

## 1. The Inbetweenness of Things

Paul Basu

[Figure 1.1. Detail of frontispiece from *Museum Wormianum* (1655). Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University.]

*Between* things does not designate a localizable relation going from one thing to another and back again, but a perpendicular direction, a transversal movement that sweeps one *and* the other away, a stream without beginning or end that undermines its banks and picks up speed in the middle.

– Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*

### A cabinet of curiosities

Imagine, if you will, that the thing now open before you is not a book, but a cabinet of curiosities. A collection of objects arranged not according to Linnaean principles of classification and taxonomy (the disciplined chronologies, typologies and geographical categorizations of the Enlightenment museum), but assembled according to a more idiosyncratic, speculative logic such as might have been devised before we imagined we were ‘modern’ (Latour 1991). Mounted on walls, placed on shelves, laid out in drawers, set on the floor, perhaps suspended from the ceiling, before you is an array of curious things: a feather-headdress (the crown of Montezuma, no less – or so it is claimed); a bonnet fashioned out of turtle-shell; tea-cups woven from seagrass; a memorial pole of the Haisla First Nation (and its Swedish double); a carved wooden bee taken from the throne of Thibaw Min; masks from West Africa; ancient coins from Macedonia; a stone vessel for making offerings to the Andean gods, and more. However arbitrary the connections may seem, these apparently random

things share a quality that defines this collection: the curious state of *inbetweenness*. Indeed, to the modest inventory contained within, one might add an infinity of things, since an argument of this book is that we might regard all things as being ‘inbetween things’, migratory, mediatory, transitive, ‘always in the middle’ (Deleuze and Guattari 2013: 26).

This book is, then, conceived as a kind of exhibition in which each of the contributing authors takes an object from the cabinet and holds it forth, as a curator might, for your consideration. The word ‘exhibit’ is, after all, derived from the Latin *exhibēre*, to hold forth, to present (Basu and Macdonald 2007: 2). As Sherry Turkle (2007) has noted, and as Claude Lévi-Strauss (1964: 89) long ago observed, whatever else they may afford, things are also ‘good to think’ with. Thus this collection of essays adopts an object-centred approach, and the things presented in each of the chapters provide starting points for each author to explore the notion of inbetweenness, grounding an otherwise abstract concept in the ‘logic of the concrete’ – in material culture. But things are not only material metaphors that evoke, express or represent ideas; as a number of the exhibits in this cabinet of curiosities demonstrate, things also have agency (Gell 1998; Latour 1999) – they act in the world, and here again their inbetweenness is key.

The ‘inbetween’ provides a way to escape the methodological essentialism that continues to dominate Western logic; the relentless search for the singular and true nature of things; the desire for certainty, for dividing the world into *this* or *that* (one fixed ‘essence’ separated from another). Yet, inbetweenness does not simply posit the opposite and argue that everything is social construction, contingency and flux. Inbetweenness is what Paul Gilroy (1993: 102) terms an ‘anti-anti-essentialist’ position. Inbetweenness is defined by its ‘essential connectedness’; a double-consciousness born from ‘histories of borrowing, displacement, transformation, and continual reinscription’ (ibid.). This double-consciousness is not characterized by symmetry, however, but by ‘syncretic complexity’ (ibid.: 101). It is a diasporic consciousness, a consciousness which ‘mediate[s], in a lived tension, the experiences of separation and entanglement, of living here and

remembering/desiring another place' (Clifford 1997: 255). To consider the inbetweenness of things is thus to normalize an understanding of the material world as being constituted by movement and mediation (Basu and Coleman 2008). All objects are, in this sense, 'diasporic objects' (Basu 2011): entanglements of ongoing social, spatial, temporal and material trajectories and relationships, dislocations and relocations. This book seeks to explore how these lines of connectivity are manifest in different ways in the form, function and perceived affordances of things; and how, in turn, these things help us to widen our understanding of the essential connectedness of the world.

