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Chapter 4

Ties that Matter, Matter that Ties: A Theoretical Framework for Socio-material Network Studies

I know it may be said that the simple existence of these shells in the ruins from the Gila valley to modern Tusayan can be explained on the theory of barter, and that their distribution does not prove racial kinship of former owners is self-evident. The theory that the same symbolism and treatment of the material originated independently cannot be seriously urged in this case. While I would not say, since I have no proof one way or the other, that these shells were worked by the people who lived in the ancient ruins, I am not sure that their ancestors may not have brought them in their migrations from the south.

Jesse W. Fewkes (1896: 49)

This chapter presents a framework that will make more explicit how the systems of material culture in the Caribbean archaeological record can be said to be interdependent with social networks. As briefly discussed in Chapter 1, the patterns of homogeneity and diversity in the Caribbean archaeological record are underlain by "socio-material networks" (cf. Knappett 2011). Here I will provide a more in-depth and conceptual take on this matter, relating to the ideas of Marcel Mauss, a scholar who has been of institutional importance for thinking about things *and* social relations in anthropology and archaeology. I will follow up on this with a discussion of post-Maussian theories on gift exchange relations and personhood. In addition, a brief ethnographic case-study from outside the Caribbean, based on the famous *kula* exchange, reveals how a dyad of (reciprocal) socio-material relations can quickly expand to form larger systems of objects and persons. Finally, I will also return to the perspectivist model discussed in Chapter 2, which provides a parallel pathway to understanding the impact of socio-material interdependency with a specific reference to Amerindian ontologies.

Jesse W. Fewkes, the same archaeologist who would later carry out important groundwork in the Antilles, discusses in the above quote how to distinguish various types of social (inter)actions. This discussion focuses on the presence of a seashell in Tusayan Pueblo middens in the Midwest of the United States, 400 km away

from its possible nearest source. It comes across quite succinctly from this rather tortuous internal deliberation that coming to grips with social factors through the archaeological record is not an easy task. Indeed, the open-ended problem in archaeology is and always has been how to perceive the difference between incidences of material culture in space-time, geographic space and social space. Has there been any progress on this issue since the advent of archaeology as a scientific undertaking? Only the greatest cynic would answer that with a negative. On the other hand, I already discussed the problems archaeologists have with understanding the movements and interactions of people as seen through a diverse but connected pan-Caribbean archaeological record. In other words, the problem at hand is a larger and more convoluted repetition of the fundamental struggle to make sense of the movements of objects in social, geographic and temporal spaces, as showcased above by Fewkes.

Allow me to illustrate what seems like a purely archaeological methodological and conceptual problem with a little thought experiment to make it more relevant for general human experiences. Suppose that we are walking on a beach and you find a shell that has washed up on the shore. You pick it up and bring it home. Because you picked up this shell this does not imply that there is now a social tie between you and the sea. Nor does it imply that there is now a social relation between the creature that produced the shell and you.[1] Now suppose the shell has not been brought by the sea but left there by another human being. Unless this was done with the express intent of leaving it for a certain other person to find, this would not constitute a social bond. Now let us suppose that the shell was transported by the sea but contained some kind of message inscribed on it by another individual designating the shell as a gift to the lucky finder? In this case no personal directionality is given to the action, the donor and recipient have never met, and the recipient will not be likely to reciprocate. In this case the ties between the sea, the creature's shell, the person who left the message, and the finder might tentatively be part of a convoluted network of social "actants" (*sensu* Latour 2005). Hereby the sea and the shell serve as the material parts of a brief, inequitable, and presumably unfulfilling social relation. Now imagine I pick up a shell on a beach and hand it to you. We will immediately recognize the gesture and the shell as a gift – literally a "social fact" (Mauss 1990). What has exactly happened here that sets this apart from the previous (inter)actions? This is the question that will be explored in this chapter.

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1 Granted, it is possible to have a social ontology in which the sea and shells would be perceived not as material forces but (partly) as social actors. Indeed, the model of Amerindian ontologies presented by Viveiros de Castro (1998) and discussed in Chapter 2 suggests that whether a shell is naturally social or socially natural is simply a matter of perspective. In fact, it seems that Andrezj Antczak and Marlena Antczak (2006) have found evidence for exactly this kind of socio-cosmic entanglements in the Late Ceramic Age shell procurement sites on the Los Roques archipelago (Venezuela). Nonetheless, broadening a traditionally Western view with reference to other social ontologies does not solve the issue of what constitutes a material social tie and what does not. Even if ideas about what constitutes a social interaction differ from ontology to ontology, every society always includes things that cannot be or simply are never socialized (with).

Society and material culture

Theories on how material culture is central to society and vice versa are deeply rooted in the European intellectual tradition. Incipient ideas on this were present in the works of Classical philosophers, in turn inspired by the philosophical and religious traditions of the Middle East and West Asia. In the Early Modern period these earlier views developed into a typically European school of thought (Graeber 2011). Among the numerous works in this tradition, two theories on the origin and evolution of human society, those of Hobbes and Rousseau, are worth explicitly mentioning here (see also Mol, in press). The reason that these two are highlighted here is that they present an argument for living in society and what is needed for it, based on what life was like in an original state of nature or "non-society". Interestingly, both philosophers drew their inspiration for this "original state" from European reports on peoples that lived on the fringes of early colonial empires, among which prominently those of the Caribbean. In addition, both philosophers represent two sides of a debate that has shaped how human sociality is studied in the social sciences and perceived by society at large (Pinker 2011; Sykes 2005). Their social contract theories are still at the basis of modern theories of justice and many other debates on violence, sociality and morality. Of more importance for the present discussion is that both philosophers present an analogous view on the importance of material culture in the formation and development of human social networks.

In *Leviathan* Hobbes (1929 [1651]) devises a theory of society that depends on a social contract enforced by an autocratic ruler. His starting point was a characterization of humans in a "state of nature", as opposed to a state of society, as "solitary, poor, brutish, and short" (*ibid.*: 99). According to Hobbes, humans in the original state of nature have a lack of all things, because they have a "right to every thing" (*ibid.*: 110). This right to appropriate "things" was not inhibited by a code of laws, norms or moral convictions. In modern economic terms, in such a system there would be no moral, social or judicial mechanism to coordinate infinite human wants that clash with equal abilities to gain access to limited means. In Hobbes' view, a lack of reciprocally enforced social contracts will result in an endless war of all versus all.

Discourse on Inequality (Rousseau 2012 [1754]), written a century later, arrives at the same need for a social contract. Here and in other works (e.g. Rousseau 1966 [1762]), Rousseau argues the opposite of Hobbes his position on the natural state. He proposes that the original environment of humans would have given them near infinite ways to foresee in their needs. This was a period in history "in which the state of nature, being that in which the care for our own preservation is the least prejudicial to that of others, was consequently the best calculated to promote peace". Only when humans came together to achieve goals that were out of reach for the solitary individual did conflict and strife and the need for a social contract arise.

The shadow cast by these conflicting theories of a war-like or peaceful human nature has also affected the anthropology and archaeology of non-state societies: the type of social structures that many hold to be closer to a fabled original state

of nature than (modern) state societies (e.g. Fry 2006; Keeley 1996; Pinker 2011; Sahlins 1972; Sykes 2005). The debate has surprisingly passed over the ethnohistoric and archaeological record of much of the indigenous Caribbean. Even more surprisingly is the fact that it goes unacknowledged that the central arguments of both Hobbes and Rousseau are partly concerned with the interdependencies between social networks and material culture (Corbey 2000; Corbey 2006; Sahlins 1972). According to Rousseau, due to natural affluence humans do not necessarily have to cooperate with each other in social support networks, while according to Hobbes limited means and infinite wants actively prevents such ties from forming. Innovation or desire for material culture will change both these situations, however. In the case of Rousseau the payoff for acting socially is gained through a cooperative development of things, while in the case of Hobbes cooperation under a social contract means to lay down the ultimately destructive individual's "right to all things" so that certain things can be reciprocally enjoyed.[2]

It is interesting to see how these examples depart from a "state of nature" that is completely opposed but for one thing: a lack of sociality and a lack of things. Both theories of sociality begin in a state of zero inter-personal contact and both the original Rousseauean and Hobbesian human being lack a material culture in the most real sense of the word – their cultures are not material because they do not create anything that endures beyond the grasp of a single individual. By encountering the sociality inherent to material culture, through invention of things by cooperation in the case of Rousseau and by claiming equal rights to things in Hobbes, the need for social cont(r)acts is discovered. Thus, through different routes Rousseau and Hobbes both present theories of the origin of society through the connective properties of material culture. The factors for the creation, durability and evolution of connections between the solitary human "nodes" that gave rise to networks are simultaneously social and material in nature.

Of course, both Hobbes and Rousseau present hypothetical cases of original human nature that likely do not correlate with any human society that ever existed and certainly not with those of what we know of pre-colonial or proto-historic Caribbean societies. Their idea that "natural society" was still present on the banks of the Caribbean Sea and other regions of the world at the advent of contact should rather be seen as a typical result of the perceived superiority of European culture and society inherent to the colonial project. Yet this does not mean that there is no merit in the idea that "having material culture" entails "having society" and *vice versa*. As we shall see this idea is still central to much of anthropology, particularly to (post-)Maussian studies of exchange. In addition, recent studies from cognitive psychology, cultural economy, and the ethnographic and archaeological record also support a deep relation between social interaction and material interests (Coward 2010; Dunbar, *et al.* 2010b; Gintis, *et al.* 2005; Malafouris 2010; Wilk and Cliggett 2007).

2 As Hobbes (1922 [1651]: 96) remarks in regards to this: "The Passions that encline men to Peace, are Feare of Death; Desire of such things as are necessary to commodious living; and a Hope by their Industry to obtain them."

