for Mike O’Hanlon

D.H.

In memory of my late advisor James Deetz, whose enthusiasm for studying things, large and small, inspired me and many others

M.G.R.
modes of mattering. This is a politically performative intervention since it erodes the monopolistic assumption that reality is destiny. It is doubly performative when it is deployed to interfere in particular locations and practices to strengthen or weaken specific materializations or forms of reality.

What we learn in all this work is that in a dozen subtle ways, mattering is simultaneously about the real, what there is in the world, and about the good and the bad, about values and politics. It is sometimes possible and temporarily desirable to tease these apart and talk, for instance, of matters of fact on the one hand, and matters of concern on the other. But they can only be held apart for so long and in particular and specific relations. Again, there can be no general rule. However, such is the complexity and the multiplicity of mattering that located interventions may hold most analytical and political promise. For Helen Verran the questions are: How to go on together? How to go on well? The answers, always enacted anew, will depend on time and place and practice.

PART II

MATERIAL PRACTICES
CHAPTER 7

MATERIAL CULTURE AND THE DANCE OF AGENCY

ANDREW PICKERING

This chapter circles around the discovery of matter. The first section concerns science studies. It emphasizes the importance of a focus on practice and performance as a way of undoing the 'linguistic turn' in the humanities and social sciences. The key concept here is that of a dance of agency. The second section reviews a variety of examples of this dance in fields beyond the natural sciences—civil engineering, pig farming, and convivial relations with dogs, architecture, technologies of the self, biological computing, brainwave music, and a certain hylozoist and Eastern spirituality. A concern here is with contrasting forms that dances of agency and their products can take, depending on the presence or absence of an organizing telos of self-extinction. The third and final section reflects on the significance of this contrast for a politics of theory.

THE DISCOVERY OF MATTER;
UNDOING THE LINGUISTIC TURN

Given the omnipresence of instruments and machines in science, one might have imagined that science studies as a field would always have centred on a discourse of
materiality, but for most of the twentieth century that was not the case. Historians, philosophers, and sociologists instead discussed science as primarily a field of knowledge, in which theory (rather than empirical, factual, knowledge) was always at the centre of attention. Why was that? One can think here of specific trajectories of disciplinary research. Historians tended to focus on the great men of the Scientific Revolution and understood their greatness in terms of their ideas (rather than, say, their virtuosity in the laboratory). In philosophy, the positivism of the Vienna Circle tended to take the empirical dimension of science for granted, preferring instead to explore the structure of scientific knowledge and reasoning, often with normative intent. More broadly, we could think about the Cartesian dualism that, still to a great extent, pervades and defines the disciplines. Matter (nature, machines, instruments) is the stuff of the natural sciences and engineering, but knowledge belongs to us, and hence the subject matter of the humanities and social sciences.

Back of all of this up, we could think of the linguistic turn taken by the humanities and social sciences in the latter half of the twentieth century. Cartesian dualism elicits profound and disquieting worries about the correspondence between knowledge and its objects, and electing to dwell on just one side, the human, became the favoured way of evading these fears. The model here was Ludwig Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations* (1953), turning aside from putatively undecidable questions of how the world is and focusing instead on something that we might have reliable access to: the world as represented in language, representational knowledge itself, theory. In the humanities, this was the move towards so-called ordinary language philosophy; in the social sciences it lay at the heart of all sorts of social constructivisms that analysed the social structuring of knowledge claims while disdaining any interest in their referents (Hacking 1999); in science studies, it led straight to the aptly named sociology of scientific knowledge (SSK) (Collins 1992; Barnes et al. 1995; on SSK and Wittgenstein, Bloor 1983, 1997) and its spin-off, work on the social construction of technology (Pinch and Bijker 1984), as taken to the limit in Steve Woolgar’s (1988) ‘reflexivity’ programme, turning the methods of SSK back on its own knowledge claims.

We could see the linguistic turn as a decisive shift towards *epistemology*—a determined focus on knowledge—and almost a prohibition on thinking about *ontology*—questions of how the world is. The discovery of matter, then, has amounted to a rather patchy and incomplete undoing of the linguistic turn—in science studies and elsewhere. How did that go, and where is it going now?

Many stories could be told. From my own perspective, the key shift was the move from an obsession with knowledge to a sustained interest in practice, in what scientists do as scientists, beginning with questions of what knowledge production actually looks like (see the essays collected in Pickering 1992). Ian Hacking was, and is, the philosopher most interested in contemporary scientific practice, and his 1983 book, *Representing and Intervening*, was a landmark in the transit from traditional epistemology to a more balanced and materialized vision of science. His famous slogan, ‘if you can spray it it’s real’ was a straightforward reflection of his observation that the physicist William Fairbank at Stanford used radioactive sources to change the electric charge of the objects he was experimenting on. Clearly what surfaces here is a notion of material performance and agency: the sources did something in the world that was crucial to experimental practice but that the naked researcher could never have accomplished on his own.

Historians and social scientists went further than Hacking into detailed empirical study of scientific practice. The late 1970s and early 1980s saw a rash of ethnographic studies of ‘laboratory life’ (Knorr-Cetina 1981; Lynch 1985a, 1985b; Latour and Woolgar 1986). David Gooding, Trevor Pinch, and Simon Schaffer’s edited collection, *The Uses of Experiment: studies in the natural sciences* (1989), was a landmark in the emergence of historical and sociological studies of scientific practice because it made the material culture of science strikingly evident, but the linguistic turn was not entirely undone. Instead, a new bifurcation became evident. A few scholars sought to take seriously the material strata of science, and this is the line I will pursue in this chapter. But it is worth being clear that many did not: many studies of scientific practice fed into a redoing of the old problematic of representation. As brought together, for example, in Michael Lynch and Steve Woolgar’s canonical collection *Representation in Scientific Practice* (1990), studies of practice rejuvenated our thinking about the actual mechanics of scientific representation and its epistemological implications while often remaining still faithful to the linguistic turn.

Something of what is at stake here is exemplified in a classic early essay by Bruno Latour, ‘Give Me a Laboratory and I Will Raise the World’ (1983). Reflecting on Louis Pasteur’s work on combating anthrax, Latour offered two rather different accounts of the sources of science’s power to move the world. One referred to ‘trials of strength’ in the laboratory between Pasteur and the microbes. This related directly to the agency of things: things as ‘agents’. Pasteur experimented on the microbes, trying out various material procedures in raising and treating them, seeing how they would perform under different conditions, and eventually found a way to ‘domesticate’ them. The second had to do with scientific strategies of writing and representation, with ‘inscription devices’, the power of ‘immutability’, and so on. Trials of strength appear at several points in Latour’s essay, but the analysis of writing dominates his long summary discussion of the power of the laboratory (Latour 1983: 161–165), and this disproportion has echoed down the ages, in Latour’s own work and in science and technology studies more generally. And this, in turn, is an aspect of what I meant by saying that the linguistic turn has been only incompletely undone: representation remains a hegemonic obsession, though now construed in new and fascinating ways.

We can return to matter and agency. Early work that focused on these topics seemed to require a surname that ends in ‘ing’. I think of the writings of Hacking
METHOD, TIME, AND AGENCY

How can we make matter visible, conceptually, empirically and textually? As far as science is concerned this should be easy. Laboratories are just full of stuff: one can describe it and photograph it. Even the agency of matter is directly visible and describable: ‘if you can spray it it’s real’ (if you can obtain effects by spraying electrons around, then electrons are real: they do things). But in a way this is too easy. The temptation is to say that since materiality is omnipresent like the air we breathe, we can take it for granted, and get back to the old questions of what’s really special about science—questions of epistemology or social theory or whatever (see, for example, my debate with Jonathan Harwood, Harwood 2003; Pickering 2003, 2009b). (A more systematic trick for obscuring the importance of matter is an emphasis in SSK on controversies as the key site for study, e.g. Collins 1993.) The argument here is that in controversies, material inputs factor out—the parties have access to the same inputs from nature; therefore something else, namely the social, must structure beliefs. In fact, this argument is erroneous. The parties to controversies seldom if ever refer to identical fields of instrumentation.

How can we resist this temptation? We could start by paying attention, first, to the fact that much of scientific practice is directed towards fields of machines and instruments and their performance, and, second, to time. Detailed case studies of practice reveal an interesting temporal structure. As the philosopher and medical scientist Ludwik Fleck (1979) suggested many years ago, research practice seems to oscillate between activity and passivity on the part of the researcher, in which the active phase consists in setting up some material assemblage, and the passive an attentive watching to see what it will do, how it will perform. In the development of the bubble chamber, for example, physicist Donald Glaser put together all sorts of configurations of containers and fluids and each time stood back in a movie camera in his hand to record their success, or more often failure, in detecting the passage of elementary particles (Pickering 1993, 1995: 37–67).

We can, of course, see this as a prototypical instance of Latour’s notion of experimental trials, mentioned above, but we can also develop the story further than Latour. This oscillation has more than one step. Glaser did not assemble material configurations at random. Each period of passivity was followed by an active phase informed by the most recent performance of his instrument, in a process that we can describe as ‘accommodation’ (Pickering 1995): reacting to failures, trying to home in on desirable performances, etc. Further passive phases followed, again seeing what the reconfigured apparatus would do this time, and so on. Moreover, we can symmetrize the picture: passages of human passivity are precisely passages of material activity—which was why Glaser stood back with his camera—and vice versa.

We can thus arrive at an understanding of scientific engagement with the material world as a temporally extended back-and-forth dance of human and non-human agency in which activity and passivity on both sides are reciprocally intertwined. (For detailed examples drawn from the history of physics, mathematics, and the workplace, see Pickering 1995.) And these dances of agency are, I think, precisely what we need to focus on empirically and theoretically if we want to grasp the constitutive role of matter and material agency in human culture, scientific and otherwise. I therefore want to make a list of observations about them.

1. Some clarification of how I am using key terms might be appropriate at this point. The social sciences typically define ‘agency’ as exclusively an attribute of persons. A person has agency precisely to the extent that his or her actions make a difference to other people. It is clear, I hope, that I do not intend my usage of ‘agency’ to be thus restricted. My idea is that matter has agency too, precisely in the sense that its actions can also make a difference—in respect of human scientists, for example (or all of us in our daily lives). Here I am referring to such actions that make a difference as performances—performances are what agents do, whether human or non-human. My conviction is that we need to move to a performative (rather than representational) idiom for studying and reflecting on science (and on being in general) (Pickering 1995). In this way of talking, ‘practice’ means ‘human performance’.

2. It follows that dances of agency are themselves performative, not linguistic, cognitive, or whatever. They have to do with actions, human and non-human, in the material world and the interplay of those. Glaser did something—putting these components together this way, and the assemblage then did something, boiling madly or forming new strings of bubbles, to which Glaser reacted performatively, and so on. This performative aspect helps us to understand the invisibility of dances of agency within a field of humanities and social sciences fixated on topics of knowledge and representation: they cannot speak about performance in itself. Conversely, attention to performance might be a necessary entering wedge in undoing the linguistic turn.

3. Agency is emergent in the brute sense of being unknowable in advance of specific performances. No one could know how Glaser’s set-ups would act in advance of their actual performance, and, symmetrically, on the human side, no one could know in advance how Glaser would respond. Much of scientific research, then, consists precisely in finding out how the material world (and, in fact, the
human world) will perform in this configuration or that. Again, the classic quest for predictive or causal explanations in both the social and the natural sciences continually acts to obscure this fact.

4. Dances of agency have a decentered quality—they are the zones of intersection where the non-human world enters constitutively into the becoming of the human world and vice versa. They cannot be accounted for by focusing either on the human or the non-human alone. If one thinks of ‘humanism’ as referring to scholarly accounts that centre on purely human variables such as epistemic norms or social structure, and ‘anthropomorphism’ as focusing on a nature from which humans have been stripped away (the natural sciences), then the dance of agency has instead to be understood in posthumanist terms. (This usage of the word, which emphasizes coupling and embodiment, is more or less the inverse of the sense in which ‘posthuman’ is used in connection with discussions of ‘transhumanism’ as an aspiration to transcend the limitations of the material body: see Hayles 1999.)

5. What is at stake in dances of agency? Everything. Everything one can think of is liable to open-ended transformation here, mangled as I called it. I have so far spoken as if dances of agency are purely performative, but this is not the case. Knowledge and representations, for example, often, though not always or necessarily, enter into them. Glaser thought he knew what he was doing and why he was doing it in the course of his development of the bubble chamber. But the important point to note is that his knowledge was itself bound up in the dance of agency, functioning as a retrospective summary of prior experience and as a revisionary guide to future practice. His early work drew upon a specific theoretical understanding of bubble-formation, but in the light of the evolving performance of his chambers he eventually switched to a quite different theory. This, then, is how we should think about the domain of knowledge and language in general: not as the sort of cage that the linguistic turn presented us with, but as an integral part of practice, just as liable to mangling as the material form and performance of Glaser’s chambers.