A laboured distinction between 'objects' and 'things' is generally not made in what follows. Some of the things discussed are formally accessioned in institutional collections. Subjected to the *parerga* of museological framings (see Carroll, this volume), it may be argued that these are things that have been transformed into 'epistemic objects' – objects that are illustrative or representational of particular codifications of knowledge, or which embody such knowledges as exemplars or specimens (Alberti 2005). At the same time, as Sandra Dudley's and Stacey Jessiman's contributions make particularly explicit, even these accessioned objects are not constrained or determined by the museum's disciplined 'order of things'. They share, in other words, an indeterminacy that Bill Brown (2001) reserves for the world of things. While all objects are arguably things, one can accept that not all things are necessarily objects; yet Brown's object/thing dialectic nevertheless runs counter to the project of this volume, which does not accord such absolute power to 'the grid of museal exhibition' (ibid.: 5), but rather asserts that, *as things*, the objects in this cabinet of curiosity also 'hover over the threshold between the nameable and unnameable, the figurable and unfigurable, the identifiable and unidentifiable' (ibid.; see also Dudley 2012). Whereas Michael Taussig (2004: 315; see Carroll, this volume) incites us to smash the museum's vitrines and free these 'captured objects' from their epistemological, and indeed ontological, bondage, one might question the capacity of the museum to *contain* these things in the first place.

The objects in this book/cabinet/collection have been contributed by scholars who, despite their particular disciplinary orientations – as anthropologists, art historians, archaeologists, classicists, museologists, lawyers and literary scholars – work in the ‘undisciplined’ interstitial space of material culture studies (Miller and Tilley 1996; cf Basu 2013). Two of the enduring theoretical concerns of this field have been to question the apparent dichotomy between subjects and objects, and to challenge the common sense assumption that things are merely the products of human labour and imagination, material expressions of immaterial ideas. The argument is, rather, that things create people as much as people create things. As Daniel Miller (2005: 8) states,

We cannot comprehend anything, including ourselves, except as a form ... We cannot know who we are, or become what we are, except by looking in a material mirror, which is the historical world created by those who lived before us. This world confronts us as material culture and continues to evolve through us.

Objects, then, make subjects; subjects make objects. Yet, as Miller and others also note, such a dialectical theory of objectification is *not* a theory of the mutual constitution of *prior* forms (such as subjects and objects):

In objectification all we have is a process in time by which the very act of creating form creates consciousness or capacity such as skill and thereby transforms both form and the self-consciousness of that which has consciousness, or the capacity of that which now has skill (Miller 2005: 9).

While acknowledging, with Christopher Pinney (2005: 257), that ‘the purification of the world into objects and subjects cannot be easily undone’ and that focusing on objects seems merely

to restate the straightjacket of binary logic, the aspiration of this book is precisely to think through things in their most obvious material manifestation – as objects – as a way of grasping the *process* of an inbetweenness that does not go ‘from one thing to another and back again’ (for example, a dialectical to-ing and fro-ing from subject to object to subject), but rather that flows in a ‘perpendicular direction’, sweeping away the dichotomous conceptual frameworks that still pervade dominant worldviews (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 25).

## **Fetish**

Let us take a step further into the cabinet. The symposium that gave rise to this collection was programmed to coincide with an exhibition that Julie Hudson and I curated as part of the British Museum’s Asahi Shimbun ‘Objects in Focus’ series. The display, *Soweï Mask: Spirit of Sierra Leone*, featured a single wooden helmet mask of the Sande (or Bondo) society, a female initiation society common throughout Sierra Leone and in parts of Liberia and Guinea (see front cover image). The mask was placed at the centre of a small gallery, juxtaposed with text and image panels, and a video installation, offering various conceptual framings. This approach was an attempt to explore some of the many ways of understanding the mask while avoiding the dominance of any singular, reductive narrative. The soweï mask was thus refracted through multiple epistemological lenses: the ethnographic, the art historical, the performative, and in relation to the histories of colonial collecting and exchange, as well as post-colonial national iconography. One of our objectives was to unsettle canonical readings of the mask and draw attention to its resistance to straightforward categorization or interpretation according to familiar museological criteria such as period, place, style and ethnic or tribal association. The exhibition sought to give the mask voice, and it spoke not to the purity of type, but to ‘impure’ material histories of entanglement, admixture, and multidirectional exchange (Basu and Hudson 2012). Manifesting inbetweenness in its very form, the soweï mask provides a good point of departure for our consideration of the materialization

of movement and mediation between worlds. Let it be the first object in this cabinet of curiosities to be held forth.

