strangeness of the subject. It calls for new and enlightening developments by a global MaP initiated by the publication of *The Material Subject*. In that respect, I wish to express my deepest gratitude to Urmila for the energy and acumen she has developed all the way from the London Conference in 2014 to the publication of the book. Thank you to her and to all of you.

4. **Céline Rosselin-Bareille** is Lecturer-Researcher of Anthropology and Sociology, University of Orléans, and founding member of the *Matière à Penser* group. She focuses on material culture, as relationship between subjects and objects, and the consequences of object incorporation on the construction of subjects and power relations in work and learning situations.

A Reflexive Look at MaP's Anthropological Stance and Dynamics

At the beginning, Màp was a group of people around an object of research with a blurred contour and later a research group in a laboratory with a more determined object that I will describe later. Today, it is an international network: Màpi (for International Màp).

I don't see Màp as a toolbox which everyone uses according to their needs of the moment, but a network fed from all sides, under construction. So, here I would like to talk about what we share: what is common ground and what is being debated. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Jean-Pierre very much who is obliged to deny in all his publications that he is not the heart of Màp with researchers around him; a Pot-King with a court; but a member of the network.

Together, these all elements make up the dynamic thinking of Màp.

1. Firstly, the base of Màp is mostly thematic, even if it gives rise to a very strong anthropological research posture.

Our goal is not the social construction of objects as we do not ask ourselves if objects have a gender, if they reveal a social environment, a period of history, a religious belief or a political ideology. Accordingly, material culture is not a set of objects or relationships between them, but a set of relations between subjects and objects, both considered as materials in a system of actions. This system of actions or networks of actions on the actions of others is the locus of the exercise of power. "What it all does to the subject" is thus the central question.

Also, everything is 'mapisable': activities at the zoo and museum, the work of professional divers, technical objects for self-quantification, smartphones among teenagers. For instance, Marie-Pierre and I, together with sociologist colleagues, have just written a call for papers on distance and proximity through the technical objects of teleactivities: e-medicine, e-learning, e-justice for example in Texas, but also e-visit of a hospitalized parent, e-aperitif, e-love, etc.

There is no mapist dogma. But even while everything can be 'mapisable', this does not mean that everything is accepted unanimously.

2. This brings me to the second point that discussions, debates, even disagreements also make the richness of Màp.

- The objectives of research themselves open up to different, but not necessarily contradictory, analytical perspectives;
- Our institutional affiliations are different: I collaborate daily with colleagues in neuroscience, and I nourish myself from these exchanges;

- The conceptual supports are not identically balanced. For example, when Geoffrey Gowlland wrote a review of the three books: *The Pot King*, *Material Culture*, and *Subjects close to Objects*, he underlined the fact that in the first one there was a psychoanalytical orientation that is not found in the other two books.

To take my own case, the praxeology of Pierre Parlebas does not interest me specifically as he is not interested in materials: there is neither body nor object in his work. Instead, when I sometimes speak of praxemes in my papers, a notion that comes from Parlebas, I refer to the work of François Hoarau, a Mapist colleague. Hoarau appropriated the idea of analyzing the "praxeological value" of objects by emphasizing how their manipulability is known in situations. It's my only concession.

It is above all the Foucault of *Discipline and Punish* that stimulates me when he talks about the "articulation between body and object" and the question of the "microphysics of power that apparatuses and institutions bring into play, but whose field of validity lies in a way between these great functions and the bodies themselves with their materiality and their forces". In this "in between", do we not encounter power and material culture? "On the whole surface of contact", continues Foucault, "between the body and the object he manipulates, power comes to slip in, he moors them to each other. It constitutes a complex body (dash)-weapon, body(dash)-instrument, body(dash)- machine" (p. 180)¹.

What interests me is the following observation: many authors with very diverse scientific traditions or theoretical currents, such as Head and Holmes, Schilder, Wallon, Merleau-Ponty, Bateson, Winnicott, Herrigel, Linhart, Bethoz, Maravita and Iriki, each in their own way, had also encountered what our ethnographic fieldworks were reporting: namely that objects and subjects sometimes have obvious relationships and this is what allows us to understand the "it works!". An efficiency resulting from a system and the way in which subjects are formed, conformed, deformed, and transformed by this system.

It is from this basis that I work on the meeting of materials.

- Finally, to return to the issue of internal debates, we take a different approach to some questions like the construction of the subject and processes of subjectivation-identification, which MPJ will talk about later.