And the list of cultural elements liable to mangling does not end with knowledge. It is not hard to see that epistemic norms, social structure, and social interests should likewise be understood to be at stake in practice (Pickering 1995). The general point to grasp is that the traditional explanatory and interpretive variables of the humanities and social sciences reappear on this account as just more entries on the list of cultural elements liable to transformation in dances of agency. From another angle, this just reflects the fact that the classic interpretive and explanatory paradigms are humanist, locating all the action in the human sphere, and contriving in various ways to make the mangling of their key terms invisible (Pickering 1995, 2003).

6. There is one further aspect of the dance of agency that requires a lengthier discussion. My contention is that such dances are visible and indeed ubiquitous phenomena—the very stuff of our being in the world—and I have already indicated some of the ways in which they have nevertheless largely evaded scholarly attention. Now I need to discuss one further way, which has to do with a certain structure that one often finds imposed on practice.

Asymmetric dualism

Glaser undoubtedly engaged in a drawn-out dance of agency with his early bubble chambers, but the telos of this work was to bring the dance to an end—to arrive at a chamber that would function reliably on its own without any continuing back and forth interaction with Glaser—an instrument that could be put to work in further projects by Glaser and others. His success at that was what won him the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1960. Bruno Latour (1987, 1993a) has discussed this telos under the headings of black-boxing, purification, and modernity. His idea is that modernity itself is characterized by an impulse somehow to make a clean separation between people and things. This is a very important idea, and I want now to put it in my own terms.

Undoubtedly, this work of purification, as Latour calls it, is central to the modern world. We need here the conception of a free-standing machine, using ‘machine’ in a very generous sense, a material device that performs independently of us (Pickering 2001). The telos of much of modern science is to produce free-standing machines and instruments (like a working bubble chamber) and to use them to produce, as it were, free-standing knowledge—this is the heart of scientific objectivity (Daston and Galison 1992). In the realm of technology and engineering, the same object holds (but without any necessary relation to knowledge): cars, TVs, computers, the electricity supply, plumbing—all of these are autonomous machines that take their place in the world precisely as such. My car would be useless if I could not rely on it to perform reliably in taking me from A to B.

So we find ourselves in an almost paradoxical situation—plunged into emergent and decentered dances of agency that aim at and often succeed in extinguishing themselves, in bringing themselves to a point of more or less clear separation between human and non-human agency. What should we make of that? Three points are worth bearing in mind.

First, this telos of purification is important. It has consequences in the world. The evolution of culture—the transformation in time of the made things of science: machines and their performances; bodies of knowledge; social roles and relations—is organized in a certain way around it and is structured and punctuated by it. Modernity, on this line of thought, is substantively characterized by, precisely,
the ubiquity of free-standing machines. It is not just a state of mind, a way of thinking or a set of political arrangements as Latour often seems to say.

Secondly, in a technological society it is easy to be dazzled by this sort of punctuation, to focus on its products and their independence from us, and not on the dances of agency that lead up to and away from them. Our made world is saturated with free-standing machines and contemplation of this no doubt contributes to a certain more general ontological appreciation of how the world is. It fosters what I think of as an asymmetric or practical dualism. Machines confront us immediately with a spectacle of almost overpowering material agency and of a dualist split between people and things: my car and my computer simply do things that I cannot, and vice versa. At the same time, however, a certain backgrounding of material agency can easily take place here, lending a degree of asymmetry to this dualism. My car might be wonderfully powerful, but it was designed and built by humans to serve specific human purposes. It can begin to seem as if human interests and desires somehow bring technological artefacts into existence, as if cars or computers are 'social constructions'. More generally, we can easily arrive at a vision in which humans are active and call all the shots, while the material world is only passive, waiting for us to give it form and purpose. Our made world both manifests and echoes back to us this sort of asymmetric practical dualism, and this again must be part of the explanation for the disappearance of matter from scholarly discourse.

Thirdly, and obviously, we should not be dazzled by the world of machines. They may punctuate dances of agency, but they do not erase emergence and a post-humanist decentring in the becoming of culture. Dances of agency are what carry us from one moment of punctuation to the next, and their emergent and decentred qualities do not go away at the moment of punctuation—they just more or less pause there for a longer or shorter time.

The upshot of this trip, then, is to leave us where we were before—with dances of agency as the crucial focus for appreciating and grasping the materiality of our culture—but now in the recognition that our dances of agency have a peculiar structure, and that their products can lead us to misapprehend the world we inhabit. An exclusive focus on free-standing machines veils our ontological condition from us.

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Now I want to change tack. I want to review a range of examples that point to the omnipresence of dances of agency in the world at large. The hope is to show that they are not a specialfeature of science, but that they are our ontological condition.

There is another principle behind the selection of these examples, too, which I can explain as follows.

It is hard work to make dances of agency visible in science studies. One has to read the science against the grain, so to speak. One has continually to resist the temptation to be dazzled by the products of science—powerful and elegant instruments and machines, imposing edifices of knowledge—that emerge at moments of purification and stabilization. We must try instead to take seriously the practices that lead up to and away from them—practices that ceaselessly strive to efface themselves and bury their own traces. Of course, it can easily seem that it has to be this way—so much of our being in the world does indeed seem to be organized around the roles of purification and the exploitation of its products, free-standing machines that echo back to us an asymmetric dualist ontology. But, as it happens, it does not have to be that way. Asymmetric dualism is hegemonic, not necessary. In the margins of our culture one can find a quite different set of practices and products that, far from seeking to extinguish the dance of agency, in various ways thematize, exploit, and even revel in it. I find myself especially interested in these, both as sites at which the dance of agency becomes much more readily visible, and as exemplifications of an alternative way to be in the world. I offer several examples below and go on to discuss their political valence in the concluding section (cf. Pickering and Guzik 2008).

The environment

Our dealings with the environment are a catalogue of dances of agency writ very large. Sociologist Adrian Franklin’s (2008) study of the emergent coupling of eucalypts and fire with Australian identity, desires, and social structures, for example, offers a clear example of a dance of agency with the environment, extending the discussion back into the evolutionary history of the trees themselves. Popular writer John McPhee’s The Control of Nature (1989) also reviews some richly detailed examples. I have previously discussed his account of the US Army Corps of Engineers’ (ACE) struggles to control the Mississippi River elsewhere at some length (Pickering 2008), but briefly the century-long history of these struggles can be understood as an enormous dance of human and non-human agency. In attempts to control flooding and prevent the Mississippi changing course, the ACE has built levees and control structures (especially to limit run-off into a tributary, the Atchafalaya). None of these has ever succeeded in taming the Mississippi—as the levees have risen, so too has the water level in the river (contrary to the best scientific expectations); massive control structures have been eroded and undermined in periodic floods. This history is one of a continual back and forth between the ACE and nature, in which the material form of the river and engineering works around it (as well as the social institutions and relations that depend on its water) have evolved in an emergent and decentred fashion, punctuated most recently, alas, in the tragedy of Hurricane Katrina and the devastation of New Orleans.
I want to make several remarks on this potted history. First, as stated, it exemplifies very nicely the idea of a dance of human and material agency on an enormous scale—now out there in the world, not in the scientific laboratory. Secondly, despite the escape from the laboratory, we have not escaped from the telos of dualist purification that characterizes it. The ACE does not enjoy this dance of agency; it would like to get out of it; stretching the usage of the word, it aims to turn the Mississippi and its associated engineering works into a free-standing machine that will act on its own in accordance with human desires. Sociologist Lisa Asplen (2008) refers to this as a command-and-control attitude towards environmental management, and it is surely the paradigmatic and hegemonic approach to engineering in general. Thirdly, we can, nevertheless, make a contrast with laboratory science here. While the development of mainstream sciences like physics is often elegantly punctuated by purifications and stabilizations, the world outside the lab is typically less docile. In instances like this one finds dances of agency that seem liable to continue forever without achieving any rest, and perhaps this is why they are easier to spot and to grasp.

Fourthly, we can turn to the contrast mentioned above. I just described the ACEs stance as paradigmatic of engineering more generally, but there are other ways to relate to the environment. Asplen (2008) describes and analyses approaches to the civil engineering of water that do not seek immediately to impose some dualist telos, but that are interested in the dance of agency in itself. ‘Adaptive ecological management’, for example, is explicitly performative and experimental in its relation to water. Asplen talks about experimental floods on the Colorado River, unleashed from an upstream dam, which have aimed to explore what the river and its ecosystem will do, given the chance. This is a self-consciously posthumanist approach to environmental management, which aims to align human goals with material agency and emergent performances, as well, of course, as vice versa.

This contrast interests me for several reasons. One is that one can make it. If the dance of agency is everywhere, the dualist telos of purification does not have to be. Another is most readily expressed by referring to the philosophy of Martin Heidegger and his famous essay, ‘The Question Concerning Technology’ (1977). Engineering à la ACE is enframing in Heidegger’s terms: an attempt to dominate nature and impose a preconceived human plan upon it—this is if of a piece with the asymmetric ontological dualism already discussed. Adaptive ecological management is instead an engagement with nature in the mode of revealing—an open-ended finding out about what the world has to offer us. Put that way, it becomes clear that there is something attractive about adaptive management in contrast to command-and-control (cf. the discussion of the ‘urban green’ by Whatmore and Hinchliffe this volume, Chapter 19). I will come back to this later under the heading of politics, but for now we could think of the ‘danger’ that Heidegger associated with enframing. Heidegger himself understood this in existential terms—enframing as a danger to the fibre of our being—but more prosaically, we can see the command-and-control stance as itself precipitating new dangers in the material world. To some degree at least, the disaster of Hurricane Katrina was the nightmarish other side of the dream of enframing the Mississippi (and see Scott 1998 for a whole list of exemplifications of this thought). It is hard to see how engineering in the mode of revealing could generate comparable risks.

**Animals**

Another excellent site for dance-of-agency spotting is in human relations with animals, and again I want to focus on two contrasting studies. Sociologist Dawn Copin (2003, 2008) has explored the unglamorous topic of pig farming in the American mid-west. Since World War II this has largely been a quasi-Foucauldian story of confinement: the attempt to raise more and more pigs indoors under controlled conditions. Again, this is a story of a transformative dance of human and non-human agency (capitalists, farmers, pigs, bacteria, chemicals, sunlight). In the process, the very substance of the pig has changed: the animals no longer have enough fat to live outside in winter, and are too pale-skinned to bear the sun in summer, but we can follow Foucault here and focus on architecture as a zone of intersection of human and non-human agency. The form of confinement facilities for pigs has always been and remains a site for performative experimentation, surprise, and emergence. Humans set up the buildings, just like Glaser and his bubble chambers, and then see what happens and how the pigs act, again just like Glaser, in a continuing back and forth of agency. The animals sicken, and the sheds are opened up and reoriented to give the piglets a chance of escape; and so on.

Again then, we find a dance of agency writ large, now in the macro-history of farming. And again too we find the dance structured by a dualist telos. This dance too has an aim in which it seeks to extinguish itself but which it never quite achieves, a Heideggerian enframing of the pig, a docile porcine body as a self-acting producer of bacon, ham, and pork chops.

Now we can turn to another way of relating to animals. Copin speaks of ‘nature-cultures’ in getting at the coupled becoming of farmers, pigs, and the built environment, taking the phrase from historian, philosopher, and political activist Donna Haraway. Interestingly though, Haraway’s focus has shifted from the grim and threatening, if possibly hopeful, figure of the cyborg to relations with dogs, which she evidently relishes (Haraway 2003, 2004). And what fascinates me
about this shift is that it elicits a new and mangle-ish conception of love. Far from understanding love as a state of mind, Haraway offers us a performative and inherently temporalized vision: love as a process of revealing, of a performative finding out about and accommodation to the other (dogs in this instance, but we could just as well say rivers and the environment, or even other people). Love as reciprocally transformative, decentred, and performative, as openness to emergence and what the world has to offer—a dance of agency for its own sake, structured not by any dualist tolos but by a self-conscious awareness and appreciation that it is a dance of agency. And again, then, this stance with respect to animals looks very different from the more familiar teleological alternative explored by Coppin.

Architecture

Now I want to shift the focus again, remaining in the realm of architecture but leaving the pigs behind, which will enable us to examine the dance of agency from a couple of new angles. Adaptive and interactive architecture is a topic of increasing contemporary interest; here I will focus on just one example, a building called the Fun Palace. As extensively documented by architectural historian Stanley Mathews (2007), the original inspiration for the Fun Palace, to be built in London, came from the radical theatre director and playwright, Joan Littlewood; the principal architect was Cedric Price, and the third major actor in its design was the cybernatician, Gordon Pask (see Pickering 2007, and, on the historical sweep of cybernetics more generally, see Pickering 2010). An enormous amount of planning went into the Fun Palace project in the early and mid-60s, but in the end a site could not be found and it was not built. Nevertheless, certain features of the unrealized design are worth our attention here.