In the popular metropolitan imagination of the late nineteenth century, Africa was, of course, perceived as the ‘Dark Continent’, a land supposedly bereft of civilization and peopled with fetish-worshippers and cannibalistic cults. Nothing epitomized this combination of fear and fascination so much as ‘secret societies’ and their devilish appurtenances. The collecting of ritual paraphernalia and their display, together with the sensationalist accounts of travellers, served to reinforce this view. Such was the context in which this soweï mask travelled to Britain. It was collected, in 1886, by a trading agent (and subsequent colonial administrator) named Thomas Alldridge from Sherbro, then an outlying island of the British colony of Sierra Leone, and sent, together with examples of country cloths, basketwork and other locally made products, to London for display at the Colonial and Indian Exhibition of that year. It was one of two Sande/Bondo society masks displayed in a central case of the Sierra Leone section, described in lurid terms in the exhibition catalogue as ‘specimens of some of the most prominent Fetishes worshipped in these parts ... the heads of two “Bundoo” devils ... worn in native “Bundoo” ceremonies by the chief dancer or priestess’ (Colonial and Indian Exhibition 1886: 499).

As a ‘fetish’ displayed at the Colonial and Indian Exhibition, and subsequently acquired by the British Museum (Figure 1.2), the soweï mask stood in a synecdochic relationship to West Africa and was deployed in that ‘spectacle of empire’ through which the familiar tropes of Africa – as dark, heathen, savage and occult – took form and were perpetuated in the popular imagination (Coombes 1994). Yet, while the mask evoked in these contexts an exotic world of magic and superstition, both distant and radically different from European metropolitan culture, what is perhaps most striking about its form is that it is surmounted by a representation of a Western-style hat of a type that was fashionable in Britain at the time. The presence of the hat disrupts the binary reading of the mask, its anticipated embodiment of the (savage) other in contradistinction from the

(civilized) self of the exhibition's metropolitan audience. The mask stands not, then, for the alterity of Africa but for a more complicated, ambiguous story of cultural interaction in the colonial era. The mask was made and collected at a time of unprecedented mobility of people and things, and just as the mask was transported to London as a representation of primitive religion, so the European hat travelled to West Africa and was incorporated into the regalia of both male and female elites as a symbol of power. The soweï mask is thus neither wholly African in its iconography, but nor, of course, is it wholly European – rather it hovers between these worlds; a travelling object, which materializes complex, multidirectional trajectories and entanglements in its hybridized form (Thomas 1991; Phillips and Steiner 1999).

[Figure 1.2. British Museum accession record for 'Bundoo devil's mask', 1886. Note the 'janus-faced' design of the mask and its European hat. (Af1886,1126.1.a-b) © Trustees of The British Museum. See also front cover image.]

But the mask hovers between other worlds too. Indeed, perhaps more than any other things, masks exemplify an ontological inbetweenness. In Sierra Leone, and in West Africa more generally, a mask is not a mask. Masks are not disguises, nor are they art objects that can be classified according to type or aesthetic characteristics associated with a particular region or ethnic group. Masks do not even *represent* something 'other worldly'; rather they are *manifestations* of other worldliness – manifestations, that is, of the spirit world. In the Sande society, the *ndoli joweï* – the 'dancing soweï' masquerade figure, of which the soweï mask is a part – is a manifestation of a particular spirit (*ngafa*), which has been coaxed or 'pulled' usually from beneath a river (Boone 1986; Phillips 1995). A visible, material manifestation of an invisible, immaterial presence, the *ndoli joweï* masquerade mediates between the worlds of human beings and spirits, and performs a central role in dangerous periods of human transition (from childhood to adulthood, of example,

when young women are initiated into the Sande society, and from adulthood to ‘ancesthood’, at the death of senior members of the society). As with the Yoruba masquerade discussed by William Rea in his contribution to the book, it is not, of course, that people do not realize that the spirit manifestation is ‘carried’ by a human ritual specialist, rather the mask is an intermediary – human yet not human, spirit yet not spirit – occupying a space that transverses both domains (Jedrej 1980: 224).

The ambiguous inbetweenness of the *ndoli jowei* is expressed in another feature of this particular mask: it is ‘janus-faced’. Thus one side faces the mundane, everyday world of humans, while the other faces the ordinarily hidden world of the spirits. Indeed, even when such masks do not literally carry two faces, or two sets of eyes, as in this instance, the faculty of having ‘double vision’ – or being ‘twin-eyed’, *ngama fele* – sets apart the ritual specialists who lead the Sande society, including the dancing *sowei*. As Sylvia Boone (1986: 177) remarks,

When the carved eyes of the wooden mask are allied to the eyes of the dancer, a Sowu [the *ndoli jowei* masquerade] becomes a ‘two-eyed’ creature with all the attendant mystical powers; the mask-head forms a Janus with the head of the human being inside; she, with her human eyes, has added to her all the power of the mask’s eyes to see inside the spirit world.