Not to conclude:

Today, M&P is not a school of thought, M&P is a network for thinking about the co-construction of objects and subjects through the encounter of materials, which continues to be nourished, which pursues its reflection through continual adjustment, and in particular by integrating the criticisms addressed to us. It does this by better taking into account the surrounding materials (like sand or water in the case of professional divers whom I studied), and the phenomenon of failures, such as the "subjects who bump into objects" and what doesn't work. With this dynamic approach, MaP will be constantly renewed and invigorated.

¹ Foucault (1975) *Surveiller et Punir*, Paris, Gallimard. "L'articulation corps-objet" (p.179); "la microphysique du pouvoir que les appareils et les institutions mettent en jeu, mais dont le champ de validité se place en quelque sorte entre ces grands fonctionnements et les corps eux-mêmes avec leur

matérialité et leurs forces"; "Sur toute la surface de contact, poursuit Foucault, entre le corps et l'objet qu'il manipule, le pouvoir vient se glisser, il les amarre l'un à l'autre. Il constitue un complexe corps-arme, corps-instrument, corps-machine" (p. 180).

5. **Marie-Pierre Julien** is a Lecturer-Researcher of Anthropology and Sociology, University of Lorraine, as well as founding member of the *Matière à Penser* group. Her research concerns the anthropology of material culture, bodies, age and food practices.

Habitus and Material Culture of Identification and Subjectivation

Dear all, Thank you for the invitation. Thank you very much, Urmila and Laurence, for the book and for the visiomeeting. I am coming after Jean-Pierre and Celine to shed light on one aspect of the M&P. Céline said that the M&P is exchanges, discussions, reflections, doubts, especially not a toolbox or a ready-to-think. I share this definition and we continue to discuss and debate as I would like to show now how.

We have worked a lot collectively on the consequences on individuals of their relationship to material cultures. In this context, we became interested very early on the question of the process of construction not of the identity but of the person, the individual, a human bio-psycho-social... the subject. This concept introduced by Jean-Pierre with the Foucault's thought through his links with JF Bayard's group at the Céri de Science-po Paris and generated the book *Materiality to Politic*. By using the term "subject", the members of the M&P clearly inscribe it in Foucault's thought, but reworked in the light of anthropology and material culture, which has caused several debates among us. What we share with Bourdieu and a part of French sociology, and what differentiates us from most of philosophy is the fact that the subject we are talking about is not the full and complete one (like that of Descartes at Sartre or Merleau-Ponty), but a subject that is at the same time as:

"the subject of the king, partly subjected and inferior to a force which goes beyond it, in this case to the social determinants, to the context political and cultural influences i.e., other laws and regulations and the other rules than his own".

BUT what we have taken from Foucault, and the German sociology (Weber) is that this subject is ALSO as:

"the subject of the verb i.e., author and sometimes master of his acts"
S. Fainzang (2001).

It seems to me that at the M&P we all agree with this duality of the subject: subject and actor of a power relationship, subject to categorizations that he participates in modifying and creating.

But the concept of the subject raises a whole host of questions, including that of its construction, of what we could call subjectivation with Foucault. If, from the very beginning of our work group, we have posed the analysis of identities as processes, do we really agree with Foucault's definition of subjectivation? Within the group, and once again considering many debates, I would say that Foucault's subjectivation includes, in fact, at least three areas that could be described as such to distinguish them: the ontogenesis

of the subject, the identifications of the subject, the historical process of individualization. Foucault speaks alternately of one or the other, using the same term of subjectivation.

The ontogenesis aspect is because the human child is born unfinished, biologically, psychologically, and socially. He only becomes human in a never-ending process that requires him to act with material cultures that pre-exist him and allow him to act in networks of action on the actions of others, to invest an "I" that produces forms of reflexivity on his own actions. By participating in the death of the classical philosophical subject, Foucault participates in defining a subject that is only a contingent event, that can be done and undone. Obviously, this process is not simply biological or psychological, it is eminently social through the material cultures that accompany the subject throughout his existence and through the inscription of all his actions in networks of actions.