The Fun Palace was intended to be a public space where people could gather in their free time, an antidote to the widely recognized 'leisure problem' that was then expected to result from the automation of production (hard to believe, I know). It was intended to support all sorts of activities—education, sport, theatre, the arts—but beyond that, it was intended to be reconfigurable in use. Using a variety of technological means, areas could expand or contract and facilities move around according to their popularity on this day or that. That is the primary sense in which the Fun Palace could be considered an exemplar of adaptive architecture, in contrast with the conventional non-adaptive buildings having a fixed shape and layout that surround us all the time (see also Landau 1968, and Sadler 2005 on the Archigram group of architects).

But beyond this, thanks to Pask, the Fun Palace was envisaged as having a further degree of adaptability. Pask imagined an automation of the building's adaptation, and further imagined an adaptive system that would 'get bored' (Pask 1971: 86). Faced with repetitive patterns of use, the building would stop responding, or respond in unpredictable ways, in the hope of eliciting novel responses from its users.

What should we make of this? From one angle, of course, we could see the Fun Palace as yet another instance of dualist enframing, built according to some plan, just like my house or my car, just another free-standing machine in my extended sense. But from another angle, the Fun Palace looks much more interesting and instructive. Its designers were explicit that they could not see the future and that they did not know what the building would be used for. If it was a free-standing machine, still it was a revealing not an enframing machine. If conventional architecture seeks to prescribe its own use—homes, prisons, schools, hospitals, museums—the Fun Palace was continually open to finding out what its use would be. It was precisely the kind of architecture one would engage in if one thought of the world as a dance of agency. Especially with Pask's cybernetic input, the building was intended to be lively and emergent, searching through spaces of human agency just as, reciprocally, the human users would search through the spaces of the building's performativity.

As a material object, then, albeit an imagined one, the Fun Palace itself thematized the dance of human and non-human agency. We can grasp it as an exemplary piece of ontological theatre. Just as conventional architecture stages for us a sort of asymmetric practical dualism, so the Fun Palace staged an emergent decentered coupling of people and things in a dance of agency. This is one of the new perspectives on the dance of agency that the Fun Palace offers us. In discussing animals and the environment I focused on forms of practice that thematize the dance of agency rather than seeking to escape from and conceal it; here instead we have an object, a machine, the Fun Palace, which in itself thematized the dance and invited participation in it. It interests me a lot that it is indeed possible to envisage a built environment, a made world, which echoes back to us an ontology of revealing rather than enframing. Such a possibility would be unimaginable if we were to leave the linguistic turn undone, and I will come back to this later. For the moment, I want to comment on one last aspect of the Fun Palace project.

I talked about the Fun Palace as searching through spaces of human agency, and it is interesting to reflect on what that search might have entailed. At the most mundane level, it would involve finding out what sorts of things more or fewer people want to do today—watch television, paint pictures, play football, or whatever. But there was a more visionary line of thought that came down to the Fun Palace from the French Situationist International, via Cedric Price's friend, the Glaswegian writer and radical Alexander Trocchi. This was that certain kinds of built environments and certain kinds of human selves hang together. Non-adaptive
environments—fixed structures with fixed functions—foster a passive, consumerist self—the bête noir of the 1960s counterculture. Conversely, the hope was that a new kind of architecture, exemplified by the Fun Palace, might elicit a new kind of self—endlessly creative and emergent. This was not put to the test, but it helps to think here of Foucault again and his notion of technologies of the self. Foucault (1988), of course, focused on technologies of the modern self (in a generic sense), practices aimed at forming and controlling, enframing, the self, and we can see much of our built environment as a set of technologies of the modern self—think of Foucault (1977a) on the prison. But just as the Fun Palace thematized emergence in the realm of machines, so the Situationists imagined revealing and the possibility of a thoroughgoing emergence in the domain of the self, and of the coupling of the two (Marcus 1989; Sadler 1998).

Here enormous vistas open up of technologies of the self, running from, for example, new ways of conceptualizing, transforming, and enframing the body and mind (Rose 2007) up to all of those technologies of the self beloved of the counterculture, technologies of revealing and the ‘exploration of consciousness’—yoga, meditation, psychedelic drugs, strobies, sensory deprivation tanks (e.g. Huxley 1964; see Pickering 2010 for an overview, and Gomart and Hennion 1999 for a scholarly and insightful sociological discussion of musical and chemical disposi tifs of self-abandonment). Reflection on these very material technologies of the self, and the sorts of selves they explore, offers us another angle on the coupling of human and non-human agency, but it would take us too far afield to follow this further here.

HYLOZOISM

My last set of examples takes us further into the wild side. Asymmetric dualism and the stance of enframing put all the weight on humanity; as the only genuine agents around, it seems as if we humans call all the shots of history, set all the goals, have to do all the work, and can claim responsibility for everything that happens, for better or for worse. A recognition that we are plunged into decentred and emergent dances of agency takes some of the weight off us and, conversely, promotes a keen appreciation for the agency of matter. My last three examples indicate some of the directions that appreciation can open up.

The first two examples reflect a conviction that, so to speak, it’s all there already—that instead of engaging in heroic projects of the transformation of matter to bend it to the human will, we might be able to find what we need already in nature. Thus, first, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, two cyberneticians, Stafford Beer and Gordon Pask pursued an amazingly imaginative project in what one can call biological computing (Pickering 2009a, 2010). Their aim was, for example, to replace human factory managers with a certain sort of computing system. But instead of a conventional computing project, which depends upon all sorts of detailed transformations of matter (turning sand and metal into precisely configured silicon chips, and the compilation of long and detailed programs that specify how they should behave), Beer and Pask sought to enrol naturally occurring adaptive systems as controllers of the factory. Their idea was that pond ecosystems, for example, can already adapt to changes in their environment without any help from us, and that if one could only couple a pond to the relevant parameters of a factory, the pond could help the factory to adapt to changes in its environment.

This project went nowhere, of course, but it founded not on any point of principle, I think, but in practical problems in setting up the necessary couplings—in getting ponds to care about us. We see, nevertheless, the upgraded and thematized appreciation for the agency of matter that such projects exemplify: the pond itself was intended to engage in dances of agency with the factory and its environment just like those of human managers. Another striking example of ontological theatre.

Secondly, we can move from a funny sort of biological engineering to a peculiar kind of music, and an idea of the human brain as just another performative, rather than cognitive, material agent. I think here of the ‘brainwave music’ that flourished in the 1960s, pioneered by people like Alvin Lucier (Pickering 2010). Now the idea was to use an EEG readout of electrical rhythms in the brain to control a sound-producing system of some sort. Often the system was tuned to the alpha rhythms of the generating brain, completing a sort of biofeedback circuit, in which the mental state of the performer was reciprocally intertwined with the sound output in yet another performative dance of agency. Presumably one does not need to labour the contrast here with more familiar forms of music, entailing the usual cognitive/linguistic detour through composition and notation. As with the earlier examples, we can think of biological computing and brainwave music as evidence that ontology makes a difference—that practices and objects that thematize the dance of agency are strikingly different from their more familiar and hegemonic counterparts, which background and aim to efface the dance. And, again, this difference can be caught up as that between revealing and enframing; an exploration of what the world can offer us, as against a determination to impose our will on matter and sound.

My last example takes this line of thought to a sort of limit. The linguistic turn was necessarily a celebration of the specialness of humanity relative to brute matter (to which we were said to have no access). A recognition of material agency and the dance of agency points to a rebalancing of this stance, which has to amount to an upgraded appreciation of matter. And if one thinks of knowledge and language as just a part of the dance, rather than a true description of nature, this rebalancing
easily shades into a spiritually charged wonder at the powers of nature that one can call *hylolozism*. And it might therefore be not so surprising, though still striking, that if one explores projects and products that thematize the dance of agency one often finds oneself exploring strange, or at least Eastern and mystically inclined, spiritualities. Stafford Beer, for example, was not only the very successful founder of management cybernetics; he also wrote poems expressing his awe at the extent to which the computational powers of the Irish Sea exceed our own (Blohm et al. 1986: 52). Furthermore, any sort of conscious recognition of the dance of agency as decentred and emergent is liable to lead to a decentred understanding of the self (as mentioned above) and an awareness of the possibility of its dissolution, a very Eastern and Buddhist conception—the other side of an idea of cosmic unity. One finds this idea in Beer’s writings too, as well as in the ‘anti-psychiatry’ of the 1960s, associated with names such as Gregory Bateson and R. D. Laing: schizophrenia as a very confused form of Buddhist enlightenment (e.g. Laing 1967). Beer in fact practised tantric yoga and, as the historian of religion, Mircea Eliade makes very clear in his magisterial *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom* (1969), tantrism is indeed the variety of Eastern spirituality that thematizes material performance and technologies of the self that return to the world in strange performances and magical and alchemical powers.

The point of this last section was not to suggest that an interest in materia culture is irrevocably locked together with pond computers, alpha-wave music, or a hylolozistic tantrism, it is to suggest that a recognition of the dance of agency can carry us, in general, a long way away from the linguistic turn, in practice as well as theory.

**Politics**

In conclusion, I turn briefly to the politics of theory—the ‘so what?’ question. This is discussed at greater length in Pickering (2009b), which also notes affinities in what follows with Haraway’s discussions of both ‘cyborgs’ and human relations with companion species (Haraway 2003, 2004). In science and technology studies, the most extensively worked-out discussion of the politics of theory is to be found in Bruno Latour’s writings on what he calls a parliament of things (1993a) and the politics of nature (2004a, 2005b). I cannot do justice to the intricacies of Latour’s thought here, but a quick summary will help to locate a site of divergence.

First, Latour’s politics are situated in a split-level view of the world. At the ground level, we find everyday practices and projects in science and engineering, people struggling with disease, building transportation systems, fighting wars, and so on, and Latour is content to leave these alone and unchanged. In *We Have Never Been Modern*, especially, he expresses his admiration for the processes (though not the ‘self-understandings’) of dualist purification that he takes to be definitive of modernity (e.g. Latour 1993a: 133–135, 139, 140), and which I have characterized by the dualist *telos* of extinguishing dances of agency. Against this mundane backdrop, Latour, quite conventionally, locates politics at a meta-level—the space of reflection on the ground level, of talking about real-world projects, deliberating on them, making decisions about them. And this meta-level is where actor-network theory (ANT) finds its political edge. Latour argues that our current political institutions enforce a dualist separation of people and things, with politicians in one place and scientists in another, the former deliberating on human actions, the latter on the state of nature. And Latour’s new politics aims precisely and specifically to reform this meta-level, to bring it into line with the non-dualist insights of ANT. Literally or metaphorically, this would entail bringing scientists and politicians together under one roof, to deliberate on science and nature as a single topic, with an explicit recognition that decisions about what should be done and about how the world is hang together: science and politics as ANT-in-action.

This is an interesting and possibly viable extension of ANT into politics, but two related features are worth noting. First, this meta-level politics is entirely a matter of the institutional orchestration of talk, thought, deliberation, decision-making. In this sense, it remains securely on the more or less immortal terrain bequeathed to us by the linguistic turn. Secondly, and obviously, one could go further than Latour and imagine changes at the ground-level, rather than the meta-level, as a further, and less conventional, extension of the politics of theory. This, equally obviously, is what the second part of this chapter has been leading up to, and I can end by elaborating the point.

I have been reviewing examples of the dance of agency in various worldly—ground-level—projects, mainly in an attempt to suggest that the dance of agency is our ontological condition, in science and engineering and our daily lives. However, I have also discussed two forms the dance can take. On the one hand, a hegemonic form organized around a *telos* of dualist purification of people and things, which echoes back to us our specialness and hangs together with the disappearance of matter in the linguistic turn. On the other, a marginal and marginalized form that thematizes dances of agency without pursuing their extinction, which continually reminds us of our entanglements with the agency of matter. Evidently, 1 find this marginal form attractive. Politically, it offers us an alternative to a hegemonic world of enframing that seems to get grimmer and more hopeless every day. It exemplifies the fact, as Latour’s politics does not, that we could indeed try going on in the world at the ground level in another way, in the mode of revealing—of being open to what the world has to offer us instead of always trying to bend it to our will.
My political fantasy, growing out of science and technology studies, is thus that these marginal traditions, sciences, and technologies might grow and become more central to our culture. This would help us to recognize dances of agency as our material condition, rather than veiling this from us, and it would help us to see modernist–dualist projects for what they are: not a necessary way to proceed, but just one option for organizing our action in the world, and an intrinsically risky and dangerous option at that (Scott 1998; Pickering 2008). Heidegger (1981) said that 'only a god can save us', but undoing the linguistic turn in a trip through the materiality of culture and the agency of matter suggests that perhaps we could try looking in the margins of our own culture first.