In the masquerade performance, human and spirit are both separate *and* indivisible, and the mask embodies a kind of double-consciousness that straddles ontological worlds. Through its donning of the Western hat, this mask also demonstrates that it was not only worldly chiefs who incorporated European headgear into their regalia: Sierra Leone’s indigenous spirits also appropriated the colonizer’s material culture into their otherworldly domain (it is a spirit, after all, who wears the hat) – even as the colonialists reappropriated such hybrid manifestations and transformed them into ‘purified’ objects of anthropological or art historical knowledge.



While colonial-era anthropologists, collectors and curators used the term ‘fetish’ indiscriminately to refer to objects such as the soweï mask, perceived to possess some kind of magical potency, the term has a more specific meaning. In his historical reappraisal, William Pietz (1985: 7) argues that the term originated from, and remains specific to, what he defines as ‘the problematic of the social value of material objects as revealed in situations formed by the encounter of radically heterogenous social systems’. Thus the idea of the fetish – from the Portuguese *feitiço* – emerged in the sixteenth century on the west coast of Africa ‘in a mercantile intercultural space created by the ongoing trade relations between cultures so radically different as to be mutually incomprehensible’ (Pietz 1987: 24). Pietz describes the ‘irreducible materiality’ of the fetish objects that resulted from these cross-cultural encounters: the fetish is ‘precisely *not* a material signifier referring beyond itself’, but something possessing an ‘ordering power derived from its status as the fixation or inscription of a unique originating event that has brought together previously heterogenous elements into a novel identity’ (1985: 7). ‘Proper to neither West African nor Christian European culture’ (Pietz 1987: 24), the fetish is in essence hybrid and inbetween. Hence, though the usage is more contemporaneous with the era of the cabinet of curiosity than of the colonial exposition, it could be argued that the description of the soweï mask as a fetish in the catalogue of the Colonial and Indian Exhibition is, ironically, apposite.

Following Pietz’s rehabilitation of what was once an embarrassing archaism in the human sciences, the concept of the fetish has been used productively to explore the intercultural contact zones, border crossings and translations that characterize the contemporary world and, indeed, to critique the boundary-making practices and false essentialisms that continue to shape our understanding of the world, with often dire political consequences. As Patricia Spyer (1998: 3) remarks in the introduction to *Border Fetishisms*, the fetish ‘is never positioned in a stable here-and-now and thereby confounds essentializing strategies that aim for neat resolutions and clear-cut boundaries among things and between persons and objects’ (ibid.: 2). By honing in on the ‘border

zones that fetishisms trace out’ and ‘considering the effects of the crossings through which relations between subjects and objects may be reassessed, redrawn, and at times overturned’, the contributors to that volume seek a better understanding of how ‘distinctions such as those of gender, class, race, ethnicity, and nationality might be negotiated, transgressed, and perhaps most of all, exposed’ (ibid.: 3). This exploration of inbetweenness has similar ambitions: seeking, through its engagement with things, to reflect upon the arbitrariness of seemingly self-evident categories; valuing ambiguity over false certainty.

### **Rhizome**

Dictionaries define ‘inbetweenness’ as being between one thing and another; intermediate; neither *this* nor *that*. The semantic field of the inbetween is wide, embracing processes of mixture, mediation, transculturation, translation, entanglement, syncretisation and creolization, and states of ambivalence, ambiguity, liminality, double-consciousness and hybridity. Inbetweenness is a middle ground, a contact zone, a borderland. It is a relational space, a space of networks and conjunctions; but it can also be a void, a limbo, a zone of suspended animation, of severed relationships. Inbetweenness troubles, begs questions, perplexes. It is paradoxical. It is, like the fetish, a *problematic*; something unresolved (and unresolvable) that unsettles settled categories and destabilizes stable boundaries. Neither positive nor negative, it nevertheless generates a kind of productive unhomeliness. It is, to borrow from Homi Bhabha, ‘an *interrogatory*, interstitial space’ (1994: 3, emphasis added).

The inbetween is also the medium of metaphor: the space across which meaning is translated (in the sense of being ‘carried over’) from one context or domain to another, giving form to ideas and descriptions of the world otherwise inexpressible. Although usually associated with language and literature, as Christopher Tilley (1999: 271) has argued, ‘the physical, tangible, *material* dimensions of material forms are essential in the creation of metaphoric meaning and significance’,

and it is often through this operation of metaphorical transference that things acquire their capacity to act upon and affect us. Tilley draws upon Roland Barthes' notion of '*punctum*' to describe the affective force with which the analogical references and associations of material metaphors may present themselves to the embodied mind of the observer. Significantly, this *punctum* – the 'prick' or 'puncture' that disturbs one's ordinary engagement with things, and which consequently animates them (Barthes 1982: 27) – operates at a pre-linguistic level not subject to verbal discourse or linguistic mediation (Tilley 1999: 271; cf. Razzall this volume).