The second aspect of subjectivation is identification. It relates to the history of each subject, who during his or her life may be a doctor, a hunter or a student, maybe both of them, plays walking or swimming, lives with a man or a woman or not, etc. In action, through the objects used, the ease acquired in this use and the people met during these activities, the subject will identify with different social groups. Identification is the fact that a subject adopts behaviors, skills, emotions, language ways of other people that are proposed to him/her as models. It is close to what Foucault describes in the techniques of self. These identifications participate in the psychological, social, and biological construction of the little human being by engaging from birth his sensory-motor skills and affectivity (an element of Bourdieu's habitus). The term "identification" marks the processual aspect because it is a relational aspect of identification. Speaking of identifications in the plural, rather than subjectivation in the singular, avoids confusion with the ontogenesis of the subject and confirms the fact that identifications can be multiple. Thus, speaking in terms of identifications makes it possible to consider the fact that subjects identify with several different groups, at different times in their lives or even simultaneously.

The third meaning of the notion of subjectivation is historical: it is the history of the legal and political subject between the 14th and 20th centuries in the West at the origin of modern democracies, which is also called individuation or individualization. This historical and political process means that a subject, born in France in the 19th century, is not the same as a subject born in Maori country or a subject born in Inuit country at the same time. They do not use the same material cultures, they do not perceive social situations in the same way, they do not have the same tastes. They are not made of the same wood as Jean-Pierre says, but this wood has a history.

Obviously, what interests us are the superimpositions, interweaving, articulation between these three aspects of subjectivation that give rise to habitus, are structured by material cultures, and constantly renegotiate the power relations that cross them. To understand the construction of the subjects, one can enter through one aspect or another of "subjectivation" according to the object of the research, the field, the theoretical sensitivity. Here again, each member of the M&P has his or her own approach.

On the other hand, the exchanges within the M&P very quickly highlighted the contradictions that the subjects must face, and which structure the subjects. In this, we are making an anthropology that looks less for coherence than Bourdieu's sociology and joins other approaches that insist on the necessary work of the subject to build his or her social identity. We can make the hypothesis that these contradictions are because the identificatory models are carried by other subjects, who live also in networks of actions on the actions of other multiples. But the plural nature of identifications, sometimes contradictory, often conflicting, is particularly rich for the researcher who must consider the way in which subjects resolve

these conflicts for themselves (management of normative conflicts for example) and within groups. In this way, he or she can have access to the culture that is being made, transformed, and unraveled.

6. **Michael Rowlands** is Emeritus Professor of Material Culture and Anthropology at UCL. He studies cultural heritage and material culture in West Africa, post-conflict Liberia and China.

MaP's Unified Model of Material Culture and Embodiment

As Laurence and Urmila say in their introduction to this fabulous book – the aim of MaP was to explore how bodies and objects move together. Jean-Pierre's motricity argument acts as a bridge in their argument. They indicate that this would bring together the French and Anglo-Saxon traditions of working on objects. The concept of material culture, they claim, has scarcely been used in France, whilst embodiment had not been a central theme of the material culture resurgence in Anglophone 1980's Anthropology. Nathan Schlanger in his Afterword also suggests a contrast exists between a French Maussian tradition of techniques of the body and something being Anglo-Saxon about the concept of material culture. MaP of course envisages a paradigm shift, particularly within the legacies of Leroi-Gourhan and Haudricourt (both students of Mauss) writing on *Techniques et Culture*.

Nathan is quite right of course. In many ways material culture is an Anglo-Saxon concept. He sketches out the American Anthropology legacy, in particular the Boasian tradition of material culture. Boas, initially trained in *Kulturkreislehre* in Germany, took with him a diffusionist concept of culture in developing a fieldwork-based approach in American Cultural Anthropology. The influence of cultural diffusionism is one dimension of a parallel influence through Tyler on the development of Anthropology in Britain. A common legacy here is the influence of Immanuel Kant and his argument in 'Critique of Practical Reason' about the inertia of the object and the imposition of meanings by active subjects on inert objects and materials i.e. objects and nature have no agency.

Given how much has been written on object agency recently, we do not need to go any further into revisions of Kant. So allow me to switch to my own experience of meeting Anglo and French traditions through a fieldwork encounter. Material Culture had been re-introduced into British Anthropology by Peter Ucko when he was appointed to teach 'Primitive Technology' by Daryll Forde, the founder of the Anthropology department at UCL. In 1969 he gave a keynote lecture on penis sheaths to the Royal Anthropological Institute in which he elaborated a theory of material culture as the study of material forms, a sub-field of Anthropology distinct from the dominant tradition of Social Anthropology. I was recruited as his research assistant, participating at first in Peter's fieldwork on Palaeolithic cave art at Hornos de la Pena in Spain. I came to do fieldwork in the Cameroon Grassfields in the mid 1970s to begin an ethnographic field study of material culture. I had met Jean-Pierre previously in Nigeria where he had been teaching at Ahmadu Bello University. For various complicated reasons my initial plan to start fieldwork in Nigeria turned to a study in the Cameroon Grassfields, where we met again. I was very influenced by Marxist Anthropology and Center/Periphery debates current in British Anthropology at that time and Jean-Pierre and I collaborated on a study of technologies, production and exchange within a historical context of the varying impact from the Atlantic slave trade to the colonial/postcolonial regional economies in the Grassfields. I was also supervising a then PhD student, Ian Fowler, working on precolonial ironworking in the Grassfields.