Chapter 8

Consumption

Introduction

Consumption is a material social practice involving the utilization of objects (or services), as opposed to their production or distribution. Some scholars, who argue for the recent development of a distinctive ‘consumer society’ during the modern period, would define it even more specifically as the utilization of commodities (that is, objects obtained through exchange, or, yet more narrowly, mass-produced objects manufactured for commercial exchange), but this seems unnecessarily restrictive. After many years of surprising neglect, consumption has garnered a great deal of attention among all the social sciences over the past few decades. Beginning in the 1970s, but especially from the mid-1980s, consumption suddenly began to receive increasing recognition as a crucial focus of analysis in a wide range of disciplines, especially in anthropology (Douglas and Isherwood 1979; McCracken 1988; Miller 1987, 1995c, 1995d; Howes 1994; Calloredo-Mansfeld 2005) and sociology (Bourdieu 1984; Campbell 1987, 1993; Boocock 1995; Edgell et al. 1996; Zukin and Maguire 2004), but also history, geography, economics, and other fields (Podol and Watts 1993; Brewer and Porter 1993; Jackson and Thrift 1995; Miller 1995a). Indeed, one prominent advocate has even argued that consumption has become ‘the vanguard of history’ (Miller 1995c: 1) and further claimed, with perhaps a hint of hyperbole, that the rise of consumption studies constitutes a fundamental transformation of the discipline of anthropology and may replace kinship as its core (Miller 1995b, 1995d).
The reasons for this groundswell of interest are several and complex and these will be discussed in greater detail below. However, one may reasonably claim that the surge of engagement with material culture within the social sciences since the 1980s, after decades of languishing in obscurity, is in many ways a by-product of this emergence of consumption as an important research domain. It is the emphasis on the social and symbolic significance of commodities raised by consumption studies that has provoked an interest in material culture more broadly. Consumption was recognized as the social process by which people construct the symbolically laden material worlds they inhabit and which, reciprocally, act back upon them in complex ways. Hence, as interest has grown in consumption as an important arena of agentic social action, symbolic discourse, and cultural transformation, a corresponding realization has emerged of the importance of understanding the long neglected material domain that consumption simultaneously operates within and creates. On the other hand, archaeologists, the one group of specialists for whom the study of material culture has always been a **sine qua non**, have, for different reasons, also recently turned to the study of consumption as something capable of helping to explain material culture and to illuminate ancient societies in novel ways (Deetz 1977; Dietler 1990a, 1990b, 1998, 2006; Rogers 1996; Mullins 1999). But whatever the relationship between the focus on material culture and the turn to consumption, the promise of consumption studies in the social sciences has stimulated the vigorous development of both cross-disciplinary theoretical discussion and new research strategies and methods.

This chapter offers a brief review of recent studies of consumption, with a particular emphasis on the fields of archaeology and socio-cultural anthropology. It examines the dramatic growth of a general analytical focus on this practice and the relationship to an expanding interest in the study of material culture. By way of example, it then focuses particularly on the possibilities and challenges that the study of consumption presents for anthropological and archaeological analysis of colonialism, while also pointing out more briefly a series of other domains in which consumption studies have been concentrated. Finally, the issue of methodology is briefly assessed, with special reference to the requirements for developing an effective archaeology of consumption.

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**The Emergence of Consumption Studies**

Let us first be clear about what is actually new about the recent wave of consumption studies, because it would be misleading to give the impression that consumption, in a very general sense, was completely ignored in the past. Archaeologists, for example, have always been studying the patterns generated most directly by consumption, rather than production or exchange (which are generally another order of inference removed from the archaeological record). This is because, aside from a few cases such as excavations of shipwrecks or production sites (pottery workshops, factories, etc.), consumption is what ultimately determines where most of the objects they excavate are located and in what state they are found. Moreover, the subdiscipline of zooarchaeology has been, from the beginning, almost entirely concerned with identifying patterns of food consumption from faunal remains. But, until recently, archaeological treatment of the process of consumption has been largely implicit, accepting it as a transparent epiphenomenon (the end product of production and distribution) rather than as a domain of agentic social action of primary analytical significance.

Economists, as well, have employed a concept of consumption since at least the emergence of marginalist microeconomics in the late nineteenth century; and, indeed, microeconomics might well be described as the study of consumer decision-making. However, economists have tended to treat consumption unproblematically in a very narrow economic sense as simply an aspect of the relationship between supply and demand, the 'marginal propensity to consume' being a response to prices through the rational allocation of resources among alternative wants or preferences. Understanding consumption then becomes a matter of plotting marginal utility and 'indifference' curves for competing commodities and services. But until recently, most economists have shown little interest in the social and cultural dimensions of consumption or the origins, roles, and meaning of consumer preferences; these are simply accepted as background givens and attention is focused narrowly on the process of quantitatively assessing how the preferences of individual consumers are relatively weighted, affected by prices, and satisfied by the allocation of income (see Fine 1995). In contrast, what is novel in the recent turn to consumption is its recognition as an emphatically social and cultural practice that has significant consequences in other domains of social life and that must be explicitly studied and theorized as a distinct field of action.

To be sure, the economist and sociologist Thorsten Veblen (2008) and the sociologist Georg Simmel (1905, 1961) both produced much more explicit social analyses of consumption nearly a hundred years ago. However, these studies of newly emerging patterns of consumption among the urban upper-middle classes in America and Germany at the beginning of the twentieth century failed to stimulate a sustained engagement with the analysis of consumption, and they emerged only in the 1980s as re-discovered ancestral precursors of the current consumption literature. Walter Benjamin's early twentieth-century philosophical reflections from the Paris Arcades Project (Benjamin 1999) and, especially, his essay on 'the work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction' (1977) have also been resurrected in recent years to discuss consumption, especially by scholars in the cultural studies and media fields (e.g. Harvey 1989: 346–349; Shields 1992;
example, were instrumental in highlighting consumption as a good deal more than the provision of material needs; it was treated as primarily a symbolic domain with a semiotic code to be deciphered (e.g. Barthes 1961; 1967b; Lévi-Strauss 1978). Roland Barthes’ (1967b) famous dissection of the fashion industry, for instance, demonstrated the arbitrary quality of signs mobilized in the domain of fashion and the way their naturalization served to assert bourgeois values. The ahistorical, static, and structurally overdetermined aspects of the core research programme of structuralism (that is, searching for hidden ‘deep structure’ in the surface manifestations of various social and cultural phenomena, such as consumption, myth, and kinship), among other problems, eventually led to a reaction against orthodox structuralism. However, the semiotic and relational forms of analysis that were a hallmark of structuralism were retained as a central feature in the work of anthropologists and sociologists who emerged from the structuralist school and were seminally instrumental in pushing the symbolic analysis of consumption further (e.g. Sahlin 1976; Bourdieu 1984; Baudrillard 1995, 1996).

These analyses viewed consumption as a symbolic process guided by a system of signs that is culturally ordered; but more than being simply a coded reflection of deep structure, this process was seen to have profound social implications and effects. The early works of Jean Baudrillard and Marshall Sahlin on this theme were primarily interested in explaining the symbolic logic of consumption and asserting a primacy for consumption in shaping the broader political economy, and they operated on a fairly sweeping cultural scale. For instance, Baudrillard, in his *The Consumer Society* (1998), used a somewhat anecdotal approach to evidence from various domains of consumption (media, the body, leisure, etc.) to argue for the idea that consumption as a system of signs had displaced production at the centre of contemporary culture and identity. On the other hand, Pierre Bourdieu, in his *Distinction: a social critique of the judgment of taste* (1984), used a very focused and systematic empirical analysis of French society in the 1960s to apply his general theory of practice (Bourdieu 1990) to the realm of consumption. He was concerned to show the ways in which taste (in things like art, music, literature, home furnishings, etc.) is distributed in highly patterned ways corresponding to positions within fields of social power, and how it both reflects and reinforces those relational positions. Consumption is structured by distinctive sets of aesthetic and moral dispositions that become embodied through life experience within particular class and status positions, and these aspects of a more general ‘habitus’ also become part of the ‘symbolic capital’ (or more specifically ‘cultural capital’) that actively reinforces power relations (Bourdieu 1984: 169–225; 1990: 52–65, 112–121). According to Bourdieu’s analysis, the apparently distinctive tastes and consumption patterns of different classes and class fractions must always be viewed in a dynamic relational fashion, such that the dominant aesthetic subtly defines the aesthetic of dominated groups and fractions through a variety of symbolic oppositions, inversions, and imitations. This provides a far more nuanced and flexible
basis for analysis than, for example, Veblen’s concept of ‘conspicuous consumption’ (2008: 49-60).

The 1980s witnessed a sudden florescence of concern with consumption within socio-cultural anthropology (especially Anglophone anthropology), influenced by the pioneering studies noted above. But this anthropological engagement with consumption was also influenced by both a growing critique of neo-classical economics and a dissatisfaction with the limitations of traditional anthropological research (particularly the dominant focus on exchange within economic anthropology and the neglect of Western consumer culture as a field of analysis). Anthropologist Mary Douglas and economist Baron Isherwood’s co-authored study, *The World of Goods* (1979), was widely influential in stimulating anthropologists to focus on consumption and commodification, and it directed a clear challenge to the hegemony of economics (as had Sahlin’s earlier critique of practical reason [1976]). Anthropologist Arjun Appadurai’s equally influential introduction to an edited volume on *The Social Life of Things* (1988b) further opened the field of consumption to anthropologists by deconstructing the entrenched gift/commodity dichotomy and the boundaries between ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ economies that had restricted disciplinary dispositions toward fieldwork. Daniel Miller (1987) was perhaps the most active advocate, pushing anthropologists towards both theorizing consumption in new ways and developing new methods and specific field studies of consumption, but other anthropological approaches to consumption emerged in parallel with his (e.g. Mintz 1985; McCracken 1988; Rutz and Orlow 1989; Friedman 1994). Colin Campbell (1987) played a similar role during this period within sociology.

Much of the growing consumption literature in sociology, geography, and cultural studies since the 1980s has followed Baudrillard’s (1988) lead in focusing upon the emergence of a post-modern, post-industrial ‘consumer society’ in Europe and America, in which the practice of consumption has overtaken class and production-based categories as a means of defining identity (Hebdige 1979; Harvey 1989; Featherstone 1991). While anthropologists have also ventured into this terrain (e.g. Miller 1987, 1988c), a more widespread concern within the recent anthropological literature on consumption has been the flow of commodities across cultural boundaries and the social and cultural consequences of such consumption. This analysis has been directed both back in time, examining the role of consumption in the historical process of colonialism and Western capitalist expansion (e.g. Mintz 1985; Dietler 1997b, 1998, 2005, 2007; Comaroff and Comaroff 1991, 1997; Thomas 1991; Sahlin 1994; Hovess 1996a; Mullins 1999), and toward the present, exploring the current process of globalization. Anthropologies of globalization have focused particularly upon the role of consumption in the historically-specific configurations of local/global relations and processes. These have emerged recently in the post-colonial, late-capitalist cultural economy, with their peculiar conjunctures of electronic mass-mediation, mass-migrations, and global capital flows, which have created new forms of diasporic communities and radically new transnational spaces of imagination and identity (e.g. Hanitzch 1992; Friedman 1994; Miller 1994, 1997; Appadurai 1996; Haugerud et al. 2000).

Archaeologists and historians have made an important contribution in relativizing some of the assumptions of uniqueness for the contemporary situation held by scholars in other fields. As the previous discussion makes clear, most of the consumption literature emerged in the context of an analysis of capitalist mass consumption and the use of industrially produced commodities in the construction of identities in the modern and post-modern eras in the United States and Europe, with the common assertion that there is something qualitatively distinctive about these recent phenomena. This assertion has, however, usually been unsupported by actual empirical analysis of earlier contexts and often rests on little more than conjectural contrasts. There clearly are potential dangers for archaeologists, historians, and historical anthropologists attempting to use theoretical concepts designed to tackle these specific historical situations in order to analyse cases from earlier periods. But these dangers exist only if models are imported as a priori explanatory devices and anachronistically universalized across all cultures and histories; that is, if historians and archaeologists act simply as naive consumers of consumption theory. Instead, they have an opportunity to contribute actively to the development of such theory by examining both similarities and differences between historical cases and thereby contextualizing the modern and postmodern situations that generated much of the early theorizing. Such work serves to temper some of the more radical assertions of uniqueness for modern and postmodern consumption; after all, the widespread circulation and consumption of mass-produced commodities was already a feature of the ancient Mediterranean economy in the first millennium BCE, and styles of consumption already played a major role in the formation of Roman provincial identities within the Empire, to cite but two related examples (see Tchernia 1986; Woolf 1998). Archaeological studies of consumption in past societies can also help to identify and understand genuinely novel aspects of the recent situation by examining simultaneously both continuities and disjunctures, and commonalities and contrasts. In brief, explorations of ancient consumption can serve to counteract tendencies toward both the production of Manichean conjectural histories of pre-capitalist or pre-modern conditions through simple dichotomous inversion of the present and the facile universalizing of modern Western experience in the way that much social theory has done all too often and easily (e.g. Baudrillard 1996, 1998). In other words, archaeological research, in dialogue with the modern consumption literature, has the potential to develop a more nuanced understanding by demonstrating that modern and postmodern consumption is not unique: since such things as mass consumption of commodities circulating over long distances existed in earlier contexts. At the same time, however, there are important differences in such things as the organization of commodity chains and the nature of marketing,
transport, and media, which prohibit the uncritical generalizing of theory derived from modern Western contexts. This does not make such theory irrelevant to the past: far from it. Rather, it means that archaeology has a role complementary to that of socio-cultural anthropology in helping to 'provincialize' (Chakrabarty 2000) Eurocentric social theory and thereby improve it.