If the focus of this book is on the *artificialia* of our imagined cabinet of curiosities, this does not suggest that inbetweenness is not found in the world of *naturalia*. Although dividing the world into 'nature' and 'culture' is antithetical to the book's objectives (which accord with Descola's (2013) view of 'an ecology of relations'), one might nevertheless open a case of botanical hybrids, noting the complex semantic migrations of hybridity from plants to people, to technologies and to contemporary subjectivities (Bhabha 1994; Young 1995; Brah and Coombes 2000; Kuortti and Nyman 2007). One might point out a shelf loaded with jars of preserved specimens of hermaphroditic animals – species of snails, worms, echinoderms and fish – that challenges a view of the world as being neatly divided into two sexes and which constructs as aberrant intersexual bodies and identities (Dreger 1998; Harper 2007; Holmes 2008). However, from among the cabinet's displays of such *naturalia*, the object which begs to be held forth is a rhizome (Figure 1.3), that key metaphor of anti-essentialism. As Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 25) famously write,

A rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always middle, between things, interbeing, *intermezzo*. The tree is filiation, but the rhizome is alliance, uniquely alliance. The tree imposes the verb 'to be', but the fabric of the rhizome is the conjunction, 'and...and...and...'

[Figure 1.3. A fresh rhizome of *cimicifuga racemose*, Plate XXIII, *Drugs and Medicines of North America*, vol. 1, 1884-5. Wellcome Library.]

Whereas the image of the ‘tree’ or ‘taproot’ represents stasis, linearity, hierarchy and binary logic – epitomized in Linnaean taxonomy (a universe divided into kingdoms, classes, orders, families, genera, and species) and in Chomsky’s hierarchy of grammars – for Deleuze and Guattari the rhizome is emblematic of a new form of thought and politics. In contrast to the stratified totalities of the root-tree metaphor, the rhizome is non-hierarchical, horizontal and dynamic. It proceeds on the principles of connection and heterogeneity, of multiplicity and what Deleuze and Guattari refer to as ‘asignifying rupture’ (cutting a rhizome does not kill it, but contributes to its proliferation and reterritorialization). The rhizome is nomadic, it forges linkages and connections between multiple and seemingly incompatible elements; it is transversal, random and unregulated. It is unlike a structure, which Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 21) define as ‘a set of points and positions, with binary relations between the points’, but is rather made only of lines – ‘lines of flight’, or ‘lines of becoming’, with neither beginning nor end.

More recently, the anthropologist Tim Ingold has drawn inspiration from Deleuze and Guattari in his own ‘linealogical’ reflections (2007a, 2015) and particularly those relating to what he terms the ‘meshwork’ (2011: 63-94). Following Deleuze and Guattari, Ingold draws a distinction between meshworks and networks (particularly as conceptualized within Actor Network Theory), which has significant implications for how we might understand inbetweenness. Proponents of ‘network thinking’, he suggests, ‘argue that it encourages us to focus, in the first instance, not on elements but on the connections between them, and thereby to adopt what is often called a relational perspective’ (2011: 70). This allows for the possibility that connected elements, by virtue of their relationships, may be mutually constitutive. However, Ingold contends that the network metaphor

‘logically entails that the elements connected are distinguished from the lines of their connection’ (ibid.).

Thus there can be no mutuality without the prior separation of the elements whose constitution is at issue. That is to say, the establishment of relations *between* these elements – whether they be organisms, persons or things of any other kind – necessarily requires that each is turned upon itself prior to its integration into the network (ibid.).

This he regards as an ‘operation of inversion’. It is to undo this inversion and repudiate the distinction between things and their relations that Ingold turns to the more organic metaphor of the meshwork and the primacy of movement: ‘lines of growth’ issuing from multiple sources and becoming comprehensively entangled with one another. It is within this ‘tangle of interlaced trails, continually ravelling here and unravelling there, that beings grow or “issue forth” along the lines of their relationships’ (ibid.: 71). Through this rhizomic logic, one can begin to understand how things *are* their relationships, that all things are inbetween. Ingold insists that we need to overcome the idea of things as entities, self-contained objects set over against other objects with which they can then be juxtaposed or conjoined. Rather than an assemblage of bits and pieces, Ingold proposes that the world is a tangle of threads and pathways (ibid.: 91-2).

