

Materializing Oceania: Why Things Still Matter

Date : January 7, 2007

[Announcing a session at the forthcoming Association for Social Anthropology of Oceania, Charlottesville, Virginia, February 20 - 24, 2006.](#)

Engaging with the recent work emerging out of anthropology's material turn, participants in this session seek to understand the ways in which the objects people make, make them (Miller 2005: 38) in a regional context. The Pacific has long influenced thinking about the relationships between persons and things. Building on a rich anthropological heritage, how can we turn this body of theory back into ethnography? Examining communities' continued engagements with their transforming material worlds, we endeavour to not only understand the diverse processes of materiality in Oceania but also to further illuminate the rich historical legacy of anthropology's engagement with Pacific objects. Using a range of historic and ethnographic case studies current participants examine trophies, shell valuables, coffee, yams, fine mats, photographs, a feather fan and heirlooms, to focus on materialization in Aotearoa, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, the Solomon Islands, Tahiti and Vanuatu. In doing so they reveal that objects are much more than what they initially appear to be: they are materializations of relationships, condensations of both knowledge and people's engagements with their life-worlds. By revealing what strategies communities use to materialise their relations, desires and values, participants show what objects do in social life and why an explicit investigation of materiality and materialization still matters.

While a large session we are accepting new participants. If you are interested please contact the session organisers and send a proposed title and abstract. Session statements and a working bibliography are available at the [ASAO form](#).

Currently the following people are planning to be present at the February meeting:

- Jade Baker (Canterbury University)
- Joshua A. Bell (Sainsbury Research Unit, University of East Anglia)
- Mark Busse (University of Auckland)
- Ludovic Coupaye (Musee de Que Branly)
- Haidy Geismar (New York University)
- Pei-yi Gou (Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica, Taiwan)
- Catarina Krizancic (University of Chicago)
- Susanne Kühling (Institut fuer Ethnologie, Universitaet Heidelberg)
- Knut Mikjel Rio (Bergen Museum, University of Bergen)
- Tobias Sperlich (University of Regina)
- Paige West (Barnard College, Columbia University)

The following people will participate in absentia:

- Claudia Gross (University of Auckland)

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Session organiser [Joshua A. Bell](#), [Ludovic Coupaye](#), and [Haidy Geismar](#)