By the late 1970s to 1990s we had recruited several, and by now, well-known colleagues (Barbara Bender, Danny Miller, Chris Tilley, Susanne Kuechler, and later Chris Pinney and Victor Buchli) to form a significant research group in Material Culture studies. Barbara Bender initiated our interests in landscape and heritage, Chris Tilley is most well-known for his phenomenological approaches to material culture, in particular on phenomenology of landscape, Danny Miller on Hegelian-influenced theories of objectification and materiality applied to mass consumption, Susanne Kuechler, with Alfie Gell as her mentor, consistently developed a cognitive approach to material forms, Chris Pinney on popular practices of visual culture and cultural encounters, and Victor Buchli on architecture and contemporary archaeology. The emphasis was very much on diversity of approach and theoretical influence, precisely to emphasise the breadth of material culture studies as a sub-field in Anthropology. Undoubtedly, due to collaboration with Jean-Pierre, my own interests had veered towards studies of techniques and material practices. My own background led me more to emphasise the influence of Leroi-Gourhan and the group around the journal *Techniques et Culture* and *technologie culturelle*

But this was not just about questions of ‘primitive technology’ as discrete forms of technical knowledges or skills nor correcting the Kantian premise of studying the material to emphasise its ‘agency’. I was inspired foremost by Mauss and his declaration “technical actions, physical actions, magico-religious actions are confused for the actor” [Mauss 1934(2006):82]. In other words, by studying ordinary things we could understand the blending of thoughts in actions, that would otherwise be treated sociologically as separate economic, political, or religious facts. In their performativity and everyday nature, certain unified and fundamental social and human values could be grasped and acted upon. In 1986, advocating the study of precolonial ironworking as a mundane ‘total social fact’, Jean-Pierre and I wrote a paper for the World Archaeological Congress entitled ‘The Magical Production of Iron in the Cameroon Grassfields’ (Rowlands and Warnier 1993). Here, Mauss and efficacy of techniques came into the material culture dialogue.

But perhaps not as efficacious as one might have expected. The autonomous study of objects was part of a resurgent materiality in material culture studies in the early 1990s or so. Moreover, the limits of consciousness and presence, the Heideggerian tensions between concealing and revealing, undermined pure ideas of objectivity. Lack of presence, it was argued, is not a product of our limited perceptions of reality but an irreducible feature of the object world itself. This led us away from a purely human-centered perspective into a conceptual realm where non-human entities can do their own thing. This brought us to accept, for instance, the sheer volatility and changeability of our planets climate systems, despite any role of human interactions to manage or compete with them. As we have found out, pandemics are likely to remain wholly unpredictable and defy our full understanding. Not because they are fixed and complex and obscure (which they are) but because they are relational and unpredictable. The ‘new’ emphasis on the materiality of things emphasised the autonomy of material agency and the divergence between *technologie culturelle* and material culture studies was maintained. Despite, two important articles by Jean-Pierre on Praxeology and on Efficacy of Action published in the *Journal of Material Culture* in the early 2001 and 2009, what captured attention was more to debate if things could speak and if not then what degree of failure to do so implied more hidden and secretive ways of understanding. Sensing the withdrawal of objects as things into their own secretive worlds that were shared by human and non-human agencies, I was invited by Jean-Pierre to Paris to come and give some lectures on material culture studies. The MaP group had been formed at the Rene Descartes University with one professor and seven students. ‘Le Paradoxe de la Marchandise Authentique’ published in 1994 but based on preceding several years of work on authenticity and mass consumption but as the blurb for the book said “objects are only objects of authentication on conditions if they are **objectifications of**

action. So even before the MaP had been fully formed, the link was made to objects in motion and objects as subjects.