Elsewhere Ingold has been critical of material culture scholars such as Daniel Miller, questioning their focus on consumption practices, on materiality and on what he characterizes as ‘a world of objects ... already crystallized out from the fluxes of materials and their transformations’ (2007: 9). This is a curious attack insofar as much of the scholarship he criticizes has been concerned to do precisely what he proposes: ‘to follow the multiple trails of growth and transformation’ that converge in any given thing. One of the methodological boons brought to the study of material culture by Igor Kopytoff’s (1986) contribution to Arjun Appadurai’s seminal

volume, *The Social Life of Things*, has been the idea of the ‘object biography’, an approach which seeks to map the material and immaterial fluxes and transformations, the crystallizations, and the disintegrations that Ingold alludes to (see John Picton’s chapter in this volume for a good example). One also might note Miller’s own repudiation, already mentioned, of ‘*prior* forms’ existing outside their co-constitution in a dialectical relationship, and his argument that ‘in objectification all we have is *a process in time*’ (2005: 9, emphasis added).

A rapprochement between Deleuzian/Ingoldian thought experiments and the broader body of material culture scholarship is particularly important in the context of the present volume, which unashamedly takes as its starting point ‘a world of objects’ (or, more accurately, a modest collection of curiosities), and seeks to discern in their supposedly crystallized forms the lines of the relationships through which they have come into being and, indeed, continue to ‘issue forth’ along new trajectories. The challenge here, then, is to apply models of becoming educed from ecological and organic metaphors (rhizomes, storms, spider’s webs) to things like memorial poles, or feather headdresses, a carved gourd, or a turtle-shell bonnet. How can these objects – which are also things – be understood as ‘tissues of interlaced threads’? While one might readily conceive of the *making* of these objects in such terms, for instance, as Ingold describes a basket as the embodiment of patterns of skilled activity (2000: 345), the objects discussed here are *encountered* as ‘readymades’ – just as the rhizome is encountered as a readymade entity that affords an understanding beyond itself. There is a need to take account of both the material trajectories of these things as they are made, unmade and remade, and their equally complex lines of becoming as social, political, economic, symbolic, epistemic, agentive or otherwise meaningful objects.

In a recent essay Ingold draws a distinction between ‘*between*’ and ‘*in-between*’, which he regards as being of enormous ontological consequence (2015: 147). ‘Between’, he argues, articulates a divided world ... It is a bridge, a hinge, a connection, an attraction of opposites, a link in a chain, a double-headed arrow that points at once to this and that’. ‘In-between’, on the other

hand, is described as ‘a movement of generation and dissolution in a world of becoming where things are not yet given’ (ibid.). This is, in many respects, a restatement of the Deleuzian image with which this chapter begins. In the spirit of the miscellany, this collection adopts a more catholic approach to inbetweenness, encompassing both ‘between’ and ‘in-between’. If the things that are presented in the book cut across seemingly pre-existing, fixed categories, it is by virtue of their intermediate, hybrid, liminal or otherwise ‘between’ status that they allow us to perceive the dynamism and ongoingness of their ‘in-between’ state. Pursuing Deleuze and Guattari’s riverine metaphor, one might say that the best vantage point to perceive the perpendicular flow of the river (the ‘*midstream*’ of in-betweenness, as Ingold terms it) is precisely from the centre of the bridge that transverses (or, better, articulates between) its banks. It is this point of intersection – between *between* and *in-between* (Ingold 2015: 147) – that constitutes the heuristic of this book, the optic through which these objects are viewed, and indeed the lens that each object provides on the worlds it mediates and travels between (Figure 1.4).

[Figure 1.4. The ‘double-headed arrow’ of *between* intersecting with the ‘midstream’ of *in-between*. Redrawn, with permission, from Figure 29.1, Tim Ingold, *The Life of Lines*, Routledge, 2015.]