**Consumption, Material Culture, and Colonialism**

Studies of consumption have ranged over a wide array of contexts and goods, and one can do little more than point to a selective sampling in a brief review such as this. However, the contribution of consumption studies to the understanding of colonialism will be singled out for somewhat more extensive discussion because, as noted earlier, this has been a particularly productive focus of anthropological research (Dieterle 2010). One of its attractions is that, because it is focused on issues of transformation, the field of colonial consumption is one that has emphasized a dynamic view of historical processes and avoided a tendency toward somewhat static, synchronic visions of consumption that have often characterized analyses of modern Western mass consumption.

A new theoretical interest in consumption within anthropology has accompanied a growing awareness of the significance of material culture and consumption by scholars of colonialism and postcoloniality (e.g. Mintz 1985; Dieterle 1999a, 1998, 2005, 2007; Rogers 1990; Comaroff and Comaroff 1990, 1997; Thomas 1991; Sahlins 1992, 1994; Appadurai 1996; Burke 1996; Howe 1996a; Turgeon et al. 1996; Turgeon 1998, 2003; Voss 2008b). Consumption in this context has come to be understood as an agentive symbolic activity deeply embedded in, and constitutive of, social relations and cultural conceptions, and is no longer simply an economic product of ends/means calculation (as in neoclassical economics) or a passive reflection of other structures (as in early structuralism). This relational approach to consumption has opened important new vistas for understanding the role of material culture in colonial strategies and processes. In archaeological contexts, it has also provided a way of addressing the issue of agency in colonial situations by revealing patterns of choice and their consequences.

However, while full of promise, one must acknowledge certain dangers in the growing popularity of this consumption work as well. For instance, an exclusive focus on consumption, particularly as exemplified in some of the more semiotically oriented forms of analysis stemming from the early work of Baudrillard, may risk decoupling it from those more traditional, but still important, domains of analysis: production and exchange. An abstract treatment of consumption as the circulation of pure signs that is divorced from consideration of the relations of power in which they are embedded, or that ignores the crucial material dimension of the objects being consumed, would be particularly dangerous in a colonial context, where the issue of exploitation and the political context of the articulation of production and consumption should be ever-present concerns. Jack Goody (1982), for example, provided a useful critical reminder of what was generally missing from structuralist treatments of foodways as sign systems: an analysis of the structures of colonial power and the patterns of labour exploitation that provided the hidden conditions of possibility for the circulation of exotic foodstuffs in European cuisines (see also Mintz 1985; Cook and Cragg 1996).

Nevertheless, with such caveats in mind, one can begin a productive exploration of this relationship between colonialism and consumption with the observation (well supported by the studies noted above) that consumption is never simply a satisfaction of utilitarian needs or an epiphenomenon of production. Rather, it is a process of symbolic construction of identity and political relations with important material consequences. Moreover, contrary to certain assumptions of neoclassical economic theory (e.g. see Ghez and Becker 1975; Stigler and Becker 1977; Becker 1966; see Fine 1995 for a critique), anthropological studies of consumption have shown that demand can never be understood as a simple or automatic response to the availability of goods, and particularly not in poly-cultural colonial situations. Consumption is always a culturally specific phenomenon and demand is always socially constructed and historically changing. These features offer, therefore, a good potential starting point for launching an exploration of the role of material culture in colonialism and the operation of agency in colonial encounters.

An approach to colonialism through consumption requires consideration of a few key concepts, not least of which is culture. This is important because, not only is consumption structured by cultural categories and dispositions, but also 'culture is constructed through consumption' (Comaroff 1996: 29). This process of cultural construction through consumption implies two things. In the first place, objects materialize cultural order. They render abstract cultural categories as visible and durable, they aid the negotiation of social interaction in various ways, and they structure perception of the social world (see Douglas and Isherwood 1979; Bourdieu 1984; Baudrillard 1995, 1998). The systems of objects that people construct through consumption serve both to inculcate personal identity and to enable people to locate others within social fields through the perception of embodied tastes and various indexical forms of symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1984). Despite somewhat hyperbolic claims by some scholars about recent revolutionary transformations of such practices (e.g. Miller 1987; Baudrillard 1998), this is by no means something unique to capitalist consumer societies, although it clearly operates in different ways in different contexts. However, more than simply reproducing static systems of cultural categories, consumption constructs culture...
in a more dynamic sense. This is particularly relevant to the issue of cross-cultural consumption and colonialism. Consumption can thus be understood as a process of structured improvisation that continually materializes cultural order by also dealing with alien objects and practices through either transformative appropriation and assimilation or rejection.

To accept this perspective implies a processual understanding of culture that differs fundamentally from the one held by, for example, the older acculturation paradigm that guided earlier analysis of colonialism and culture contact in American anthropology (e.g. Herskovits 1938; Social Science Research Council 1954). Rather than viewing culture as simply an inheritance from the past, a processual approach recognizes that it is, more accurately, a kind of eternal project (Hounkondi 1994; Sahlin 1999). In other words, culture is not a fixed, static, homogeneous system of shared beliefs, rules, and traits, but rather sets of embodied categorical perceptions, analogical understandings, and values that structure ways of reasoning, solving problems, and acting upon opportunities. The operation of culture is always a creative process. Among those problems/opportunities to be handled is the ever-present one of dealing with exogenous peoples and objects. This process involves both the selective domestication (or indigenization) of formerly foreign goods, practices and tastes, and the rejection of others. Such selective incorporation operates according to a specific cultural logic, but it also has a continual transformative effect in the reproduction of culture. Moreover, this process, obviously, does not occur through the actions of cultures (seen as reified entities) coming into contact, but rather through the often contradictory actions of individual human beings and social groups located differentially within complex relational fields of power and interest.

This process of selective appropriation and indigenization is not something that is unique to colonial situations. It happens everywhere and continuously, given that societies have never existed in a state of isolation and people must always negotiate their lives in relation to external conditions. This is what Amselle, following Ricoeur's (1992) observation that 'selfhood' is constructed in a permanent relation with alterity, meant in writing about 'organizing syncretism' (Amselle 1998: x). Cultures are inherently relational in nature: they have always been both products of fusion and in a ceaseless process of construction through fusion. The distinctive feature of colonial contexts is that the particular configurations of colonial relations of power have a marked influence on the nature and structure of the process. Moreover, precisely because of the significance of consumption to the construction of culture, material culture has been repeatedly used as a tool of colonialism.

Perceiving culture in this way means deconstructing the entrenched Western dichotomy between tradition and change (and the linked dichotomy between static and dynamic societies). It also means understanding that the adoption of foreign goods and practices does not result in 'deculturation', and it does not render cultures inauthentic or incoherent. As Marshall Sahlin (1999: xi) has noted, 'anthropologists have known at least since the work of Boas and his students that cultures are generally foreign in origin and local in pattern'. Moreover, cultural continuity usually consists of the distinctive ways that cultures change (Sahlin 1993: 2). Hence, cross-cultural consumption is a continual process of selective appropriation and creative assimilation according to local logics that is also a way of continually constructing and reconceptualizing culture (Figure 8.1).

This is not to say that such consumption does not have significant consequences in terms of altering the conditions of cultural reproduction. It clearly does. Moreover, focusing upon the role of consumption in the process of colonial entanglement should underline precisely this feature. However, these effects are often subtle and gradual, and they frequently will not be perceived by the participants as marking a cultural discontinuity (although there will sometimes be generational or gender differences in such perceptions). What is usually perceived by colonized peoples as marked rupture or discontinuity is the imposition of colonial political domination and the forms of colonialism that follow it: that is, the sudden loss of control over the process of cultural reproduction and the imposition of techniques of repression and discipline.

Such considerations argue for a more symmetrical treatment of consumption on both sides of colonial encounters than has usually occurred in the past. The consumption of goods and practices does not flow in one direction only, and the...
process deserves to be examined in comparable ways in all contexts. For example, consumption of foreign objects and practices by Euro-American societies is rarely credited with provoking sentiments of cultural crisis or inauthenticity in popular consciousness. Europeans and Americans are allowed any number of invented traditions and indigenizations of foreign objects and practices—whether pasta and tomatoes in Italian cuisine, tea in England, or the decoration of American homes with African baskets, Indonesian cloth, Persian rugs, and Japanese furniture, for example—without the suspicion of cultural emulation or incoherence. Yet, similar kinds of adaptations of European or American objects or practices in places such as Africa or the Pacific have often been seen as a flawed mimesis of the West rather than creative, and sometimes subversive, appropriations. Nevertheless, asymmetrical analysis of consumption can correct such misperceptions. Jean Comaroff (1996: 31) has used the revealing example of a Tswana chief in South Africa of the 1860s, who had a Western style suit made for himself out of leopard skin, to show that, rather than simply imitating Western goods in a curious way that did not quite get it right, he was creatively playing upon symbols of power from two domains to create an object that doubled its impact.

The case of the Tswana chief underlines the fact that when an object crosses cultural frontiers, it rarely arrives with the same meanings and practices associated with it in its context of origin. If one thinks of the consumption of Coca-Cola, for example, a bottle of this beverage consumed in rural East Africa does not have the same meaning as an identical one consumed in Chicago. In the former context, it may be reserved for serving to distinguished visitors and incorporated into ceremonial commensality in a pattern reminiscent of the use of imported French wine in bourgeois homes in Chicago, where it would be unthinkable to use Coca-Cola in a similar way. Hence, the presence of bottles of Coca-Cola in rural Africa is not a sign of the Americanization of Africa, but rather of the Africanization of Coca-Cola (Dietler 2007). It is crucial to understand the specific contexts of consumption in order to recognize the meaning and significance of goods. After all, it is reported that in Russia Coca-Cola is employed to remove wrinkles in hair; it is believed to revive the dead, and in Barbados it is said to transform copper into silver (Pendergrass 1993: 245–247; Howes 1996b: 6). Moreover, Coca-Cola is sometimes valued precisely for its foreign origin (indeed, sometimes for its indexical relationship to an imagined concept of America), while in other contexts it comes to be seen, as Daniel Miller has observed, as a thoroughly local drink without any aura of the exotic (Miller 1994, 1998a).

Obviously, speaking about the Africanization of Coca-Cola does not imply that its consumption is a benign activity without potentially serious economic and cultural consequences. For example, in some contexts, imported soft drinks can come to replace native beverages, and this can have implications for both nutrition and relations of economic dependency (James 1993). Moreover, it is also clear that the availability of Coca-Cola in Africa is driven by strategies of corporate

executives seeking global market penetration and is enabled by a massive international infrastructure of production and distribution embedded in global geopolitical structures of power. Finally, one must also avoid a romanticized vision of unfettered indigenous agency in which consumption becomes an autonomous form of liberating resistance. There are always both intended and unintended consequences in consuming alien goods, and these consequences ought precisely to be the focus of analysis in understanding the entangling operation of consumption and the subtle transformations of consciousness and identity that result (Dietler 1998, 2007). This is the reason that analysis of consumption should not be simply about the semiotic play of signs, but must be firmly grounded in the material conditions and power relations of the political economy. However, just as clearly, this is not a simple homogeneous, or homogenizing, process of the 'coca-colonization' (Hannerz 1992: 217) of passive peripheral subjects. Whatever the hegemonic schemes of Coca-Cola executives for global market domination, demand for this beverage in Africa, Chicago, Paris, or Trinidad is a product of local desires and tastes generated according to local cultural conceptions and social practices. In order to be desired and used, exotic goods must always be imbued with culturally relevant meaning locally and incorporated into local social relationships. Moreover, these processes of redefinition and reorientation must be contextualized and understood if we are to comprehend the transformative effects of cross-cultural consumption (Figure 8.2).