Interestingly, in the diverse linguistic, ethnic and cultural landscape of the Caribbean, material culture may also have functioned as a connective factor for "Rousseauean innovations", "Hobbesian pacifications" and other socio-cultural processes. We can see this in practice through the historic documentation of "first contact" situations between Europeans and indigenous peoples:

> *Sunday, 30 December, 1492*
>
> *The Admiral went ashore to eat and arrived at the same time as did five kings, subjects to Guacanagari. All wore their crowns, showing their high position, so much so that the Admiral says to the Sovereigns that "Your Highness would have been delighted to see their manners." When he went ashore the king came to receive him, taking him by the arm and conducting him to the same house they had been in the day before where they had arranged a layer of woven fronds and some seats where the Admiral sat. Then the king took the crown from his head and put it on the Admiral, who in turn took off a necklace of good carnelians and very handsome stones of most delicate colours which shone in any position and put it on the king's neck. Then he took a richly woven mantle of fine cloth he was wearing that day and gave it to him, and he sent for a pair of colored Moroccan boots and had them put on him. The Admiral put a large silver ring on the king's finger, for it was reported to him that earlier, when the king had seen a silver ring on a sailor, he had insisted that it be given to him. The king was particularly satisfied and content, and two of the kings with him moved up to where he was with the Admiral, and each gave the Admiral his own large gold plate"* de Navarete 1922: 133-134.[3]

The above account from the first voyage of Columbus details one of the many documented encounters of Europeans with Caribbean indigenous peoples during the first years of contact. It tells of the diplomatic manoeuvrings between Columbus and the indigenous "king" or *cacique* Guacanagarí. Some days prior to this get-together, admiral Columbus and his crew, shipwrecked after their ship the Santa María had run aground somewhere on the north coast of present-day Haiti on Christmas Day 1492, had been taken in as distinguished guests by Guacanagarí. Establishing good relations was of paramount and strategic importance for both groups and their leaders. Columbus and Guacanagarí were both in a precarious position – one was shipwrecked, the other faced a group of strangers with superior military technology. Nevertheless, they could both benefit enormously from the

3 "Salió el Almirante a comer a tierra, y llego a tiempo que habían venido cinco Reyes subjetos á aqueste que se llamaba Guacanagari, todos con sus coronas, representando muy buen estado, que dice el Almirante a los Reyes que sus Altezas hobieran placer de ver la manera dellos. En llegando en tierra el Rey vino a rescibir al Almirante, y lo llevo de brazos a la misma casa de ayer, a do tenía un estrado y sillas, en que asentó al Almirante, y luego se quitó la corona de la cabeza y se la puso al Almirante, y el Almirante se quitó del pescuezo un collar de buenos alaqueques y cuentas muy hermosas de muy lindos colores, que parecía muy bien en toda parte, y se lo puso a el; y se desnudó un capuz de fina grana, que aquel día se había vestido, y se lo vistió; y envió por unos borceguíes de color, que le hizo calzar, y le puso en el dedo un grande anillo de plata, porque habían dicho que vieron una sortija de plata a un marinero y que había hecho mucho por ella. Quedo muy alegre y muy contento, y dos de aquellos Reyes que estaban con el vinieron adonde el Almirante estaba con el y trujeron al Almirante dos grandes plastas de oro, cada uno la suya" (de Navarete 1922: 133-134).

opportunities offered by these new social ties, as well. This is why, in the days that followed the wrecking of the Santa María, relations between the two groups steadily improved to a point where Columbus decided he would build a small settlement, La Navidad, close to the village of Guacanagarí.

In hindsight, the importance of the interactions between Columbus and Guacanagarí far transcended their own immediate interest and their dealings would have a large impact on the diplomatic history between two previously unconnected peoples. Regrettably, what started out as a series of friendly exchanges soon ended in bloodshed. In November 1493, when Columbus returned to La Navidad on his second journey to the Caribbean, he found the settlement destroyed and its inhabitants killed. Columbus learned from a messenger sent by Guacanagarí that the fort had been attacked by a more powerful *cacique*, Caonabo, who had been angered by expeditions made by a riotous group that left the fort in search of gold and women. When questioned while resting in his hammock nursing his wounds, Guacanagarí vowed he had tried to defend the fort from Caonabo. Nevertheless, many chroniclers and other historians have noted that, since he was likely a vassal of Caonabo, this account is questionable. The exact history of events taking place after Columbus left La Navidad remained unclear, however (Wilson 1990: 68-71, 75-79).

Guacanagarí himself remained Columbus' ally, and continued to send him gifts at the new Spanish Colony of La Isabela (Deagan and Cruxent 2002; Mol 2008; Wilson 1990: 75-79). Yet on a larger scale the destruction of La Navidad was the beginning of a long spiral of violence between Europeans and the indigenous peoples of the Caribbean. In Hispaniola this culminated in the Spanish-indigenous Wars of Higuey of 1502-1504, after which the Spanish colonizers were unobstructed to aggressively assert their dominance over the native population (Churampi Ramírez 2007; de las Casas 1992 [1542]). Unfortunately, put into its wider historic context, this early episode serves as a bloodstained archetype for indigenous and European contact throughout the centuries of colonization that followed.

Aside from Columbus, Guacanagarí, and the dramatic force of colonial history an attentive reader will distinguish another key actor in this passage. There was as yet little or no common language at this point, but during the meeting, crowns, seats, clothing, jewellery and other adornments facilitated and framed the interactions between the two leaders and the peoples they represented. This "material lingua franca" must thus have been of great aid or even necessary for communication. By sharing, exchanging or otherwise incorporating things in their interactions, Europeans and Amerindians alike attempted to create and maintain ties of huge personal and historical interest.

Thus, starting out in a potential state of Hobbesian "Warre" or Rousseauean isolation, over a span of days Columbus and Guacanagarí managed to create a society between them – albeit one that would ultimately prove to be disastrous for the indigenous peoples of the Caribbean. The rapid emergence of this intercultural, social network was only possible because it was being built with mutually intelligible social strategies that were efficiently scaffolded by material culture (Keehnen 2011; Mol 2008; Oliver 2009: Part V; Valcárcel Rojas 2012). The reciprocal gift giving,

the creation of hierarchies based on the exchange of prestige items, and other interactions are born out of a desire for (new) things that goes hand in hand with socialization. This example of indigenous-European network creation in practice is a historical example of how social and material factors are inherent to the theories of Hobbes and Rousseau. Such particular person-thing "networks" are tied to a universal human tendency in which material culture "scaffolds" personal and group interactions (Corbey 2006; Graeber 2001; Knappett 2005, 2011; Mol 2007, 2010). Furthermore, viewed from the particular perspective of Guacanagarí and his community, these exchanges were likely mimicking ancient Amerindian ontologies in which things had a central part to play in personal and group interactions (Keehnen 2011; Mol 2008; Oliver 2000, 2009). These can partially be reconstructed through archaeological and ethnohistoric studies, but are also still echoed by the attitude towards material culture in contemporary indigenous communities in Lowland South America (Santos-Granero 2009a).

Mind over matter?

Most of the more traditional archaeological and anthropological theories of material culture and society have in common that they posit a hierarchy between their social and material dynamics. Where there is smoke there is fire, where there are objects there are people. Heuristically, where the former is the *explanandum* (smoke/objects), the latter is the *explanans* (fire/people). This "mind over matter" hierarchy spills over into other fundamental differences between subjects and objects, cause and effect, signifier and sign, agent and dependent, and means to ends (Bourdieu 1977; Keane 2006; Olsen 2010; Preucel 2008; Tilley 1999). As a result, the evaluation of the strategic position of things in networks has often taken a backseat to the strategic position of people. For instance, consider the following famous archaeological parable. In it an archetypal Real Mesoamerican Archaeologist (R.M.A.), reacts to a theory forwarded by his Skeptical Graduate Student. The Skeptical Graduate Student has just presented a paper in which he discussed how Olmec prominence in Early Formative Mexico was largely due to their wealth in highly developed ideas. The R.M.A. has an entirely different view on the matter (Flannery 1976: 285-286):

> *"'Two Indians met on a jungle trail at the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. One was an Olmec from La Venta. The other was a guy from the Motagua Valley, carrying a 200-lb jade boulder with his tumpline.'*
>
> *'Hey soul brother', says the Olmec. 'What'll you take for that jade boulder?'*
>
> *'What have you got?' says the guy from Motagua.*
>
> *'Ideas.' says the Olmec.*
>
> *'Let's hear one.' […]*
>
> *'Our chief is descended from a jaguar who mated with a human female.'*
>
> *'So is ours.'*

'If you'd let me have that jade boulder, I think we could make our chief into a king.'

'What's that mean?'

'That means he'd be semidivine, and have life-and-death power over his subjects; he'd have a monopoly of force, and the power to conscript soldiers, levee taxes, and exact tribute.'

'If our chief tried that, we'd whip his ass.'

The Olmec sighs.

'That's all the ideas you got?' says the guy from Motagua.

'That's all I'm authorized to trade.'

'In that case,' says the Motagua Indian, 'if you don't mind, I'll head on up to the Kaminaljuyú area, where the chief is offering 10, maybe 12 girls from elite lineages for every hundredweight of jade." And that, O Best Beloved, is how the Great Jade Boulder got to Kaminaljuyú.' "

In other words the reason why a large jade boulder came to be deposited in Kaminaljuyú rather than in an Olmec site is that a guy from Motagua rated the "social" benefits of girls from elite lineages above those arising from the favour of an Olmec near-king. The R.M.A.'s theory is meant to be tongue in cheek and he therefore presents a (too) functionalist interpretation of the whole affair. Yet, remarkably, his seemingly straightforward story actually does nothing to explain how a guy from Motagua, elite girls and an Olmec chief came to be part of a set of social relations revolving around a boulder of jade in the first place. Which is strange, when you think about it: the boulder of jade has the highest materiality in this particular set of interactions. Its ties are valued as much as the lives of multiple human beings and more than the support of a nearly semi-divine king, who apparently can use this jade boulder to gain life and death power over other people.