## Gift

Interest in the entangled relationships between people and things has been sustained by anthropologists and archaeologists since the emergence of these disciplines in the nineteenth century and has been renewed with each new theoretical turn (see Hicks 2010). These relationships have been conjugated in many different ways, each offering a different inflection of inbetweenness (Hodder 2012). Anthropology and archaeology began, of course, as museum-based disciplines in which objects acted as surrogates for different times, places and peoples. In the case of

ethnographic museums, even as objects were extracted from their local contexts and recirculated via networks of collectors and collecting institutions, the relationships between these things and the people from whom they were sourced, though transformed, were also preserved, creating the possibility, perhaps a century or more later, for these relationships to be reanimated, for objects to be repatriated, and for museums to become ‘contact zones’ in which competing claims (and ontologies) might be negotiated (e.g. Basu 2015; Bolton et al 2013; Clifford 1997; Peers and Brown 2003). As Sandra Dudley (this volume) argues, while objects undeniably undergo a fundamental transition when they become part of museum collections, it is not an end to their social lives, but rather entry into a liminal phase during which their capacity to become re-enlivened may at any time be activated. Museums remain profoundly inbetween spaces, places of ‘transit’ and ‘contact work’ as James Clifford has argued (1997: 213). Even their primary mode of communication relies on inbetweenness. Exhibition grammar is juxtapositional, and it is through *making connections* between things that visitors *make sense* of what is arranged before them (Bal 2007; Basu 2007). Museum exhibitions are like laboratories in which objects can be endlessly arranged and rearranged so as to explore and explicate the relationships between things (Basu and Macdonald 2007).

It is not only when objects are accessioned into museum collections that they are transformed. Nicholas Thomas (1991: 28) has, for example, discussed the ‘promiscuity of objects’ in the context of colonial contact and exchange. Rather than possessing identities fixed in their structure and form, it is the ‘mutability of things in recontextualization’ that impresses (*ibid.*). While this is not unique to colonial interactions, in this case it is at the crossings between the ‘indigenous appropriation of European things’ and the ‘European appropriation of indigenous things’ that new, mutable inbetween forms such as the Sierra Leonean *sowe* mask, or the Nlaka’pamux woven teacup discussed by Madeline Knickerbocker and Lisa Truong, or the Asmat Christ figure discussed by Nick Stanley, the ‘traditional-yet-contemporary’ carved gourd vessel discussed by Mary Katherine Scott, and other objects in this cabinet of curiosities have come into being. These are



materializations of the ‘midstream’: expressions of processes in time and space, crystallized at a given moment, and in some senses suspended, even here, as they are held forth in this book, in a collection, in a church, an artist’s workshop, or a ritual. These are, however, temporary as well as temporal manifestations of movement and mediation, mutable in recontextualization as they continually become entangled in new relationships and disentangled from others.

Such processes of generation and dissolution are particularly highlighted in Stacey Jessiman’s discussion of the G’psgolox memorial pole in this volume. Thus, after protracted negotiations between representatives of the Haisla First Nation and Swedish national government, the Swedish Museum of Ethnography relinquished its proprietary preservationism and acquiesced to Haisla wishes for the pole to decay in its original setting and thence to ‘return to nature’. In exchange, however, a new replica G’psgolox pole was gifted to the ethnographic museum – a memorial, one might say, to a memorial. And so the exchange of poles, which do their own mediatory work between time, space and spirit worlds, tied new ‘postcolonial’ relations in the present, while untying the ‘colonial’ relations of the past.

Indeed, the gift must surely be the next emblematic object in our cabinet of curiosities to contemplate. Look, here: *kula* shell valuables, or *vaygu’a*, from the Trobriand Islands. They might even have been collected by Bronisław Malinowski himself (Young 2000). *Soulava*, long necklaces of red spondylus shell discs, which, as every student of anthropology knows, travel in a clockwise direction between the island communities of the Massim archipelago off Papua New Guinea; *mwali* arm-ornaments of white conus shell, which travel in the opposite direction. ‘Once in the Kula’, Malinowski wrote, ‘always in the Kula’ (1922: 83), the journeys of these ever-moving objects described lines of connection between distant communities that Malinowski portrayed on his maps as the Kula Ring (ibid.: 82). While much of Malinowski’s analysis has been revised by subsequent anthropologists, *vaygu’a* remain emblematic of the inbetweenness of things as intermediaries in the relationships between people, the ‘chains along which social relationships run’, as E. E. Evans-

Pritchard put it (1940: 89). They are, like all things in this collection, travelling objects, which give ‘material expression’ to the relationships they mediate (Mauss 2002: 34). Malinowski argued that *vaygu’a* had little intrinsic value, and yet these ‘incessantly circulating and ever exchangeable valuables’, which possessed names and carried the history of their circulations with them, were treasured above all else – a value and a status that accrued to the objects through their very circulation (1922: 511; Munn 1986).