This approach to consumption also leads to consideration of the significance of material culture in strategies of colonialism, something that has gained increasing
recognition among anthropologists in recent years. As Nicholas Thomas has noted, 'material cultures and technologies are central to the transformative work of colonialism' (2002: 182). Given the importance of consumption in constructing culture and social relationships, it should not be surprising that goods have not only been appropriated and indigenized, they have also been used by both parties in exchanges to attempt to control the other—‘making subjects by means of objects’ (Comaroff and Comaroff 1997: 218). This involved not only attempts to create novel desires for new goods, but also attempts to get people to use imported objects in particular ways, as well as the (usually mistaken) belief that the use of particular objects or technologies would inherently induce certain kinds of desired behaviour. For example, it is clear that clothing played a very important instrumental role in the strategies of European missionaries to colonize the consciousness of indigenous peoples in various parts of the world. Christian missionaries in the Pacific tried to use clothing as a means of transforming Samoan and Tahitian moral consciousness and instilling new concepts of work discipline, temporality, and gender relations (N. Thomas 2002). Similarly, among the Tswana in South Africa, both clothing and architecture served as vehicles for attempts by missionaries to inculcate European concepts of domesticity and bodily discipline; and they became sites of struggle as the Tswana used these new material forms as an expressive language to structure identity in new ways and contest colonial categories and aesthetics (Comaroff and Comaroff 1997). As this case suggests, such strategies to use material objects as vectors of control always have unintended consequences for all the parties concerned.

Anthropological and archaeological studies of consumption guided by this kind of perspective have been instrumental in providing new insights into the operation and consequences of colonialism in a wide variety of colonial and postcolonial (or neocolonial) contexts, ranging from the cases of African and Pacific encounters with Europeans noted above (see also Hansen 1992; Sahlin 1992, 1994; Burke 1996), to European missionary activity in South America (Scaramelli and Tarble de Scaramelli 2005), North American slavery (Mullins 1999), the politics of identity in colonial Ireland (Hartnett 2004), colonial ethnogenesis in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century California (Voss 2008b), and ancient Greco-Roman encounters with indigenous peoples of the Mediterranean (Dieterl 1998, 2010).

**OTHER FIELDS OF CONSUMPTION**

Aside from colonialism, the range of domains of material culture and social action in which consumption research has played a prominent role is extensive. Food, alcohol, and drugs have constituted one obvious area, given that consumption of such 'embodied material culture' (Dieterl 2006a: 231–232), transforms goods by ingesting them directly into the body, is so closely linked to the construction and display of social and personal identity. This is also an area where the performative aspects of consumption are closely tied to the creation and maintenance of social relationships and politics. Because of the biological imperatives of nutrition, it is also an area where symbolic action in the domestic sphere is so obviously linked to production and the broader political economy. Hence, it is hardly surprising that this is also an area that attracted the attention of early structuralist analyses (e.g. Barthes 1961; Douglas 1975; Sahlin 1976; Lévi-Strauss 1978) and that has consistently linked social anthropologists, archaeologists, historians, and sociologists in a common dialogue. Subjects of study have ranged from the micro-politics of cuisine in Indian homes to the invention of the restaurant in Europe, the construction of national cuisines, the wine trade in the ancient Mediterranean, the role of alcohol in the construction of gender and class, and the consumption of world cuisine in cosmopolitan cities, to name only a few (e.g. Douglas 1975, 1984, 1987; Appadurai 1989; Goody 1984; Weismantel 1988; Dieterl 1990a, 2006a, 2007; Falk 1993; McDonald 1997; Goodman et al. 1991; James 1996; Mennell 1996; Counihan and van Esterik 1997; Wilk 1999; de Garine and de Garine 2001; Turgeon 2003; Twiss 2007; Mullins 2008).

Most recently, rituals of food and alcohol consumption, called feasts, have attracted particular theoretical and empirical attention, especially by archaeologists, as prominent arenas of political action (e.g. Dieterl and Hayden 2003; Bray 2003a; Mills 2004; Wright 2004).

Another domain of consumption closely associated with the body—clothing and dress—has also been a long-term popular theme for researchers from a variety of fields, and has generated an enormous literature. This includes both analysis of fashion (the constantly shifting semiotics of clothing style, especially in Western bourgeois society) and more general treatment of cloth, clothing, jewellery, and other forms of bodily adornment in other contexts (e.g. Hebdige 1979; Turner 1980; Weiner and Schneider 1989; Comaroff 1996; Caplan 2000; Entwistle 2000; Hansen 2000, 2004; N. Thomas 2002; Banerjee and Miller 2003; Allman 2004; Küchler and Miller 2005). Studies of the consumption of media and services have also become increasingly popular, particularly as the former industrial powers of Europe and America move increasingly toward service economies (Morley 1992, 1999; Silverstone and Hirsch 1992; Mazzarella 2003). However, the list of goods and services that have been treated in consumption studies (furniture and other household items, art, music, tourist experiences and memorabilia, automobiles, etc.) is both enormous and expanding daily (Figure 8.3).

For archaeologists and historians, another recent expanding domain of research attention has been the consumption of the past, including concerns about the implications of scholars in this process and the effects it has on both disciplinary practice and society at large (e.g. see Lowenthal 1998; Abu El-Haj 2001; Baram and
Rowan 2004; Dietler 2006b; Silberman 2007). Archaeologists, in particular, have been concerned about the role of the discipline in producing the objects and sites that constitute a material symbolic reservoir for the construction of modern identities. Whether under the banner of ‘heritage’, which is often linked to nationalizing narratives of the state, or the neo-liberal private commercialization of archaeological sites and artefacts as marketable commodities, entertainment and cultural tourism, or the media-fed integration of archaeology into popular culture under the tropes of mystery, discovery, and adventure, the perceived value of archaeology to consumers plays a major role in the funding and use of research. This fact has a variety of ramifications for archaeological practice that are the subject of a growing body of current research.

Fig. 8.3 Consuming the past: cultural tourism and the use of archaeological objects in popular culture (Murlo, Italy).

Methods

Analysts of consumption have tended to approach the issue from two directions: focusing either on the symbolic logic and social action of consumers or on the efforts of marketers and vendors to shape and/or follow consumer tastes. The work of early social theorists on consumption was often rather loosely grounded in anecdotal personal impressions and general assumptions (e.g. Baudrillard 1996, 1998). However, the methods used by subsequent analysts vary from detailed ethnographic analysis of communities of consumers or advertising firms (e.g. Comaroff 1996; Mazzarella 2003; Miller 1994), to statistical analysis of consumer tastes and class and status position correlations by sociologists (e.g. Bourdieu 1984), to more text and image-based studies of advertisements, shop windows, and novels by historians and cultural studies scholars (e.g. Leach 1993; Frank 1997), to product biographies tracing the history of the creation, promotion, and reception of particular commodities (e.g. Pendergast 1993; Parr 1999; Mullins 2008). The demands of consumption studies have also been instrumental in pushing anthropologists and sociologists toward methodological innovation, such as new forms of cooperative ‘multi-sited ethnography’ (Marcus 1995; Gilje and Ó Riain 2002) that are capable, for example, of exploring the social life of classes of objects by following commodity chains or commodity networks (e.g. Mintz 1985; Collins 2000; Hansen 2000, 2002). In this way, the often hidden linkages between the decisions, actions, and effects of consumers and those of transnational corporations, media, bureaucracies, and producers spread around the world can be exposed and analysed.

For archaeologists, the epistemological issues are somewhat different. Historical archaeologists have been able to rely partly on the kind of textual evidence available
to historians (archives, advertisements, wills and probate statements, etc.), but supplemented, interwoven with and challenged by the material evidence of consumed objects (Deetz 1977; Mullins 1999; Cochran and Beaudry 2006; Voss 2008b). For those working in periods and areas where textual evidence is scarce or nonexistent, the archaeological turn to the study of consumption has required some methodological ingenuity, as older excavations were usually not geared toward the acquisition of data that are useful for detecting consumption patterns.

The kinds of regional distribution maps of objects and limited excavations that have been typical for discussions of trade, and even many typologies of ceramics and other objects that were originally designed for purposes of regional chronologies and culture histories, will often be inadequate for investigating consumption. Moving beyond the limitations of these techniques to study consumption requires examining much more carefully the particular things that were consumed and the ways they were consumed: that is, examining closely the specific properties and contexts of objects and practices in order to understand the social and cultural logic of the desire for them and the social, economic, and political roles that their consumption played. It is also, of course, necessary to examine the counter-phenomenon—that is, what might be called the logic of indifference and/or rejection. It is necessary to understand what goods and practices were available for appropriation but were ignored or refused, and why a particular pattern of selective consumption emerged from a range of possibilities. In brief, one must seek to discern and explain the choices that were made and the consequences of those choices.

This kind of close examination of consumption requires a research strategy geared toward the simultaneous relational analysis, on regional, intra-site and household scales, of several features: the contexts of consumption, the patterns of association among objects consumed, the spatial distribution of objects, the relative quantitative representation of different kinds of objects, and the specific material and functional properties of different objects. Finally, such analysis is most effective when one subjects these patterns to comparative analysis, in both their temporal and spatial dimensions; that is, when there is both a focus on historical process, comparing successive phases at individual sites and within regions, and also an attempt to compare and contrast local patterns with those of adjacent sites and regions. This kind of analysis has, for example, enabled a much richer understanding of the shifting nature of demand for imported wine in Iron Age France, its role in articulating the colonial encounter with Greeks, Etruscans, and Romans over several centuries, and the social and cultural consequences of this consumption (Dietler 1998, 2005, 2010; see also Sammarti 2009) (Figure 8.4).

This strategy obviously places quite stringent demands upon the archaeological evidence, demands of a kind that cannot always be met adequately by the data from many past and current field research projects. It is clear, for example, that the kind of understanding sought cannot be gleaned from a single site or dwelling in isolation: it requires fairly dense contextual documentation over a regional landscape and over individual sites within that regional landscape (comparing detailed household and funerary data on consumption patterns within and among sites), as well as good chronological control. It is also evident that, by itself, archaeological survey cannot provide an adequate basis for this kind of analysis, because it yields very little contextual information. Excavation is therefore essential, but not just any type of excavation. One really needs large-scale, area-extensive excavations that pay very careful attention to the contextual and processual details of domestic and funerary situations, and that record this information in ways that allow fine-grained comparative analysis on a variety of scales. It also requires, for example, classifications of ceramics that are based on functional criteria, rather than on the kinds of decorative elements or fabric types that have been traditionally employed to construct chronologies and trace horizons and trade patterns. Tamara Bray (2003b), for instance, has shown how a major rethinking of ceramic classification was necessary to understand the operation and significance of food consumption rituals of the Inca state (see also Cook and Glowacki 2003; Smith et al. 2003).
Conclusions

Consumption is a material practice that has seen a dramatic increase in research attention in recent decades, and that has had a major impact on the revival of interest in material culture in the social sciences and humanities. Consumption research has stimulated an appreciation of the symbolic significance of the material world and a new analytical focus on the use of objects in the construction of identity and in the politics of daily life. It has also brought about a re-evaluation of popular culture as a domain of consequent agency rather than simply a banal and decadent distraction or a mystification of capitalism.

The pursuit of consumption studies is a vibrant, evolving research frontier that has provoked a good deal of theoretical discussion and methodological innovation. This popularity poses certain dangers, particularly if consumption is studied in isolation or treated in a limited semiotic fashion as an entirely symbolic activity. However, if understood as a social practice with significant material consequences that is intimately entangled in systems of production and distribution, then consumption studies have the potential to serve as a heuristic bridge between various disciplines and fields and to provide novel insights into a variety of phenomena ranging from identity to agency, class, nationalism, colonialism, and globalization. Studies of consumption by archaeologists and sociocultural anthropologists have a special place in this domain of research because they bring to it a global perspective that ranges widely in time and space. Hence, they offer the crucial ability to relativize and contextualize studies of modern Western consumer culture, which generated most of the early theoretical work on consumption.