Of course, this parable is just that: a story meant to teach a certain lesson. However, the added lesson is that archaeological theories from high to low are often more focused on the direct networks between and around people.[4] People who were making things, shaping things, using things, moving things, exchanging things, acquiring things, hoarding things, giving meaning to things, generally doing things to, with, and through things in order to establish ties with other people. As a result, what has changed significantly in the course of the history of archaeology is the identification of possible relations behind the distribution of material culture in the archaeological record. On the other hand another vast amount of literature discusses how material culture itself is related in time and space – starting with the typo-chronological frameworks of early scientific archaeology. Therefore, while these domains are often segregated into archaeological theory and method, there is a definite understanding of both humans and things in their own respective

4 Another lesson to be learnt here is that R.M.A.'s from the 1970s still thought it humorous to equate women with objects.

systems (Olsen 2010; Schiffer 1999). The problem lies in the interpretive interface in which both domains come together.

This also applies to the Caribbean, where (macro-regional) networks have mostly been dealt with as reflections of ethnicities, identities and cultures drawn from relations between things (Geurds 2011). Whether it is the spread of Saladoid ceramics, distribution of jades, metals, hard woods or ball courts, the interpretative weight lies on the cultural or social and not the material counterparts of these networks (e.g. Helms 1987; Rodríguez Ramos 2010a; Rouse 1992; Wilson 1993). However, it is clear that these things must also have shaped Caribbean social networks. If not, why would they even have been distributed across such distances? Caribbean archaeology cannot be faulted for the particular disregard of objects as a shaping factor in its networks. It is part of a wider context in which "despite the grounding and inescapable materiality of the human condition, things seem to have been subjected to a kind of collective amnesia in social and cultural studies" (Olsen 2010: 2). During the last 10 to 15 years numerous scholars with a broad range of interest in material culture have made a serious effort to remedy this situation. At least in some parts of anthropology and archaeology, thinking about things is enjoying a renaissance.

This "material cultural turn" in anthropology originated from scholars who already had an affinity with the study of material culture (Hicks 2010). Pinpointing the exact beginning of this new wave is impossible, but often the works by Miller on consumerism and materiality are regarded as the starting point (Miller 1987, 2005). *Art and Agency* by Alfred Gell (Gell 1998) is another setting off point that presented a new theory on how things can come to be agents. Both emphasize the influence that material culture exerts on wider societal practices and the lives of individual persons (Dant 2005). More avant-garde thinkers, such as Latour (2005), have completely discarded the idea of difference between social and material factors. Things and people are part of an inclusive "network of actants" that shapes the Social. Actions of things and actions undertaken by humans become part of the same fields. From such a perspective, material culture can (re)act on people as well as the other way around.

Scholars such as for instance Gell, Miller, Dant, and Latour have each in quite variable ways – e.g. the reactions to Ingold (2007b) – shown how human life and society can be shaped by means of "silent" but vital ties between things and persons. This has opened the way for a line of thinking in which life, culture and society is not any longer only created by humans and given meaning to by human minds. Things are part of society and society partly consists of things. As such, this revaluation of the thing has been a timely counter to what Olsen (2010: 2-3) has called the "anti-material sentiment". However, as so many academic counter-movements, its solutions have sometimes been as extreme as the problem it tried to address.

A problem with tracing networks of object agency in society is that things are hardly ever literally perceived as having the same type of agency as human beings. To a Western frame of mind in particular, things lack the necessary qualities that would make them comparable to human agents. Referring to both humans and

things as "actants" does not solve this. Things are important in the networks that create and maintain human society, but that does not imply they are commensurate with human subjects. Things are not alive, do not think, do not perceive and are, or should not be, as valuable as persons (Graeber 2011). These inconsistent alignments of humans and objects are based in the rejection of a modern point of view, where the materiality of things comes as somewhat of a "surprise" – a logical process Gell (1998: Chapter 1) calls abduction.

However, such questions of human-thing and subject-object ontologies would likely not have been of (immediate) concern for the indigenous peoples of the Caribbean. This definitely applies to more contemporary Amerindian ontologies, in which things are often simply part and parcel of life. Some things may occupy central positions in the interfaces between social and even socio-cosmic networks (see also Keegan 2007; Oliver 2000, 2009). Nevertheless, as I will explain below, when things become subjects this arises from a certain inter-subjective context, an interaction with a (human) being that brings out their inherent but only partly social nature (Santos-Granero 2009a).

Yet even when taking other, non-Western perspectives on this matter to their extremes, only the most fervent panpsychist would disagree with the fact that, while things and humans potentially share many ontological and metaphysical aspects, they are not the same. People are not things and things are not people, at least not in an ultimate analysis. Consequently networks of people, social networks, are not the same as networks of things, or material networks, and therefore the interdependent system that results from them cannot be quite the same as either. Thus, when there is nothing that directly ties them together, how can one make the conceptual leap from material to social network? In the following I will propose a perspective on the matter that is inspired by (post-)Maussian theories of gift exchange.

The gift: a material total social fact

The burgeoning field of gift exchange theory was created by the virtue of one scholar's singular essay: the French sociologist Marcel Mauss and his "*Essai sur le Don: Forme et raison de l'échange dans les sociétés archaïques*" (Mauss 1923/1924). This publication, translated into English as *The Gift* (Mauss 1990), is a remarkable text when viewed against the backdrop of the history of anthropology (Sykes 2005). It is saturated with concepts, theories and research agendas that are exemplary for the French anthropological project of the early 20th century, yet it is still relevant today (Corbey 2008; Sigaud 2003). It is near unthinkable in anthropology and archaeology to write about forms of exchange without referring to it. It has proven problematic, however, to read and understand this *c.*100 pp. essay in an unequivocal manner (e.g. Corbey and Mol 2012; Godelier 1999; Graeber 2001; Gregory 1982; Lévi-Strauss 1949; Mol 2007; Parry and Bloch 1989; Sykes 2005).

In this sense the *Essai sur le don* is truly a reflection of the type of anthropologist and individual Marcel Mauss was and the personalities engaged in the anthropology of the day with whom he worked, not in the least his famous uncle, the sociologist

Émile Durkheim (Fournier 2006).[5] Mauss followed up on Durkheim's idea of "social facts", promoting the view that society is a real and active force, which prior to Durkheim's studies was not a generally accepted idea (Durkheim 1897, 1982 [1895]). Mauss expanded on the idea of the social fact with the notion that some social facts are "total" in nature, a key concept in the essay (Mauss 1990: 9). A total social fact is a practice that is inherently social and pervades all layers of a society: political, religious, economical, judicial, *etc.* Total social facts are not only present in every aspect of a given society, but they can also be thought of as the "generators and motors of the system" (Gofman 1998: 67).[6]

When the exchange of gifts is considered to be a total social phenomenon, it readily becomes apparent that it does indeed touch on a large number of related subjects. Nonetheless one aspect in particular caught Mauss's attention. He was puzzled by the fact that the reciprocal gift as total social fact is found in so many societies and has proven to be such an effective social mechanism. In his essay he therefore wonders "[w]hat rule of legality and self-interest, in societies of a backward or archaic type, compels the gift that has been received to be obligatorily reciprocated? What power resides in the object given that causes its recipient to pay it back?" (Mauss 1990: 4). For his explanation he turned to the concept of a "spirit" or force contained within the thing given.

An embryonic version of this hypothesis can be found in *Origins of the Notion of Money* (Mauss 1914). In this short lecture Mauss attempted to elucidate the socio-economic phenomenon of money that, as in the case of gift exchange in contemporary society, stems from a pre-monetary stage of history. He claimed that, where no true monetary system exists, the words referring to objects that come closest to our idea of "money" are always directly related the words for magical power in that society. Examples Mauss presented are the concepts of *dzo* among the Ewe, the notion of *mana* in Polynesia, and *manitou* among Algonquin-speaking peoples.[7] Mauss indicated that the items that are perceived as possessing a large amount of "magical force" are often the most prized in exchanges. This is by and large due to the fact that these objects also garner the most prestige for the owner. Joined to this is the idea that the magical force contained within objects is important because it is perceived as durable and transmissible. In this view

5 Although an understanding of Durkheimian sociology is instrumental for comprehending the oeuvre of Mauss – and the largest part of anthropology in fact – this does not imply Mauss his works were only influenced by his uncle. Mauss worked closely with and befriended leading French ethnologists and sociologists of the time, for instance Hubert, Espinas, Levy-Bruhl, Leenhardt and Fauconnet. In addition, he was an avid letter writer, corresponding with whom we now consider to be seminal scholars in anthropology such as Boas, Van Gennep, Frazer, Tylor, Radcliffe-Brown, Firth and Evans-Pritchard (Corbey 2008: 9; Fournier 2006: 240-241).

6 In his "*Essai sur le Don*" Mauss actually uses the French terms *des phénomènes sociaux totaux* and *des prestations totales* (translated as "total social phenomena" and "total services" in Mauss 1990) instead of *faites sociales totales* (total social facts).

7 Subsequent research on these concepts and many of their similarly perceived counterparts in other cultures has revealed that their amalgamation with money is an artefact of early anthropological studies of value, rather than proof of the existence of monetary systems before the development of money (Graeber 2001; Parry and Bloch 1989).

exchange valuables are therefore best characterized by the magic force contained in them that serves as a certain kind of transmissible, mystical currency.[8]

In "The Gift" Mauss goes one step further in his attribution of exchange functionality to the magical force contained in the exchanged thing when discussing the Maori *hau*. (*ibid*.: 14). The *hau*, Mauss (1990: 15) explains, is a magical force contained within the thing given that forces it to return to the previous owner:

> "[H]au – *which itself moreover possesses a kind of individuality – is attached to this chain of uses until these give back from their own property, their taonga [valuables], their goods, or from their labour or trading, by way of feasts, festivals and presents, the equivalent or something of even greater value. This in turn will give the donors authority and power over the first donor, who has become the last recipient"*

It is his theory concerning the spirit in the gift that has attracted the bulk of the critique forwarded by scholars who commented on Mauss (e.g. Gell 1998: 106-109; Godelier 1999; Graeber 2001: 178-181; Lévi-Strauss 1997; Parry 1986: 456; Sahlins 1972: Chapter 4; Sigaud 2003; Weiner 1992: 49).[9] Numerous commenters feel that cross-culturally transposing the magical force of the *hau* is essentially flawed. The general sentiment is that a reference to a magical thing within the gift to account for a social practice while leaving the underlying social mechanism itself unexplained resembles the introduction of a *deus ex machina* to tie up loose ends in a story plot.