Laurence and Urmila summarise the MaP position as “MaP’s interest lies in the role that material culture, and thus materiality, plays not only in the constitution of the body but also of the subject.” There are lots of disagreement here—perspectives where notions of the body or embodiment are not seen as central, or are seen differently in alternative traditions of thought, or the unfathomable nature of bodies as things and embodiment as consciousness, issues around the ‘other than human’ agency, the new materialism emphasis on vibrant materials, post humanism, the ontological turn, etc. But the aim of the Material Subject is to look at the influence of an embodied material cultural approach where embodiment is precisioned on the incorporation and excorporation of materials within bodies to create subjects.

Let me finish therefore in emphasising how Jean-Pierre’s study of kingship—one of the most creative innovations in studies of African kingship and studies of divine kingship in recent years—brings out the contrast between a very particular embodied approach and the most well-known anthropological model of Sacred Kingship, viz Marshall Sahlins’ ‘Stranger King’ concept or what he calls ‘An Elementary Form of Political Life’, discussed most recently in Sahlins and Graeber’s book *On Kings*.

Warnier (2007), in his study of kingship, explains that objects and the sensori-motor conducts, so essential to the MaP’s conceptualising of materialities, played a compelling role in mediation of power in Grassfields chiefdoms. In Warnier’s analysis, the king as a container of ancestral substances disseminates them to his subjects through praxis, such as spraying raffia wine mixed with his saliva onto his subjects that amounts to a micro-technology of power incorporating the subjects into the single body politic of the kingdom, a non-verbal, bodily conduct that does not express in so many words what it achieves but still does it efficiently. Thus, the workings of power in the Grassfields and their actions as a ‘governmentality of containers’ reveal themselves through material practices instead of speech. The Foucauldian concept of governmentality or sovereignty is elaborated in the work of Warnier as a governmentality of containers in relation to motor conducts and the habituation of performance through power. Where are the objects here? As containers in relation to actions of containing. Objects, bodies, houses, kingdoms are containers of different levels and forms of incorporation and excorporation on which protection, and taking the outside in, and its domestication depends.

Sahlins’ Stranger King thesis is really the opposite of this. Kings are outsiders—they invade and usurp power from indigenous autochthonous owners of the land. They are the founders of dynasties who come from the periphery and are identified in myths of origin with the outside as a sacred place. In the process they are understood to have done monstrous anti-kin morality things in usurping power, showing their unique external source of sacred powers; for example, human sacrifice figures heavily here usually. Once installed they are domesticated and with appropriate rites could be seen to bring life, fertility to the land and reproduce the population. But the illegitimacy and source of power of the original act is always there, threatening as status declines and dynasties collapse and stranger kings in turn are usurped. Sahlins would be too structuralist to have considered either bodies or material culture as a central element of his argument. Also, there are elements of Jean-Pierre’s Grassfield story of kingship that fits the Stranger Kings thesis extremely well. Grassfields kings are also legitimised by stories of migrating from the outside—they arrive and usurp power from autochthones, often violently and then by appropriating local rituals of kinship they create local dynasties and manage controlling fertility of land and people. But the materiality and embodied argument of Jean-Pierre’s actually

reverses these stories. Regardless of any historical truth, they are stories about the power of taking the outside in. Historically in the Grassfields, in the era of the Atlantic slave trade and European colonialism, power came through acquiring European 'prestige goods' and consumables. Or as now, the Grassfields migrant with a green card to America, described by Francis Nyamnjoh as a 'bushfaller' (gone to the bush to hunt) returns home with riches. His/Her body has to come back to be buried on lineage land and not to have had this done by living descendants, affects their well-being. None of this is specific to Grassfields polities nor only to those where transmission of ancestral substances are a key value. If we extend Warnier's argument to other cultures where ancestral capacity is not essential what new forms of taking in and porous containment emerge? We cannot ignore that the capacity for violence is also an external force that is brought in and used for domesticating dynasties. For instance, Trump in the U.S. is a Stranger King who as a 'King'/President motivates an insurrection to defy usurpation bringing in issues of nativism and populism, and Covid-19 and containment.

So, we may congratulate the editors and authors of the Material Subject, confirming the originality of MaP and its approach that, whilst the original group is now dispersed, is actually even more innovative and productive.

7. **Katherine Ong** is Commissioning editor for Anthropology and Religion research books at Routledge. She talked about 'How to Publish with Routledge'.

8. **Q&A Session** Please send your queries and comments to editor@thejugaadproject.pub for a response after the event. Some of the discussion excerpts can be viewed at the end of the event's video.