CHAPTER 9

FIELDWORK AND COLLECTING

GAVIN LUCAS

Introduction

Studies of collecting and fieldwork in the disciplines of archaeology and sociocultural anthropology are relatively undeveloped, but in the past 10–15 years there has been a noticeable rise in interest as part of a broader reflexivity in the practices of these and related disciplines. Collecting, studied from a psychological perspective has a longer history, especially through Freudian interpretations that linked it with the anal retentive stage, thus associating it with certain personality traits (Pearce 1995: 6–8). However, as part of a wider discourse, it is a fairly recent topic of investigation and has been generally approached either in the context of consumer research (Belk 1995) or more commonly, museum studies (Impey and MacGregor 1985; Stocking 1985; Pomian 1990). Susan Pearce’s major study On Collecting: an investigation into collecting in the European tradition was a landmark volume in a shift over the past two decades from the study of only ‘the content of collections’ to a focus on ‘collecting as a process in itself’ (Pearce 1995: vii; cf. Pearce 1992; Elsner and Cardinal 1994). Studies specifically on ethnological collections have also seen a major rise in interest in the past decade (O’Hanlon and Welsh 2000; Gosden and Knowles 2001; Edwards et al. 2006), but have a pedigree in George Stocking’s seminal volume Objects and Others: essays on museums and material culture (Stocking 1985). In parallel with this growing awareness of the practices of collecting, reflexive studies, which examine the nature and practice of
anthropological and archaeological fieldwork, have also begun to develop, albeit rather unevenly. In socio-cultural anthropology, a number of recent volumes attest to the growing importance of reflexivity. From George Stocking’s *Observers Observed: essays on ethnographic fieldwork* (volume 1 of his seminal *History of Anthropology* series; Stocking 1983a) to more recent collections (Gupta and Ferguson 1997a, 1997b; Atal 1995; cf. Robben and Sluiter 2006). In archaeology, similar reflexive studies of fieldwork have developed since the late 1990s, most notably Hodder’s *The Archaeological Process, Lucas’ Critical Approaches to Fieldwork* and Edgeworth’s *Acts of Discovery* (Hodder 1995; also see Hodder 1997; Lucas 2001a; Edgeworth 2003).

Contemporary practices of collecting and fieldwork form a key part of material culture research in archaeology and anthropology, but the approaches can vary quite dramatically, depending on the context and the discipline. The most obvious variation relates to the fact that in ethnographic research, material culture is today rarely collected and removed from its context, while this is a central aspect of the archaeological process. This has important consequences for the nature of fieldwork and its interpretations. This distinction is historical, however, for up until the 1920s, both archaeological and ethnographic or ethnological research shared a similar focus on retrieving and collecting material culture; after this time, the two disciplines diverged. This divergence largely relates to the changing goals of socio-cultural anthropology and its eschewal of material culture studies in favour of direct participant observation. Even since the return of many anthropologists to an interest in material culture, especially from the 1990s (Buchli 2000a), the field has generally maintained this observational rather than interventionist approach to objects. The rest of this chapter presents a review of the history of these practices and the current differences between the treatment of material culture in archaeological and ethnographic fieldwork.

**Collecting and the Field**

Europeans have been continually exposed to artefacts from other cultures, even back into prehistory. One remarkable example is a bronze statuette of Buddha from northern India found from excavations at the eighth-century Viking trading emporium at Helgö in Sweden (Gyllenstvård et al. 2004). Nonetheless, it can be plausibly argued that the Renaissance ushered in a new era of such exotic goods in European history, marked by a sheer increase in scale and variety (Jardine 1996). Such objects initially came from other Old World cultures, especially from the Middle East and Asia, and entered Europe via widespread trade networks, which have been, perhaps misleadingly, named world systems (e.g. Abu-Lughod 1990b; Frank and Gillis 1993). While the connections between Europe and other parts of the globe before the sixteenth century have without doubt previously been understated by European historians, largely because Europe was usually on the periphery of these trade systems, as Europe became the core of a truly global system after the sixteenth century the number of exotic objects—now also from the Americas—entering its countries also dramatically increased. What emerged at the same time was a new conception of many of these exotic objects; while many remained significant items for trade and were inserted into already understood categories and practices (e.g. spices, jewellery, ceramics), others were constituted as a new category of ‘curiosities’ and tied to new and largely elite practices of collecting (Impey and MacGregor 1985; Pomian 1990).

One of the most striking aspects of much early collecting is the lack of distinction among objects; curiosities formed a generic group, where items such as fossils, butterflies, tribal weapons, and antiquities might all jostle side by side in a collector’s cabinet (Figure 9.1). For example, antiquarian researches, such as
those of the seventeenth-century Robert Plot, were frequently part of the wider study of natural history, and archaeological remains were discussed alongside flora, fauna, and other aspects of the environment (Schnapp 1993: 198). The gradual development of classification systems was bound up with the emergence of the modern museum and ultimately the emergence of separate disciplines, including archaeology and ethnography (Hooper-Greenhill 1992).

We know very little about the practices that resulted in the primary acquisition of these early ethnographic objects, except that they probably came as random gifts or other items bought by traders, sailors, and travellers, who later donated or sold them on to patrons, dealers, and collectors. In a sense, the 'fieldwork', if one can use that term, of early modern collectors largely involved visiting other collections and dealers, rather than travelling to the source of such curiosities. For example, John Evelyn, the seventeenth-century collector, travelled around Europe visiting other collections and museums in his diaries, a new shopkeeper dealing specifically in curiosities (Fodden 1964: 114–118). The situation only started to change in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when some collectors started to go into the 'field' to acquire objects themselves. Initially, this happened with ethnologists and naturalists accompanying exploratory or trade voyages, but later, as European colonialism developed, residents such as missionaries and diplomats also built up quite substantial private collections (e.g. Cannizzo 1998; Hasinoff 2006). Similar practices were common in the case of classical antiquities through the rise of international travel among the European elite, whether through the 'Grand Tour' or through official postings (Jenkins 1993). In the case of prehistoric antiquities, however, a tradition of collectors going into the field has, inevitably, a much longer history. This is perhaps unsurprising, as such material was often on the collector's 'doorstep', so to speak. This tradition, which included both excavation as well as accidental discovery through other earth-moving activities, was particularly strong in central Europe (Malina and Vašíček 1990: 27; Schnapp 1995). Even in Britain, which was more oriented towards a topographic approach, until the nineteenth century, 'fieldwork' was a central component of antiquarianism, where, because it largely involved landscape survey, presence in the field was considered essential—a feature that continues to define British landscape archaeology (Ashbee 1972; Pigott 1976; Johnson 2006).

Although motivations for collections varied, by the nineteenth century collecting practices most commonly remained embedded in commercial transactions and connected to the market; collections were still bought and sold, and individual pieces were obtained in similar ways as before—as gifts or commodities. Yet the fact that collecting antiquities or ethnographic objects was, from the late eighteenth century, increasingly being done by the collector-scientist rather than an intermediary such as a merchant, came to have pivotal consequences for the development of both archaeology and anthropology. Nicholas Thomas' now classic study of early ethnography in the Pacific, *Entangled Objects*, provides invaluable insight into this transition (Thomas 1991). As Thomas shows, the motivations for the acquisition of artefacts by the ethnologist and naturalist Reinhold Forster on Cook's second voyage went little beyond curiosity and an unarticulated sense of aesthetics (Thomas 1991: 130–137) (Figure 9.2). Indeed, there was no attempt at systematic collection or representative samples, but rather what was acquired was largely dictated by what the islanders offered (Thomas 1991: 138). Being in the field did not, then, intrinsically affect the content of collections, as might be expected. The economic nexus in which such artefacts were entangled, however, shows that a new discourse was emerging around collecting, which created a competing set of values. Thomas highlights Forster's irritation over the trade in curiosities carried out by ordinary sailors, who bought items for resale back in Europe, knowing their value to collectors. Forster himself clearly purchased items from sailors, but his main grievance was that such trade raised prices and made it more expensive for him to build up scientific collections (Thomas 1991: 140). This story encapsulates the ambiguous status of such objects at the end of the eighteenth century as both commodities and objects of scientific interest. While this ambiguity must have existed since the sixteenth century, it would appear that it was not felt as a problem so long as the collector was at a distant remove in the chain of exchange, but it became problematic once that chain collapsed and there was no mediation between the collector and the original source.

This direct contact between collector and source became a hallmark of scientific authority. Forster quite explicitly criticized those scholars who tried to understand human society solely through their cabinets, which became constituted as second-hand knowledge. Ultimately, presence in the field became the sine qua non of proper scientific practice (Thomas 1991: 141; Kublick 1997: 48), and represented the beginnings of archaeological and anthropological fieldwork. This was by no means an overnight transformation, however, for it was not until the early twentieth century that the modern concept of ethnographic fieldwork emerged, in a process that, ironically, saw a shift of emphasis away from objects, and to which this chapter will return later.

Throughout the nineteenth century, although many ethnologists went into 'the field' to collect artefacts, whether on commissioned expeditions or as resident colonialists, many did not. The first-hand reports of these field collectors provided new authenticity for collections. Many of these individuals collected not just for themselves but for museums.

What is interesting about the professionalization of anthropology in the late nineteenth century and its museum phase (Sturtevant 1969) is the fact that fieldwork did not distinguish amateurs from professionals at this time. Museums sent out their staff to collect artefacts, but at the same time purchased material from local collectors; indeed, often it was in the field that the professionals bought collections from amateurs. For example, many of the important museum
collections of south-west Indian artefacts in North America derive from the practices of one man, Thomas Kearns, who traded and dealt in contemporary and ancient Hopi objects in the last decades of the nineteenth century (Wade 1985). Kearns was well connected to leading anthropologists such as Frank Cushing and Washington Matthews; in 1892, he supplied Jesse Fewkes with over 3,500 objects for $10,000 (Wade 1985: 171). Although Kearns dealt with antiquities, his main influence was on ethnographic collections, while the Wetherill brothers were the master pothunters of the region, excavating Pueblo sites and helping other archaeologists such as Gustaf Nordenskiöld and George Pepper (Wade 1985: 175).

Similar practices occurred in Britain, although without institutional backing; the nineteenth century was the great period of barrow diggers—antiquarians who dug into ancient burial mounds, such as the Reverend William Greenwell or the Mortimer brothers (Marsden 1974) (Figure 9.3). Greenwell was a canon at Durham Cathedral who excavated more than 400 barrows all over Britain—often coming into conflict and argument with John Mortimer; Mortimer was a corn merchant from Driffield who, with his brother Robert, excavated about 360 barrows in eastern Yorkshire (Kinnas and Longworth 1985; Giles 2006). Other antiquarians did not solely rely on their own fieldwork to acquire their material, but frequently hired others; James Ruddock, a taxidermist from Pickering, was paid to excavate barrows on behalf of Thomas Bateman, among others. It was also common practice to pay villagers and farmers for bringing in stray finds—the Mortimer brothers, for example, amassed huge numbers of flint tools from east Yorkshire this way, indeed locals referred to flints as ‘mortimers’ (Sheppard 1911: 186–187).

What is clear from this is that, at least until the late nineteenth century, antiquarians, ethnologists, and museums had no qualms about dealing with and purchasing material from other amateur collectors, so long as they could be trusted. For the emerging profession of anthropology, conducting one’s own fieldwork was not essential, so long as a few reliable individuals—whether freelance or museum employee—could safeguard the integrity of collected objects and information. The collection, examined through systems of classification in academic study or the museum gallery, remained the key focus for anthropological practice before a refocusing upon the field and fieldwork in the early twentieth century. Until this change, the dominant concern with universalizing classification and evolutionary typologies meant that fieldwork was viewed primarily as a means of enhancing the collection rather than a concern for understanding the specific cultural context of objects. It is only with a concern for the specific local context—whether this involves participant observation or greater attention to stratigraphy—that presence in the field or on site became important too (Boone 1993: 136; Gupta and Ferguson 1997c: 80).

Fig. 9.2 Maori artefacts collected on Cook’s second voyage (1772–1775), as illustrated in Plate XVIII in Captain Cook’s A Voyage towards the South Pole and Round the World . . . (London 1777): (1 and 2) adze, tokpou tangata (Forster 109, PRM 1886.1.1159); (3) knife (Forster 110, PRM 1886.1.1161); (4) shell-trumpet (now in the Cambridge University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology).
THE INVENTION OF FIELDWORK

The modern concept of ethnographic fieldwork is perhaps most firmly associated with the London-based anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski (Figure 9.4), but this needs some qualification (Fiorin 1977; Stocking 1983b; Urry 1984). With the professionalization of British anthropology in the late nineteenth century, the need for greater control over data recovery was initially met by the adoption of the questionnaire. Questionnaires were used by Danish antiquarians at the start of the nineteenth century to assess the extent of antiquities in Denmark and its colonies (Kristiansen 1981: 12), but they became widely used in anthropological sciences in the later nineteenth century. For ethnographic data, questionnaires were sent all over the British Empire and returned a wealth of data on local customs. In Britain, the paradigm of such an approach was the Notes and Queries on Anthropology established by the Royal Anthropological Institute, which was issued in various editions between 1874 and 1931 (Urry 1972). One benchmark of the shift away from questionnaires to first-hand fieldwork was the Torres Strait Expedition, which was carried out by a group of Cambridge University-based researchers led by ethnologist A. C. Haddon in 1898. Haddon, along with W. H. R. Rivers (1914), established the critical importance of trained observation in collecting information and the corresponding emphasis on intensive research of a single community (Urry

Fig. 9.3 Barrow digging (from Gentleman’s Magazine 1852).

Fig. 9.4 Bronislaw Malinowski in the Trobriand Islands (1915–1918).