As one of the first to present his critique on the *Essay on the Gift*, Raymond Firth held that the *hau* Mauss was referring to did not exist, since "[attributing] the scrupulousness in settling one's obligations to a belief in an active, detached fragment of personality […] is an abstraction which receives no support from native evidence (Firth 1959 [1929]: 421)." Furthermore, Firth held the view that the explanations for reciprocity should rather be understood as the avoidance of social sanctions, such as the desire to continue useful economic relations and the maintenance of prestige and power, that do not have to rely on esoteric credence – in other words, Equality Matching for the sake of Market Pricing and Authority Ranking relations. Lévi-Strauss (1997) likewise laments that Mauss was misled by native "ghosts and goblins" stories. According to Lévi-Strauss any notion of *hau* in the gift was nothing more than a "*truc indigène*" (Godelier 1999).

Remarkably, it seems that the concept of a spirit in the gift has again gained some momentum with the theories of materiality and objects as subjects discussed above. Moreover, the idea that things can be autonomous and somehow can have the same qualitative status as human beings has always been present in works that were influenced by Mauss (1990). Particularly discussions of the status of gifts

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8 The connection between exchange and magic would be further examined by Thurnwald in his "Economics in Primitive Communities" (Thurnwald 1932).

9 These two distinct lines of critiques both focus on Mauss' application of the Maori concept of *hau*. Aside from the critique on the *hau* as "floating signifier", scholars have pointed to problems when applying secondary data on the *hau* in order to introduce this hypothesis of the spirit in the gift. This line of critique is interesting in its own right, but not of direct concern here (e.g. Graeber 2001: 178-181; Sahlins 1972: Chapter 4; Sigaud 2003).

in contrast to that of commodities refer to the notion that gifts and persons are commensurable (e.g. Gregory 1982).[10] In some recent material culture theories, the spirit in the gift that was independent of individual human actors has expanded in scope under the headings of "thing", "fetishism" and materiality (Dobres and Robb 2005; Gosden 2005; Keane 2006; Pels 2005).

The point of this short critique of the *hau,* spirit and materiality of gift objects is to shift the emphasis away from the idea that persons and things can impact one another because they are categorically similar. Consider the idea that the majority of objects that circulate between humans are not perceived as alive or as "fetishes". In practice, most objects that are exchanged do not need a spirit or force to circulate in human networks.[11] Instead of person-thing commensurability I wish to shift the focus to how humans and objects (systemically) stand in relation to each other and how socio-material dynamics can effectuate a diverse yet inherently linked set of social and material cultural relations. The general idea is that things that are part of social networks have a different dynamic from objects that are not. For example, I can enjoy an artefact I excavated by putting it in my private stash, but the a-sociality of the situation will prevent it from having the same impact on social networks of myself and others as it would have when displayed in a museum – in fact it is likely even my enjoyment of the object would decrease if it was based on a purely solitary relation between myself and the artefact (Graeber 2001: 260).

A physical transfer of objects is also never the same as a "service", i.e. non-materially expressed social relations. In his essay Mauss somewhat conflates the two.[12] However the reality is that, while the former has a physical presence after the exchange has been made, the latter is based only in the cerebra of those that were witness to the exchange – and their perceptions and recollections may vary. Graeber, in an excellent reappraisal of Mauss his discussion (2001: 169-188) also reconnects the *hau* and similar magical forces explicitly to the material condition of human sociality. He contends that because of the functioning of the Maori exchange system (in which a donor can basically request anything from a recipient, leaving the recipient completely in the donor's *tapu*, or "sphere of influence") the *hau* should indeed be considered a type of gift and not as a magical force. The gift of something invested with *hau* is a clever "intentional movement", a material social stratagem, of a thing towards one's creditor in order to avert his or her influence.

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10 A good example of this the concept of "object biography", also popular in archaeology (cf. Kopytoff 1986). Although it is clear that objects can have their own "narratives", a story of its use-life, this is too often directly taken to mean that an artefact may have been considered to be actually alive.

11 Granted, as we shall see below, some objects will have a kind of subjectivity. Nevertheless saying that these objects are therefore commensurable with persons is missing the point. These objects circulate between or are otherwise part of other relations than exist between humans alone: i.e. their defining relational characteristic is that they are part of relations between humans and *other than human* beings (see also Mol 2007, note 1).

12 It has to be noted that this conflation between non-material and material relations is present in the original French term "*prestations*" used by Mauss (1923/1924) to indicate gift relations. However, in the 1990 English version of the essay this term has been translated as "services". This is somewhat unfortunate because Mauss also uses the French "*services*" to denote relations that may only be immaterially expressed.

Furthermore, social relations stick to things and things stick around. Thus, aside from the "externalization through materialization" of human socio-politics, material culture can also function effectively as corporate memory-bases (Dyke and Alcock 2003; Mills and Walker 2008). The relations a human can have with and through things will be there after other people are not present. In such a way things become social by proxy and what are considered as, in theory, predominantly spiritual or social relations will become material.

The interdependency of persons and gifts

It is thus my contention that the value of Mauss's "The Gift" is as a theory of sociality by the mechanism of the materialized social contract (cf. Corbey 2006), rather than as a theory of reciprocity or thing and person commensurability as is often done in retrospect. The former is also how the essay has been used in most ethnographical studies it is referenced in (Sykes 2005). The majority of gift case studies do not focus on the spiritual essence of gifts – although this will generally play a very important in their emic conceptualization – but rather on their social and material dynamics. For those coming after Mauss, exchange does not occur because things *contain* a magical spirit, but because they *stand in relation to* persons.[13] This reading of the gift can also be literally found back in the above-mentioned essay. It is true that Mauss is not outspoken about this particular topic, but he does make the following remark towards the conclusion of his discussion of the *potlatch*. This small sentence already expresses the concept that part of one's own being is material and "external" – that which is visible to others – because it is part of social relations:

> *"The circulation of goods follows that of men, women, and children, of feasts, rituals, ceremonies, and dances, and even that of jokes and insults. All in all, it one and the same. […B]y giving one is giving oneself, and if one gives oneself, it is because one 'owes' oneself – one's persons and one's goods – to others"* Mauss 1990: 58-59.

Subsequently, anthropologists who have actively framed their research, carried out in various settings and various locations, around the question of the gift consistently engaged the topic of personhood and communal identity in relation to the gift. This has led to numerous culturally specific examples of this phenomenon that have contributed immensely to a cross-cultural understanding of personhood and society. This has shown that, aside from the type of evocative give and take of the type of "Archaic" societies Mauss focused on, gift giving is still a central tenet of many contemporary societies.

In the Soviet Union during the rule of Stalin, for example, it was customary for international and national institutes (ranging from the Supreme Soviet to provincial factories) to present personal gifts to the General Secretary on the

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13 This is not necessary a novel idea. R. W. Emerson (1844), for example, distinguishes this nuclear element of gift giving. "[I] like to see that we cannot be bought and sold", but that "[t]he only gift is a portion of thyself" (*ibid*: 26).

occasion of his birthday (Ssorin-Chaikov 2006). The thing presented to Stalin was often something that reminded of the gift's origin, regional culinary specialities for example, or of the type of person that Stalin was believed to be. Stalin then often redistributed these gifts, especially the ones that bore his countenance. Interestingly, these things were treated with the highest degree of decorum.[14] One could say that gifts from Stalin that were somehow inherently linked to the person of Stalin are a characteristic example of the distorted nature of Soviet political ideologies. Nevertheless even in capitalist societies relations of persons with things has the power to change the relations between persons, by moving even the most basic "stuff" from Market Pricing models of relations into other social spheres and vice versa (Kopytoff 1986).

For example, in the U.S.A. an event such as a garage sale, in which one sells personal belongings to complete strangers, is not only about making money through the sale of commodities (Herrmann 1997). Prices paid for the objects are small, but values attached to them by either donor or recipient can be great. Often potential buyers receive gifts in the form of discounts or free "stuff" if the person hosting the garage sale feels a personal connection with the buyers. In certain extreme cases donors and recipients imagine that something that was once theirs now has the opportunity for a second life with the new owner, while still remaining tied to their original owner, as well (*ibid.*: 918-920). The gift is in this sense an extension and renewal of the self as a partly Communal Sharing model of relation, but giving or receiving a gift also acts as a constituent of one's status as a person and can therefore create socially and material Authority Ranking hierarchies.

This can even elevate normal persons to a categorically different status such as in the case of the late, saintly monk Thamanya Hsayadaw. His birthday was, as was Stalin's birthday – to make a politically incorrect comparison –, celebrated by means of an extensive presentation and redistribution of gifts (Rozenberg 2004). In generally, such exchanges between Burmese Buddhist monks and the laity are one of material and immaterial asymmetry. A layperson presents a gift to a monk who reciprocates by acknowledging its merit and thus the merit of the person in the gift itself. Additionally, the monk is supposed to renounce the material profit

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14 For instance, the Russian author Agranovskii recalls the following event that took place during a trip of his orphanage to a confectionary factory involving the person of Stalin and a particularly impressive gift that was on display there: "[I]n a small hall in front of the director's office a huge bust of Stalin, made of chocolate, was exhibited. […] I don't know who touched the pedestal where the bust was seated. The fact remains that Stalin's bust tottered and fell down, breaking into many large and small pieces. Our teachers were stunned. And the director, when he jumped out of his office and saw what had happened to the chocolate Leader of All the Progressive Humanity, went completely white, then looked at us with suddenly empty eyes […] and uttered almost without any voice and with only half of his mouth open […]: 'Eat it!'
We heard his command, and not just heard it but correctly understood it – and jumped… on the Best Friend and the Teacher of All Soviet Children. The first thing that struck me (and, maybe others as well, but we did not share these thoughts) was that Stalin turned out to be empty inside… I got a huge ear […]. On another occasion we would have luxuriated on this ear for the whole day… but now we finished Stalin quickly… Nothing was left of Stalin, not a single crumb: the director, we think, even forbade sweeping the floor – which would be an extra blasphemy… – not that there was anything left to sweep; it was Stalin, after all" (Agranovskii in Ssorin-Chaikov 2006).

that the gift provides and would therefore be best off by redistributing his material wealth, although in practice this is more the exception than the norm.