All objects are, in a sense, travelling objects. Some, like the Roman/Macedonian coin discussed by Clare Rowan, mediate power by carrying intentionally ambiguous messages in their iconography or form; others extend the spatio-temporal reach or influence of the individuals or groups with whom they are inalienably associated – materialized ‘sendings’, like a ‘detachable mask’, projecting human potential beyond the everyday limits of space and time (Battaglia 1983: 302; Munn 1986). These objects are agentic in their interactions, actively shaping the relationships between those they ‘go between’. In this respect one might question the distinction between ‘intermediaries’ and ‘mediators’ employed in Actor Network Theory. Whereas an *intermediary*, in Bruno Latour’s vocabulary, ‘transports meaning or force without transformation’, *mediators* ‘transform, translate, distort and modify the meaning or the elements they are supposed to carry’ (2005: 39). A consideration of the inbetweenness of things brings into doubt whether anything transports without also transforming. All intermediaries mediate, although the transformations they effect are not always immediately apparent to our routine ways of seeing.

## **Prism**

The objective of this introductory essay has not been to summarize or debate the chapters that follow. Rather the intention has been to introduce the idea of this book as a cabinet of curiosities, in which the contributing authors are invited to hold forth an object of their choice (an object they have donated to the collection, as it were) that provides a point of departure for their exploration of

inbetweenness. A second objective has been to take down from the imagined cabinet's shelves a few objects that may be said to emblemize inbetweenness and invoke distinct theoretical literatures that engage with the inbetween: the *fetish*, a hybrid object of irreducible materiality, the power of which is animated in the 'fissured spaces' of intercultural encounter (Spyer 1998: 3); the *rhizome*, Deleuze and Guattari's key metaphor of anti-essentialism, defined by principles of connection, heterogeneity and multiplicity, 'always in the middle, between things', issuing forth along lines of becoming (1987: 25; Ingold 2015); the *gift*, the paradigmatic 'travelling object', which accrues value through circulation and materializes the relationships it mediates: the object *as* relationship. These each provide an analytical lens – a *prism* – through which to reflect upon the concrete, ethnographically-informed case studies that follow. Indeed, although less canonically inbetween than these introductory object-metaphors, each of the things discussed in the subsequent chapters of this book provides a prism through which to view the others, and, ultimately, each throws light upon the wider world of things that surrounds us.

Fittingly, then, the final emblematic object to be presented in this introduction is the prism itself. The prism is a material object, the inbetweenness of which enables us to understand the nature of reality differently. Famously, it was Isaac Newton, in his 1704 work, *Opticks: or, A Treatise of the Reflexions, Refractions, Inflexions and Colours of Light*, who demonstrated through the use of prisms that white light, which was previously believed to be colourless, actually consisted of a spectrum of colours (Figure 1.5). The speed of light changes as it passes from one medium to another, for instance from the air to the glass of the prism. This causes the light to be refracted in the new medium, and since the refractive index of the glass varies with the wavelength of the incident light, light of different colours is refracted differently and thus exits the prism at different angles. The prism does not create these colours, as was thought prior to Newton's experiments, but separates the colours that are already present.

[Figure 1.5. Visible light spectrum experiment using a prism. Mehau Kulyk/Science Photo Library.]

Like the fetish, the rhizome and the gift, the prism provides a material metaphor through which to ‘think inbetweenness’. Just as the prism quite literally refracts waves of light as they pass through it, here, the intermediary – the object-as-prism, situated at the intersection of the between and inbetween – is shown to be a mediator that refracts the ‘midstream’ lines of growth and becoming. It is not passive, extraneous or inconsequential, but influences the processes in time and space through which subjects and objects constitute one another. At the same time, the object-as-prism possesses an ‘heuristic inbetweenness’. It is a material medium that interrupts our routine assumptions about the world. Instead of singular, self-evident truths – a world divided into this or that, of one category separated from another – seeing through the prism of things allows us to perceive the complex heterogeneous flows, ambiguities, and uncertainties that make up reality, causing us to pause, ask new questions, and think again. Being mindful of the inbetweenness of things facilitates our entry into their interrogatory interstitial space and opens up a whole spectrum of possibilities.

And so, rather like Charles Willson Peale’s painting *The Artist in His Museum* (1822), the crimson curtain is lifted, the doors of the cabinet are opened wide, and you are invited to explore the curious things within.

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This is an accepted manuscript of a book chapter that will be published Bloomsbury Academic in *The Inbetweenness of Things Materializing Mediation and Movement between Worlds* edited by Paul Basu . See more at: <http://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/the-inbetweenness-of-things-9781474264778/>

Accepted version downloaded from SOAS Research Online: <http://eprints.soas.ac.uk/23331/>

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