

## Within the Trajectory of Things

**Date :** December 7, 2008

Material Culture and Technology in British and French Traditions

*Dans la trajectoire des choses: Culture matérielle et technologie dans les traditions britannique et française*

*Journées Techniques & Culture, Marseille 16 January 2009*

In preparation for Issue No.53 of Techniques & Culture we would like to announce a one day workshop entitled “Within the Trajectory of Things: Material Culture and Technology in British and French Traditions” taking place on the 16th of January 2009 in Marseille.

The proposed workshop aims to assess and discuss French and British approaches to material culture: the former being distinguished by concentrating on ‘techniques’ and the latter on ‘consumption’ (Faure-Rouesnel 2001; Julien & Rosselin 2005).

When looking at the study of material culture it can be seen that in both countries great progress has been made in terms of innovative methods, methodologies, concepts and theories.

In the British tradition, Mauss’s seminal text on body techniques had a major impact on the analysis of the socially constructed body. Importantly, the term ‘technology’ itself has also increasingly acquired a Foucaultian sense, encompassing practices, consumption and demonstrating that daily usages can also constitute meaningful acts. Equally, studies on praxeology, developed by the French research group “Matière à Penser” have found their way into Anglophone literature (Warnier 2001).

In the Francophone tradition, the study of consumption has greatly benefited from the work of Appadurai (1986), Kopytoff (1986), Miller (1987; 2005) and open studies addressing modernity.

Notions such as the biography of things or materiality increasingly find their way into French studies, be it museology or the analysis of modernity. However, one can observe that concepts such as “chaîne opératoire” (Cresswell 1996) or technical systems (Lemonnier 1986), although employed in British-American archaeology, seem to have been ignored by the British anthropology of material culture. In contrast new materials and techniques are becoming a subject of anthropological approach, as a way to unpack modern understanding of material culture. In other words, techniques and technology, in relation to historical ‘beings’ and their social lives, are understood and used differently according to the research context.

Recent publications (e.g. Schlanger 2006), events and research projects constitute an opportunity for taking stock of differences, respective influences, and for increasing the dialogue.

Consequently, the proposed Techniques & Culture workshop will enable the introduction, debate and illustration of these approaches, concepts and theories of techniques and technology, as being both empirically grounded, by locating them in existing trends in the study of material culture.

The workshop will raise the following questions:

- What are the respective uses of the term “technology” in both traditions, and their consequences? As Sigaut (1985, 2002) recalls, the definitions could be at the origin of the different understandings and research.
- What are the influences of Mauss’s writings on technology and body techniques (1935) on contemporary approaches of material culture?
- What is the position of the study of techniques in both British and French contemporary studies and analysis of material culture?
- What are the passage points between both “traditions”, when describing the relationship between, on the one hand, making and production and, on the other hand, usages and biography of things?
- Because of its particular importance for the analysis of material cultures, “technology” has been mostly included within anthropological and archaeological concerns and methods. If, as Haudricourt (1985) advocated, “technology” can become in itself a domain of enquiries, how can other disciplinary approaches, such as ethology, philosophy, sociology, or even engineering and ergonomics be included?

This workshop is organised by Laurence Douny (UCL), and Ludovic Coupaye (CREDO/SRU) with the support of the journal Techniques & Culture. Papers, in English or in French, will be published in Techniques & Culture and published on-line in English. This workshop is part of a series of workshops taking part over 3 days as part of the Master Programme of the EHESS “Evolution, objects, techniques et cultures”, directed by Frédéric Joulian (EHESS) and Olivier Gosselain (ULB).

Contact Details for confirmation and further questions:

Ludovic Coupaye

Email: [ludocoupaye@gmail.com](mailto:ludocoupaye@gmail.com)

Phone : (+33) 6 68 15 95 92

Laurence Douny

Email: [l.douny@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:l.douny@ucl.ac.uk)