Thamanya Hsayadaw did live up to this expectation of renunciation, even when he received a huge number of presents during this ceremony in honour of his birthday, which could go on for 1 day or more. The large number of gifts and his ability to reciprocate them were a yardstick of his sanctity and in this sense affirmed his living sainthood. At the same time he renounced the gifts by redistributing his material wealth. One portion thereof served to feed those attending the ceremony, while the larger part was redistributed among the other monks in attendance. This redistribution among monks created "a radical rupture" between them. The birthday ceremony materialized the claim that "there is no possible comparison between Thamanya Hsayadaw and the other monks" (*ibid.*: 512). By receiving and giving away material gains Thamanya Hsayadaw doubly reaffirmed his sainthood.

There are many more examples from past and present societies that indicate the way in which persons and things are tangled up in the act of being social: for example, the restitution of gift-souvenirs taken from dead enemies by WW II veterans to their family members (Harrison 2008); the passing on of unopened and unused gifts in Japan (Daniels 2009); literally presenting one's person through the gift of a part of one's own body (Copeman 2005; Simpson 2004); giving to one's spiritual self by extending one's material wealth to one's church and fellow believers (Coleman 2004). This can all be synthesized by the realization that in these situations things and persons, while not necessarily commensurable, are interdependent. In a practical sense, things are of persons and persons are in things. As such, they are tied together in socio-material networks.

While Mauss mostly deals with maintaining relations of people using things, new social ties are also created through this interdependency. This goes back to his original question concerning the origin of the triple obligation to give, receive and give in return. Mauss's answer to this question is twofold. While the essay focuses almost entirely on the reason for reciprocation, a small part concentrates on the reason for giving and receiving. Both are explained rather curtly and culminate in the following statement: "To refuse to give, to fail to invite, just as to refuse to accept, is tantamount to declaring war; it is to reject the bond of alliance and commonality" (Mauss 1990: 17).

It is remarkable that this explanation has not received more direct discussion both from Mauss and his followers (see Corbey 2006; Graeber 2001: 152-155; Sahlins 1972: Chapter 4, 2008), because it states in so many words that a social action – the gift and its reception – is needed in order for there to be a social bond.

It pre-supposes a reality in which it is not the gift that is the total social fact, but the absence of "bonds of alliance and communality", i.e. social networks.[15]

This theme has already been dealt with in the beginning of this chapter, where I discussed how both Hobbes (1651) and Rousseau (1754) found the origin of social morality within communal material interests and how this was reflected in the interactions between European colonizers and indigenous people at the very beginning of contact.

The problem with this concept is that it can result in rather antithetical views on moral and political economies. On one side it can lead to a materialistic, neo-liberal view on human social networks, in which a desire for things – "man's natural propensity to truck, barter and exchange one thing for another" (Smith 2009 [1776]: 19) – is at the heart of their sociality. On the other hand we see the classical Marxist idea of the "material base of society", i.e. the idea that when people "(re-)organize" the production and alienation of things they start to re-organize the ideology that drives their social networks.[16] In essence, both neo-liberal and Marxist theory ground their models of society in a materially-based perspective. However, rather than siding with one of these two overwhelming theoretical traditions, it is more suitable to find out if this reasoning is also present in non-Western social ontologies.

Such a project has already been carried out by David Graeber, whose rational I follow here (2001: specifically Chapter 4, see also 2011). His work is a re-appraisal of Marxist, (neo-)liberal and, more importantly, many non-Western theories of value. It points to the fact that the various forms of "social totalities" – from globalized consumerism to highly ritualized exchange ceremonies in the remotest corners of history and the earth – have in common that they apply "creative energies" arising from the production and exchange of things to "produce people." This need for creating social relations will be discussed more in-depth in Chapter 7 in the context of the "political economy of life" of late pre-contact Hispaniola. Here, communities and their leaders were always looking to draw in new political allies into their sphere of influence in order to compete with others and maintain their own viability (Santos-Granero 2009b).

15 This is not to say that war or interpersonal conflict is not intimately linked to social interaction. As Mauss points out here and in other places (Corbey 2006), society is composed of both contracts and conflicts. This is especially true for indigenous Lowland South America where inter-village exchange and raiding networks are often one and the same (Lévi-Strauss 1943). Social interactions can be antagonistic relations (Mol 2007). Direct violent, conflict, whether physical or not, is a form of interaction that precludes all other types of social relations. You cannot solicit gifts while smashing your exchange partners' head. The result hereof is that conflict (inter-personal violence, war, even verbal arguments) and contract (exchange, cooperation, agreements) alternate.

16 The following excerpt from the German Ideology written by Marx and Engels, is a mode-of-production-flavoured echo of Rousseau's idea on the emergence of the social contract: "By producing their means of subsistence men are indirectly producing their actual material life. […]This production only makes its appearance with the increase of population. In its turn this presupposes the interaction of individuals with one another. The form of this intercourse is again determined by production" (Marx and Engels 1970 [1845-1846]: 42).

The idea of "production of people" starts from the absence of relations. As humans are inherently social, not engaging in social interaction denies their humanity. The opposite is true, as well. Nevertheless, it is precarious to assume that other human beings are inherently sociable. Thus, if you wish to "create a person", it is best to first socialize him or her. Gifts are an excellent way to do this – a concept also found in Lowland South America (Santos-Granero 2007; Vaughn Howard 2001). Obviously, certain things are more suitable than others when creating new social ties, because certain things are more broadly valued (see Chapter 8). What is valued and what is not depends upon local norms (Bourdieu 1984).

This becomes clearer when these relations are being created in encounters between socio-cultural others (Thomas 1991). On the other hand, ethnographic and socio-cognitive case studies suggest that humans have quite a capacity to appreciate – not necessarily agree with – the value of each other's (material) cultures. If value systems roughly align across the cultures involved it is only normal for social networks to evolve from material exchanges, a situation Gosden (2004) calls "middle ground". From this common ground, mutual understanding may follow. As Columbus remarks during his visit to an indigenous village on the north coast of Hispaniola:

> *"Some ran here, others ran there to bring us the bread made of yams, which they call* ajes*, very white and good, and they brought water in gourds and terra-cotta jugs made like those of Castile, and they gave all they had and knew what the Admiral wanted, and they did it all with such an open heart and with such joy that it was a wonder to behold. 'Let no one say,' declares the Admiral, 'that what they gave was worth little and therefore they gave generously, because those who gave pieces of gold did so as generously as those who gave a gourd of water. Besides it is easy, 'continues the Admiral, 'to tell when one gives something with his heart, truly wishing to give"* (Navarette 1922: 115, translation from Beckwith 1990.[17]).

This vivid, if perhaps somewhat romantic, account reaffirms that cultural and linguistic barriers are easily negotiated in socio-material networks (see also the above citation from the Diary of Columbus on his interactions with Guacanagarí). However, this type of inter-cultural connectivity was only found in the earliest period of contact in the Greater Antilles. Socio-material ties ultimately proved to be too weak to counter the strong prejudices and lust for gold expressed by the Spaniards (Keehnen 2011; Valcárcel Rojas 2012). In the Caribbean this process resulted in things, which were once freely given or exchanged (Communal Sharing

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17 *"[L]os unos corrían de acá y los otros de alía a nos traer pan, que hacen de ñames, aquellos llaman ajes, que es muy blanco y bueno, y nos traían aguas en calabazas y en cantaros de barro de la hechura de los de Castilla, y nos traían cuanto en el mundo tenían y sabían que el Almirante quería, y todo con un corazón tan largo y tan contento que era maravilla; y no se diga que por lo que daban valía poco por eso lo daban líberamente, dice el Almirante, porque lo mismo hacían, y tan liberalmente, los que daban pedazos de oro como los que daban la calabaza del agua y fácil cosa es de conocer (dice el Almirante) cuando seda una cosa con muy deseoso corazón de dar"*
(de Navarete 1922: 115)

or Equality Matching), that had to be paid as tribute (Authority Ranking and Market Pricing). These tribute systems, such as the *encomiendas* established in Hispaniola and other parts of the Spanish American empire, were also socio-material in nature. An *encomendero* would task a *cacique* or other indigenous leader with gathering a certain amount of gold or other goods from his people. If unsuccessful he would face (corporeal) punishment. Yet such an unbalanced Authority Ranking-based relation ultimately only brought death or slavery to indigenous peoples and falling productivity to the *encomenderos* (Valcárcel Rojas 2012). The latter is a negative example in which the balance of "creative energies" was hugely distorted, as so often occurred in colonial or imperial enterprises (Graeber 2011). Nevertheless, in general, colonial socio-material networks were evolutionary stable, since in many cases they were and are still able to bring about mutual profit.

In fact, from a networked cost-benefit analysis, this would be the most logical outcome, since one tie always connects two nodes. In other words, where one person is socialized with a gift, so, from the other's perspective, is the donor. Naturally people also create new connections in material networks when they interact (Kandler and Laland 2009; Levinson 2006; Padgett and Powell 2012; Steele, *et al.* 2010). Various objects and technologies will be connected for the first time, out of which increasingly complex artefact forms, technologies and other material practices may arise – e.g. "terra-cotta jugs made like those of Castile", mantles and shoes as a new addition to the regalia of Antillean *caciques*, indigenous valuables at courts across Europe, and, later, indigenous tobacco creating a wide range of smoker's paraphernalia, potatoes that partly powered the Industrial revolution, *etc.* (Crosby 2003). Socio-material interdependencies were thus also the cause for the production of new ties between things.

Kula: from gift relations to socio-material network

Maussian theories of gift exchange focus on dyadic relations, on a pair of persons and their things. One may wonder if this perspective that emphasizes reciprocal relations between a pair of individuals is compatible with a network perspective, which tries to take account of a whole system of such relations? To answer this I will present a brief case-study based on the Melanesian *kula*, to show that gift relations between persons can quickly grow into a network of persons, especially when material culture is involved.[18] The *kula* is a set of elaborate social practices, centred on the exchange of *vaygu'a*, or "valuables" (e.g. Campbell 2002; Leach and Leach 1983; Malinowski 1922; Munn 1986; Weiner 1992). This exchange phenomenon rose to fame thanks to Bronisław Malinowski (1922), the first anthropologist to develop a clear methodology for anthropological fieldwork as a participant observer (Sykes 2005: 46). During fieldwork in the Trobriand Islands, and attempting to describe Trobriand society as a whole, Malinowski became fascinated by this exchange.

18 These exchanges from a graph theoretical perspective will not be discussed here as this issue has already been dealt with extensively by Hage and Harary (1991).

In turn archaeologists examining past exchange systems have often been caught by the exchanges Malinowski describes. In Caribbean archaeology and beyond it is therefore a beloved, but sometimes misconstrued (Spriggs 2008), icon, as well as an evocative analogue for other prehistoric exchange systems (e.g. Knippenberg 2007; Renfrew 1986; Spielmann 2002; Tilley 1996; Watters 1997). This work also adds to this *kula* analogy obsession, but only moderately so. I do not claim that direct analogies between twentieth-century island Melanesia and the pre-colonial Caribbean are in order, but I hold the view that this proto-typical exchange practice does clearly illustrate the interdependencies between social and material networks.

Kula valuables come in two types: necklaces of red shell, called *soulava*, and white shell bracelets, called *mwali*, which are exchanged for one another along *keda* or "paths". This exchange is highly ceremonial, involving magic spells and strict taboos.[19] Sea travel is the only way to reach exchange partners in other regions. Because inter-island travel is too dangerous and costly for a man to do on his own, *kula* expeditions are organized in which a group of men sets out to exchange *kula* valuables with their trade partners on the nearest neighbouring island. During the 1980s the system was still present in approximately thirty communities that stretch out across island Melanesian over an area known as the Massim, sometimes called the Kula ring (Leach and Leach 1983). It is talked about as if it was a game and men exchanging *kula* are referred to as players. Just like excelling in certain sports increases one's social standing, the success of *kula* players influences their and their clan's socio-political status (Liep 1991; Munn 1986).

A *kula* exchange or *wasi* begins when A gives to a desired exchange partner B a *vaga*, an opening gift. This is done with the idea in mind that when B gets his hand on either a desirable *soulava* or *mwali* A will receive this as a *yotile*, a return gift. If too much time passes between the *vaga* of A and the *yotile* of B, B is expected to give a *basi*, a smaller bracelet or necklace, as intermediary gift. This in turn obliges A to return the *basi*, with a *basi* of his own. In the case that B has multiple exchange partners and has a *kula* valuable that is a particularly fine specimen, which is desired by more than one exchange partner, these partners have the option to give *pokala* or *kaributu*, non-*kula* gifts (of which the stone axe *kaributu* is the most valued) These are meant to persuade the exchange partner into exchanging his *kula* valuable. When B finally presents the closing gift to A that will balance the equation. This is called the *kudu* (Malinowski 1922: 98-99). It should be clear that all of these exchanges are social interactions in which the Equality Matching relational model dominates – It does indeed matter what is exchanged, between who, when and how much, but there is no absolute exchange ratio.

19 The *kula* valuables are meant to be displayed by women, but their exchange is essentially a male practice (Weiner 1990).

Fiske (1991: 16-17) also references the exchange of *kula* valuables as a prototypical model of balanced exchange separate of formal economic ratios and rationality.[20] However, aside from *kula* exchange, Malinowski (1922: 96, 176-192), also reported the existence of extensive barter trading or *gimwali*. According to Malinowksi there were huge differences between *gimwali* and *wasi*. While one was Market Pricing barter, the latter was a highly ceremonial activity and signified a precarious moment in the social life of an individual and group in which things could easily fall either way.[21] Interestingly enough *gimwali* would still go on in tandem with *wasi* exchanges, often with the same group of trading partners. However, in the *kula* ring the models of relations belonged to separate "spheres of exchange". This means that, in theory, one exchange networks is completely independent of another, because value conversion between the two spheres of exchange is impossible (Sillitoe 2006).

Although it is a highly important aspect of social life and can be the main model through which relations are framed, it would be highly impractical if Equality Matching was the only model of relation. If a *kula* exchange goes wrong fortunes are lost, but it is always possible to start over again. Yet, if an expedition would run out of supplies, it would be unthinkable to exchange *soulava* or *mwali* directly for *taro* or other foodstuffs. That is why these things can be bartered for outside of the Equality Matching model of relations of highly ceremonial and precarious gift giving between individuals who are competitors that must try to have a balanced, non-ratio relation. In addition, the ingredients necessary for making new *mwali or soulava* often have to be bartered or, nowadays, paid for with non-Kula ring communities (Campbell 2002). Market pricing g*imwali* and Equality Matching *wasi* are linked.

A successful player is due considerable respect in his own community or clan, this does not imply he is a categorically differently ranked person in communal life. Many of these communal relations are built on various types of exchanges that are more Authority Ranking than Equality Matching or Market Pricing. Communal Authority Ranking is built on social contracts with the wider kin network of a person, especially affinal relations. Every year during the yam harvest men are obliged to present part of their harvest to their affinal kin. This harvest is housed and displayed in personally owned yam houses, built and filled by one's affinal kin, especially the son-in-law. At the same time this yam house will be emptied by transferring one's yams to the yam house of one's affinal kin on the side of the

20 In fact, the characterization of the *kula* as an Equality Matching model of relations – avant la lettre – had been one of Bronisław Malinowski's main motives (Wilk and Cligget 2007). If 'primitive economics' were at all covered by the economic theory of the early 20th century it followed the neoclassical tradition set out by Adam Smith 150 years earlier (Smith 1776). In this view non-western, non-market economies were considered as a precursor to a capitalist monetary economy and were believed to rely solely on barter in order to see to their wants and needs (e.g. Bücher 1893). Unhappy with the way in which the practice of exchange in non-market societies was approached in *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* Malinowski (1922) set out to disprove neo-economic theories of exchange.

21 *Wasi* and other type of Equality Matching exchanges are often similar. They transcend the everyday practice of give and take between humans and distil it into a focal point – a node – of relations that are 'socio-cosmic' rather than economic (Bourdieu 1997; Dumont 1970).

spouse. This obligation sometimes continues even beyond the death of the spouse. This is not a matter of an exact Market Pricing tribute, one yam for you, three for me. Neither is it framed in Equality Matching terms. Rather it simply is a matter of showcasing who owes allegiance to whom, i.e. it ranks persons and even whole clans on an ordinal scale. Ultimately, stock of yams in Massim villages displays the Authority Ranking of extended kin and, by extension, the Authority Ranking relations in the community itself. Outside of the community or clan, these publicly displayed Authority Ranking networks can then be used in displays of generosity to others – such Communal Sharing models of relation always have a potential for becoming Authority Ranking models of relation, such as in the case of the American Northwest coast *potlatch* (Mauss 1990; Rosman and Rubel 1986), or as a base to acquire *vaygu'a* in order to enter into Equality Matching *wasi* exchanges. These relations then garner social standing or "fame" for the whole of the island community, providing an alternative inter-communal Authority Ranking (Damon 2002; Munn 1986).

The same can be said when referring to the *kula* valuables themselves. Annette Weiner (1992) has highlighted this central role of the most valued *mwali* armband and *soulava* necklaces in the Trobriands. During her fieldwork on women valuables she established that many social relations of Kula playing communities were structured around keeping a certain highly valued *mwali* or *soulava* out of exchange. Instead of focusing on social relations as the shaping mechanism of individual and communal identity, her research concentrated on things excluded from the exchange structure. In a cross-cultural review of similar practices, she postulated that such things are of a nature so inalienable that to exchange or otherwise lose them would cause a change in society that would be extremely detrimental to individual and communal identity. Nevertheless, it is difficult to keep a *vaygu'a* out of the hands of its "suitors."[22]

Kula is a very competitive game played for the highest political stakes. Being a successful player means transcending one's kinship group and connecting oneself with an elite group of men (Munn 1986: 71). Not exchanging *soulava* or *mwali* means not being able to participate fully in the world of inter-communal politics. In addition there is the tug of exchanges that are external to the *kula*. Promising a *kula* valuable to a partner is a way of keeping it safe from being exchanged in a non-*kula* exchange. When one man has many *keda*, or *kula* paths, this offers a way of forestalling the forever ongoing exchange by manipulating them in such a fashion that the choice of who is going to receive what can be postponed and postponed again (Weiner 1992: 140). Some very successful players can put off exchanging the most esteemed *soulava* and *mwali* for the duration of a generation,

22 The paradox here lies in the fact that, because these inalienable possessions are the most potent force in the effort to prevent such things from happening, they at the same time represent the threat. Herein lays, according to Weiner, the paradoxical function of the exchange of things: to keep inalienable things out of exchange through the gift of some other object. A good example of this keeping-while-giving are the *basi* gifts consisting of minor *kula* valuables to avoid the alienation of a more precious *mwali* or *soulava* (Malinowski 1922: 98-99).

up to 2 decades. Instead of the threat of the loss of a valuable, the owner risks the danger of *keda* withering and harmful sorcery by covetous or jealous individuals.

In Weiner's original analysis, "keeping-while-giving" practices are underlain by the incest taboo. Be that as it may, to my mind her work shows first and foremost that it is not only persons that are in the middle of social networks. The "fame" of *kula* players and communities is for a great deal dependent on the "fame" of the object itself (Damon 2002; Munn 1986; Weiner 1987). This fame of the *kula* valuable is contained in a narrative of why, when, where and between whom it was exchanged. Therefore, the value of an individual *mwali* or *soulava* is constructed through and during its circulation: if it is held by renowned *kula* players the object's value would have increased accordingly – something Malinowski already remarked upon (Malinowski 1922: 511). Thus, in order to know the value of a *mwali* or *soulava* the players must know the exact itinerary of the *kula* path the object had travelled on and the "fame" of all its individual keepers many of whom a player will never have met, because they had already passed away or lived beyond his range of mobility. For instance, for the documented case of the *mwali* Nonowan the recorded history runs between 1938 and 1976. It comprises a list of twenty-four exchange partners, divided among fourteen communities dispersed over a distance of 300 km (Damon 1980). Advanced *kula* players, who would be partaking in several *kula* paths, needed great skill in tracking multiple networks of things and people in order to be successful and gain personal "fame".

What this aspect of "fame" in the *Kula* ring shows is that the centrepiece of this exchange system, the *mwali* and *soulava*, are socio-material nodes. They are, of course, also things on their own: beautiful ornaments fabricated from local and exotic materials. Yet their most important quality arises from their participation in specific social networks: "tournaments of value" in which individuals and their communities play for the highest stake (Appadurai 1986: 21). Their success was dependent on the keeping and giving of famous *mwali* and *soulava*, which was again based on the fame of its previous keepers, *etc.* The community of players were part of larger communal and inter-island social networks. Nonetheless their "fame" and their community's standing in these networks was for a great deal based on their access to and understanding of the material network-part of the *kula* "tournament of value". In other words, *kula* is not just a type of social network or a collection of (in)alienable valuables (Malinowski 1922; Weiner 1990), it was an interdependent socio-material network.

The *kula* exchange has been studied from a graph theoretical approach (Hage and Harary 1991). However, as can be expected, this analysis has concentrated on how humans have structured the *kula* network. The mini-*kula* exchange model, featuring only 4 players and 2 valuables, in Figure 4.1 is more in line with analyses such as those of Weiner that focus on how the objects themselves have a large impact on the overall structure. The figure depicts a *soulava* A and a *mwali* B that increase in "fame" (size of the node) as they travels along their path, thereby also increasing the fame of its keepers (1-4). These, in turn, increase the "fame" of the valuable. Interactions of past phases are indicated by decreasingly smaller ties. Note that this is a situation in which every keeper remembers all past exchanges of

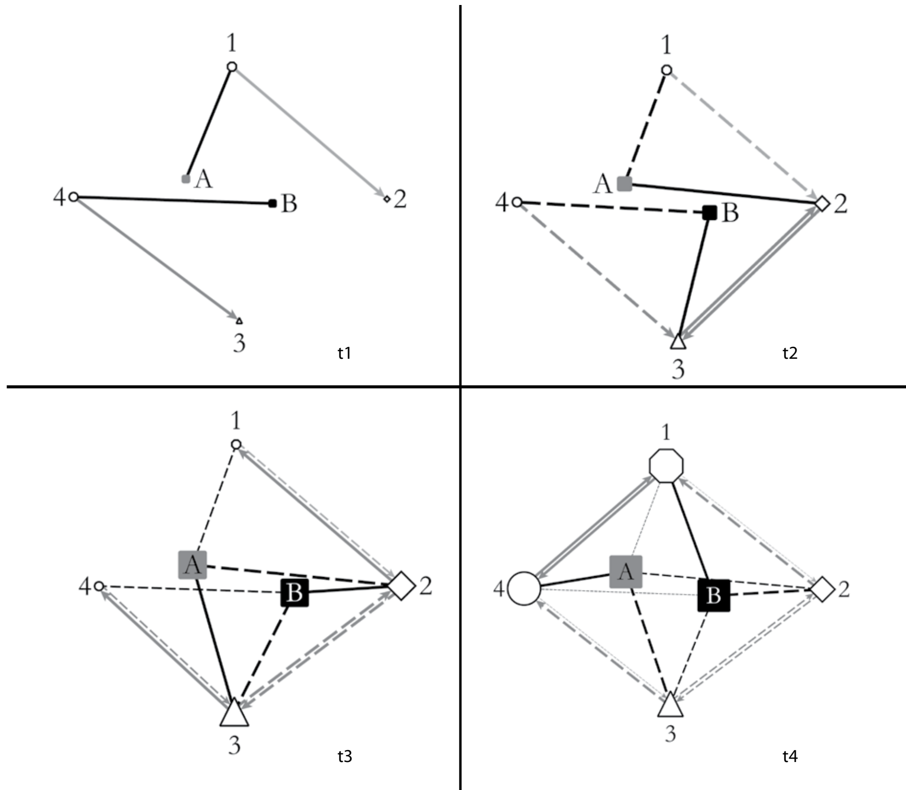

Figure 4.1: One cycle of the kula *as socio-material network The size of the* soulava *A and a* mwali *B nodes and the "keeper" nodes 1 to 4 indicates the "fame" of the object and person respectively. Because they are interdependent they reciprocally increase each other's fames. In this model past exchanges are remembered (indicated by decreasingly smaller ties). This network memory prompts quite a high rate of inflation (incremental node growth).*

A and B, which prompts quite a high rate of inflation (incremental node growth). Additionally, it should be clear that the "fame" of node A is not only linked to its keepers, but through them also to B and vice versa. Aside from showing the interdependency of *kula* players and valuables, this model also makes clear how easy it is to progress from the Maussian relation of give and take between two persons to a wider socio-material network.

Object perspectivism and socio-material interdependency

What about the confluences between social and material networks in Amerindian theories of culture and society? To answer that question we should re-visit Viveiros de Castro's (1998) model of perspectivism. As Viveiros de Castro pointed out in a further refinement of his model, the subjectivity of any being is not a fundamental given. Rather it is influenced and activated through the perspective of and interactions with others. Here, the state of being a subject, is a quality

of an individual that is interdependent with the perspective and agency of other subjects. One way in which this interdependency is manifested is in the widespread Amerindian perspectivist concept of what, for lack of a better term, may be called a "life-force". This life-force rests in human but also bodies of other types of subjects (Århem 1996; Santos-Granero 2009b; Vaughn Howard 2001). It is an integral part of a person but is not contained to a physical body and can "leak" into peoples, places or things with which a subject interacts with. A person's things are conceived of as being infused with a specific person's life-force and thus the personal qualities of its owner. For example, the passing on of a thing from a peaceable person to another is expected to effectuate a pro-social tendency in the recipient (Vaughn Howard 2001). The specific social state of a person is thus directly dependent upon whom he or she interacts with.

This concept of life-force is also closely examined in Oliver's 2009 publication on socio-political alliances and *cemís*. *Cemís* have traditionally been perceived as being a class of objects, specifically three pointed artefacts (de Hostos 1923; Rouse 1992). He shows how persons of great import, both human and other than human beings, were connected through *cemí* exchange and idolatry. In this sense their exchange is a social and material network in which a particular class of things has a central position, such as the *kula* exchange. However, Oliver (2009: 59-60) suggests that *cemí* was (also) a "numinous force", a potency contained in both human and other than human beings that could have been transferred between them.[23] In this sense, there seems to be some local base for Maussian theories of the inspirited gift.

In the context of the perspectivism model peoples and things have another type of interdependency, too. While the original model of perspectivism only incorporated humans, animals and spirits as subjects, it has recently been extended to also include the Amerindian theory that objects can also be (multi-) perspectivist subjects. In *The Occult Life of Things*, Santos-Granero (2009a, editor) and other Lowland South American ethnographers present examples of the shifting subjective states of objects in Amerindian ontologies. Their work implies that objects can also change perspectives and subjective states – i.e. see themselves as and often outwardly become more human. Early historic descriptions suggest that the objects humans used to engage with other than human beings were more than ritual imagery or paraphernalia or even carriers of personhood: they were powerful subjects in their own right. This is clearly represented in the discussions on individual *cemís* in the work of Pané, such as below:

> *"This* zemi *Guabancex was in the country of a great cacique, one of the principal caciques, whose name was Aumatex […] and they say that there are two others in her company; one is a herald, and the other a gatherer and governor of the waters.*

23 The Greater Antillean, Arawakan *cemí* can be traced back to a similar term in Lokono (True Arawak). Here *seme* or *semehi* denotes "the good spirits that help the medicine man" and a shaman or curer is known as *sémi-či* . *Seme* also means "sweetness" in Lokono, however (de Goeje 2009 [1929]: 200). Oliver connects these two meanings and re-interprets *cemí* as being a spiritual quality. Following this, what archaeologists call '*cemís*' are actually the things that are capable of possessing *cemí*, by that quality becoming a type of "idols" or "fetishes" (Oliver 2009).

> *And they say when Guabancex grows angry, she moves the wind and water and tears down the houses and uproots the trees. They say this* zemi *is a woman and made of stones from that country"* (Pané 1999 [1571]: 30).

In an academic European frame of mind, a spirit who is also a woman made of stones is a contradiction of states and therefore must ultimately denote a metaphoric, allegoric or other type of symbolic relation. Yet in a multi-perspectivist ontology there is not necessarily a contradiction of states and it is possible to literally be a stone-woman-spirit. If we accept this as a reality and not as a "*truc indigène*", as Lévi-Strauss would call it, this entails that the spirit in the gift or the socio-materiality of relations has an added dimension in the sense that one could not only interact through but also with material culture.

Pané's account has several instances describing such socio-material relations between humans and spirit-things, discussed in great detail in Oliver's 2009 book. These fragmentary examples of human and object relations affirm that where the agency of things is a logical abduction in our society (Gell 1998), from an indigenous Antillean perspective (some) objects literally could be subjects. In this capacity they would have had even more of a formalizing role in the interpersonal and intercommunal networks of humans than the things in the ethnographic examples on gift giving, as discussed above. What is more, these stories indicate that *cemís* even regularly dominated humans. For example, a *cemí*, called Baibramá, "brought diseases to those who had made that *zemi*, because they had not taken him *yuca* to eat" (p. 27).

On the other hand, even if objects sometimes lorded over humans, further exploration of their status as subjects shows they were actually quite dependent on humans. In Lowland South America the subjectivity of material objects will be activated by coming into contact with humans. In fact, in many of the Lowland South American cases that are discussed in *The Occult Life of Things* objects cannot reach full agentive potential without their intervention. Only when activated by a human subject, do material objects become semi-autonomous agents taking their own decisions and exerting influence over humans. This story from the Warao provides an example of how this happens and the sometimes undesirable effects it can cause to human beings:

> *"Once a young man went along the river all alone, carrying a bow and arrow in his hands. Without realizing it the young man was heading toward Skull. On and on he went until he came to a basket lying there on the ground. The young man touched the basket with his arrow and the basket ran up to him and hugged him around his neck. As it hugged him, it said it would be easy to cut his throat. The young man said, 'Don't cut my throat. Let's be partners. We can talk and I will go with you.' So with Partner went Skull, hanging onto his neck"* (Wilbert 1970: 170).

Subsequently, the young man reluctantly hunts animals for the basket for some time, until he deliberately misses his target and has to search for the arrow. He then takes this opportunity to run away and hide from the basket. The basket tries to follow and kill him, but ends up falling in the river and transforms into a

caribe, a carnivorous fish. The interchange of the subjective state of the Skull, the basket, and Partner, the man, is straightforward in this example: the young man touched the basket by which it changed from an object into a spirit-thing. This then literally created a socio-material tie between the young man and the basket. The basket even becomes the dominant subject by enforcing its will by means of physical threats. Yet when the contact between the human and the thing came to an end, the basket was literally lost, falling into the river and loosing (some of) its potential to inflict harm.

This idea that objects become powerful subjects through mediation of a human being can also be found in the invaluable account delivered by Fray Ramon Pané (1999 [1571]: 25-26). It includes a small excerpt on how the subjective state of a "natural" feature can be activated through encounters with humans and how its life-force can be further enhanced by trans-specific beings such as the shaman-like *behiques*:

> *"The ones of wood are made in this way: when someone is walking along and he says he sees a tree that is moving its roots, the man very fearfully stops and asks who it is. And it answers him: 'Summon me a* behique*, and he will tell you who I am!' And when that man goes to the aforesaid physician, he tells him what he has seen. And the sorcerer or wizard runs at once to see the tree of which the other man has told him; he sits next to it and prepares* cohoba *[a hallucinogenic mixture of the Anadenanthera peregrina plant and chalk] for it [...].*
>
> *Once the* cohoba *is made, then he stands up and tells it all his titles, as if they were those of a great lord, and he asks it: 'Tell me who you are, and what you are doing here, and what you wish from me, and why you have had me summoned. Tell me if you want to be cut down or if you want to come with me, and how you want to be carried, for I will build you a house with land.' Then the tree or* zemi*, turned into an idol or devil, answers [the behique], telling him the manner in which he wants it to be done. And he cuts it and fashions it in the manner he has been ordered; he constructs its house with land, and many times during the year he prepares cohoba for it"* (Pané 1999 [1571]: 25-26).

Ties between persons and things can lie at the root of personal transformations, but on a societal level Amerindian life can also be shaped by (before-time) acquisition of material culture. Aside from socio-material ties based on gift exchange and the other social relations that were already discussed extensively above, there is also a higher level of interdependency between what it entails to be (culturally) human and the possession of things. Coming into possession of (material) culture is at the root of many South American Lowland narratives on the origins of society. Distinctively human things, such as tools, fire, ornaments, and dances, have often been introduced by "culture heroes" who acquired the objects themselves or the knowledge to make them from other than human beings. This can occur either through theft or as part of gifts from non-human beings in before-time (e.g. Lévi-Strauss 1969: 66-78). Thus, primordial humans have only become the "true" humans of the present day because they have acquired certain material cultural traits.

Among the Warao, the so-called *Haburi cycle* is chief among such origin narratives (Wilbert 1970: 279-310; 1993: Chapter 1). In it the protagonist Haburi, or sometimes the Haburi brothers, travel across a before-time version of the Orinoco Delta and its neighbouring regions. Along the way he interacts with a variety of animals and spirit beings. Through them he gains key knowledge on societal and material culture practices, some of which shape the daily life of the Warao to this day – e.g. bow and arrow hunting, canoe travel and the acquisition of stone tools and ornaments. For Hispaniola, Pané's document describes a comparable journey in which the culture hero Guahayona travels around a before-time version of the Antillean archipelago in search of women (Pané 1999 [1571]: 5-12). During his travels he encounters several other than human beings, among which the aquatic spirit-woman Guabonito, who presents him with *guanines* and *cibas*, precious metal and valued stones that adorned the *cacique* and other important personages (Oliver 2000). The latter narrative elements also have a noteworthy analogue in a Lokono origin story that describes a human who became the first shaman when he received sacred rattle stones from a water-spirit (Boomert 2000). Through such narratives from Lowland South America and the Caribbean, it is possible to see how universal socio-material dependencies are framed within local ontologies.[24]

A Maussian and Amerindian ontological framework

By now it has become clear that matter that ties and ties that matter are inextricably, but not necessarily inexplicably related. Often things and persons come together to such an extent that they seem to be more than two sides of the same coin; they are part of interdependent socio-material relations and networks. This is not a new insight. In the introduction to this chapter it was discussed how in some Enlightenment views, such as those by Thomas Hobbes (1929 [1651]) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (e.g 2012 [1754]), the origins of society and material culture are inherently linked. This kind of thinking culminated in a specifically European intellectual tradition that focused on how owning and alienating material goods was one of the constituents of society, as can be read in influential works on economy, ideology and society by thinkers such as Karl Marx and Adam Smith (Graeber 2001, 2011a; e.g. Marx 1893; Marx and Engels 1970 [1845-1846]; Smith 2009 [1776]; Weiner 1992).

Obviously, thinking about the material roots of human social networks has progressed far beyond these earlier theories, not the least in archaeology and other material culture studies. One example hereof were concepts and theories resulting from the "material cultural turn" (Hicks 2010). Aside from this there are also interesting new developments in cognitive archaeology and (palaeo)anthropology – in particular how the "social brain" has developed as a "distributed mind" that can extend from the human body into the realm of things – providing a deep historical perspective on the way humans utilize material culture to build their

24 For further information on this subject I recommend the index and the relevant volumes on Guyanese and Orinoquoid peoples in the series "Folk Literature of South American Indians", published by the Latin American Centre of UCLA and edited by Johannes Wilbert, as a starting point.

social networks (Coward 2010; Dunbar, *et al.* 2010b; Malafouris 2010). Recent "fragmentation theories" that stress the links between "dividual" personhood and "fragmentation" of things propose a similar line of thinking (Chapman and Gaydarska 2007; Oliver 2009). Furthermore, in his book *the Archaeology of Interaction*, Carl Knappett (2011) has also put forward an intuitively appealing, archaeological network approach that seeks to integrate material culture theories with (social) network perspectives. These contributions seek to bridge in their own way the interfaces between social and material fields and offer good starting points for archaeology as a more emphatically social and material (network) discipline.

In the present chapter I have presented an alternative, but possibly complimentary view of this issue, based on (post-)Maussian theory and Amerindian perspectivism. Hereby I did not mean to imply that transposing the total social material facts of gift-giving is an all-purpose solution. Rather, theories of the gift provide one pathway in order to understand the dialectic or even cyclical relations between things and persons, as was exemplified by the discussion of fame in the *Kula* ring. This may result in a position that is less materially focused than several other current theories, but it stresses the importance of things as nodal points of human social life.

While things and people have an existence outside each other's sphere of influence, when they come together a different sort of relation emerges from their combined dynamics. By themselves such relations have a high impact on the identities of persons and things and, by extension, on the history of societies and (material) cultures. What is more, because they consist of objects that were part of social relations between humans in the past, the networks we encounter in archaeology will always be socio-material interdepends. As a result, based on archaeological data, the only social networks we can meaningfully abstract, analyse, interpret and discuss are those that have co-evolved as socio-material networks.

With regards to Caribbean pre-colonial networks the key is, in my opinion, to view such co-referential socio-material ties in the light of both Maussian person-thing relations and a broadly shared Amerindian ontology that Viveiros de Castro (1998) tried to capture by means of the "perspectivism" model. As such it is noteworthy that, as far as it is possible to understand this based on ethnographic studies, humans and things *are* interdependent subjects from an Amerindian perspective. Humans and specific items of material culture can literally change, enhance or otherwise affect each other's status as subjects. Furthermore, (human) culture is seen as partly resulting from the primordial and present-day appropriation of material objects. In other words, it seems that Amerindian perspectives align well with the basic premises of socio-material interdependency.

In the Antilles pre-colonial personhood and society may literally have been perceived as socio-materially interdependent. In sum, we can identify at least three types of interdependencies: (1) a "Maussian" type based on the exchange of "life-forces" and the shaping influence of gifts on personhoods, (2) connected to (1) is a "perspectivist" type based on the idea that the perspectival states of others can be influenced through interaction, something which many objects need to become subjects, and (3) a local variation on the "Hobbesian-Rousseauean" type of

interdependency discussed at the beginning of this chapter, based on the idea that "having society" entails possession of (material) culture.

Interestingly, numerous romantics have contrasted a more detached and often spiritual indigenous valuation of material culture with the rampant materialism of European societies, painting a picture of an Amerindian pastoral society wholly unperturbed by the "materiality of things" (e.g. Bond 2006; de las Casas 1992 [1542]; de Montaigne 1958 [1580]; Michener 1989; Rousseau 2012 [1754]; Torres Santiago 2009). Although it has a specific Amerindian character, the importance of socio-material interdependency in the constitution of personhood, subjectivity and society goes against this widespread supposition that Amerindians are anti-materialists.

Obviously, it is by and large impossible to re-discover and understand specific individual biographies or past subjective statuses of objects from the archaeological record. Nevertheless, the following chapters will show that, rather than being of ephemeral importance, socio-material interdependencies were highly important for creating the patterns of homogeneity and diversity that characterize the pre-colonial Caribbean.