(Source: Archives/Papers of Bronislaw Malinowski, ref. no. UKE_3_18_3; reproduced by kind permission of the Library of the London School of Economics and Political Science)
1984: 44–48; Stocking 1983b). In the subsequent years, Malinowski’s approach developed within this context through direct contact with members of this new ‘Cambridge School’, and was again focused on the anthropology of Melanesia. But what distinguished Malinowski was his ability to communicate what he gained through this method, especially in his seminal work _Argonauts of the Western Pacific_ (Malinowski 1922).

During this transitional period from the end of the nineteenth to the early twentieth century, collecting came to be downplayed in British ethnography. From occupying a central role, it became almost peripheral or invisible, ushering in an era of disillusionment around material culture within anthropology that was not revived until decades later, hesitantly at first in the 1960s but only fully in the 1990s (Buchli 2002a). Nonetheless collecting still went on—Malinowski, for example, collected objects, but showed little academic interest in them (Young 2000). Such collecting, however, was increasingly done simply to furnish museum exhibits rather than from an academic interest in objects. Darryl Forde, whose work focused on the anthropology of Africa, was one of the few to keep alive the material dimension of ethnography through his focus on environment and economy (e.g. Forde 1934), but a general abandonment of the study of objects by ethnography took place in the early twentieth century.

In part, this shift related to the complex ethical relations forged by objects themselves between collector (in the field) and donor. Nicholas Thomas’ discussion of the tensions between commercial and scientific interests of collectors in the field was mentioned above. Chris Gosden and Chantal Knowles, in a study of the history of ethnographic collecting in Papua New Guinea, highlight further complex meanings and emotions involved around acquiring ethnographic objects (Gosden and Knowles 2001). It is possible that the difficulty in separating the academic value from other meanings by collectors in the field fostered a discomfort with the place of material culture studies within scientific ethnography. Objects may have brought: the ethnographers too close to their subject. However, the shift can be seen as much in a move towards a new interest in the nature of society, as in a move away from objects. In this context, Radcliffe-Brown, influenced by Durkheimian sociology but also trained by the Cambridge School, played a much greater role in forging the new discipline. Both Malinowski’s _Argonauts_ and Radcliffe-Brown’s _Andaman Islanders_, which were published in the same year (1922), mark the beginning of a new anthropological genre, reflecting this shift: the field monograph.

To further understand the sidelong of collecting in ethnography, it is useful to consider the history of anthropology in North America and, in particular, the role of Franz Boas. Boas began his career as a museum curator in Berlin in the 1880s, and it was while arranging an exhibition of ethnographic objects from the Northwest Coast in British Columbia, Canada, that he found the regional focus of much of his later research (Jacknis 1985). His subsequent fieldwork trips there, especially after his emigration to the States in 1887, resulted in bringing back various collections of material. These he displayed as part of tableaux of native life during a series of museum appointments in the 1890s—first at the Peabody Museum, then the Chicago Field Museum, and finally, the American Museum of Natural History in New York. It is in Boas’ arrangements of the objects that one sees the germ of his turning away from museum-based and collection-based ethnography (Jacknis 1985: 77; McVicier 1993). As Ira Jacknis has shown, Boas’ rejection of collection-based ethnography in favour of fieldwork stemmed from the tensions that grew between his view of displaying artefacts and the conventions employed by his seniors, particularly Otis T. Mason at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC. Anthropological museum displays of the late nineteenth century were most commonly organized according to typological and evolutionary ideas, whereby artefacts of similar functions but from widely different cultures and periods were juxtaposed. In contrast, Boas wanted the idea of anthropological culture to provide the basis of arranging artefacts, rather than universal schemes of technology. The debate between a typological and a tribal arrangement of artefacts was partially reconciled as Mason started to shift to Boas’ views, but it was always limited—simply because insufficient information on provenance and the cultural meanings of objects was available. This of course reflected back on the collecting practices, which subsequently started to become more controlled, especially when they formed part of those expeditions sponsored by the Bureau of American Ethnology (Jacknis 1985: 81). Mason, however, did not substitute the tribal for the typological but merely added it as a complementary method.

Boas continued in museum anthropology until 1905 when he resigned from the American Museum of Natural History after a major disagreement with the administration. At the same time, there was a discernible shift in his thinking. He felt he had reached the ‘limitations of the museum method of anthropology’, turning instead to a more contextual and psychological approach to other cultures (Jacknis 1985: 208). This is not to say Boas completely left material culture studies behind, for he continued to support its study within archaeology through his students, not least contributing to the development of stratigraphic excavation techniques (Brownman and Givens 1966). Nonetheless, within ethnography this shift away from material culture had widespread repercussions for American anthropology, which were evidenced in the work of Boas’ students from the 1920s (e.g. Alfred Kroeber, Robert Lowie, Edward Sapir, Fay Cooper-Cole, Leslie Spier, Melville Herskovits) at the same time as the British Social Anthropology of Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown had become established as the new ethnography. What is clear is that learning from things, both in the United States and Britain, has become a dead end for anthropology by this time, while at the same time, fieldwork became fundamental. Discarding the concept of material culture as a medium for understanding other cultures meant also discarding distance between the anthropologist and the people studied. During the early twentieth century, then, the focus of
socio-cultural anthropology in Europe and North America switched from collections to people, their ideas, their beliefs as expressed not through material culture but through their actions. Presence in the field—the ideal of ‘participant observation’—came to be an essential element of anyone claiming the title of sociocultural anthropologist. It was only now that fieldwork became the cornerstone that it remains today within ethnography.

In archaeology, collecting remained and is still a central part of the archaeological method. Nevertheless, just as in ethnography, concerns over trained observation, intensive investigation, and presence in the field developed, and led to the emergence of the professional and a divergence from the amateur. As in anthropology, the professionalization of archaeology was closely linked to institutionalization, and a key part of this transition was related to the changing demands of ‘fieldwork’ (Hinsley 1976; Levine 1986). Curtis Hinsley’s account of the growing distance between the collector Charles Abbott and the museum curator Frederick Ward Putnam during the development of archaeology at the Peabody Museum, Harvard University, encapsulates this transition very well (Hinsley 1985). After nearly a decade of digging in gravel quarries, Abbott expressed his disillusionment over his continued collecting of flints, which seemed to him to say nothing new anymore. In 1878 he wrote to Putnam, asking whether ‘in the course of your thoughts from day to day, in archaeological matters, any new question arises, which you think it possible, I may be able to throw some light upon, by some new style of fieldwork or otherwise, please let me know’ (quoted in Hinsley 1985: 64, emphasis added). The potential for such new methods increasingly preoccupied Putnam, and led to perhaps the first statement on archaeological fieldwork in North America several years later where he argues for greater attention to the depositional structure and stratigraphy of a site (Putnam 1973 [1886]).

Modern archaeological fieldwork—in distinction to the mere field collection of archaeological artefacts—is characterized by one key concern: provenance, and especially the ideas of stratigraphy and stratigraphic context. In relation to collecting artefacts, this entails simply the proper recording of the location of an artefact: in relation to the layers of soil. However, an important distinction must be made between stratigraphic observation and stratigraphic excavation: the former has been established in Europe since the late eighteenth century for Palaeolithic remains but only as a consistent method for archaeology since the mid-nineteenth century (Lucas 2002a). But it is one thing to notice which layer an artefact comes from or even draw sections of the layers, and quite another to excavate the layers themselves with attention to their stratigraphy. The transitional figures in this shift were people like J. J. Worsaae and General Pitt Rivers in Europe or Putnam in North America. Thus it was not until the 1890s that the first steps toward stratigraphic excavations occurred in North America, fully crystallizing in the prehistoric archaeology of the American South-west with Alfred V. Kidder’s fieldwork at Pecos Pueblo, near Santa Fe, New Mexico between 1915 and 1927 (Kidder 2000; cf. Browman and Givens 1996; Lyman and O’Brien 1999). A similar development occurred in Britain, where stratigraphy became the key concept driving Mortimer Wheeler’s new archaeological field methodologies as laid out in his address to the Royal Society in 1927 (Wheeler 1927) (Figure 9.5).

While early antiquarians and ethnologists helped to constitute the field as an essential, even respectable, location for the practice of ethnography and archaeology (complementing the indoor study of collections), it took a long time for such work carried out in the field to become constituted as ‘fieldwork’. However, as we have seen, in both ethnography and archaeology basic principles of a field method were established by the second quarter of the twentieth century. Since that time, although there have been many important developments (see review by Lucas 2002a), the most radical shift has been the emergence of archaeological and anthropological fieldwork as a professional practice, with explicit methods and trained staff. In archaeology, this happened by developing the concept of stratigraphic observation into one of stratigraphic excavation; in ethnography, it happened by replacing questionnaires and indexed collecting with participant observation. In the process, alternative approaches to objects in ethnography and
because archaeology remains wedded to field collection and the study of such collected material—whether fragments of pottery or biological remains such as burnt seeds—still has a central and respectable role in archaeological practice. A researcher can be a fieldworker and a zooarchaeologist, but equally they can be just one of these. By and large then, the application of ideas of reflexivity to archaeological fieldwork has involved the application of sociological ideas of the construction of knowledge to field practices, highlighting issues such as the process of on-site interpretation (Hodder 1995; Bender et al. 2007) or the challenges of community archaeology (Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson 2007). Perhaps the most significant development in this context has been the rise of phenomenological approaches to fieldwork, which explore the sensory qualities of the archaeological record in more diverse ways than previously. Features such as visibility and perspective, sound and texture have been explored as a means to understand the role of experiential qualities in structuring the archaeological record (e.g. Tilley 1994, 2004; MacGregor 1999; Watson and Keating 1999; Cummings et al. 2002; Cummings and Whittle 2003; Hamilton and Whitehouse 2006). Such studies were initiated within and largely continue to be applied (but not exclusively) to landscape archaeology, especially in Britain, where they were pioneered by Chris Tilley through his seminal work A Phenomenology of Landscape (Tilley 1994). They have, however, also been subject to certain criticisms, such as conflating the experience of the archaeologist with that of past people (Brück 2005) or simply being unscientific and overly subjective (Fleming 2005).

Reactivity has also given rise to the adoption of ethnographic approaches to studying archaeological fieldwork. In the preface to his recent edited volume Ethnographies of Archaeological Practice, Matt Edgeworth cites the critical dimension of ‘being there’ as the criterion for labelling such studies ethnographies (Edgeworth 2006b: xii). Just as socio-cultural anthropologists are deconstructing the traditional notions of fieldwork and field location, it is ironic that archaeologists should adopt such ethnographic approaches to study their own practices. Nonetheless, such studies can reveal important aspects of fieldwork that have tended to be suppressed or unrecognized: the mutually constituting role of people and things (Lucas 2003a; Edgeworth 2003; Yarrow 2005). Archaeologists do not just discover or uncover sites, they also produce them through the physical work of sculpting soil, stones, and other materials, drawing on their sensory properties. Such work also produces the archaeologist and in part, defines their skill and abilities through the exercise of an archaeological sensibility. Archaeology is a materially productive discipline, articulated through the technology, ideology, and organization of fieldwork, while simultaneously, archaeologists and archaeology as a discipline are constituted through this engagement with objects and sites.

Today, the revived interest in materiality in the social sciences presents new challenges for conceptualizing fieldwork in archaeology and anthropology. Chris Gosden has suggested that the changes to the notion of fieldwork in anthropology
discussed above may also serve to blur the boundaries with archaeology (Gosden 1999: 61), while some archaeologists have long suggested that archaeology could be redefined as the study of material culture, irrespective of time and space, thus linking it up seamlessly with ethnographic approaches to material culture (Rathie 1981: 92). From one perspective, these comments are certainly important and a lot is to be gained by highlighting similarities; but from another perspective—particularly in terms of fieldwork—such comparisons ignore critical differences. Archaeologists do not engage with material culture in the same way as ethnographers, historians, or sociologists. The archaeological intervention is a material intervention. Despite the important role of non-interventionist fieldwork in archaeology such as landscape survey, or even some archaeologies of the contemporary world that are more ethnographic in their mode of practice (Buchli and Lucas 2006b; McAtackney et al. 2007), most archaeology continues to involve collecting objects, pulled from their context in the process of conducting fieldwork (especially but not exclusively through excavation), while an ethnographic approach that focuses on material culture leaves objects in the same state as they were encountered. Ethnographies of archaeological practice demonstrate this difference clearly.

First, archaeological fieldwork, because it is interventionist, is also transformative—or as is usually said, destructive (Lucas 2006b). Secondly, because it continues to collect things—now widened to include not just whole pots but every tiny fragment, and not just artefacts, but seeds, charcoal, animal bone, shells, and so on—it has tended to focus a lot more intensively on the material properties of things, which includes drawing on a panoply of scientific techniques such as compositional or elemental analysis. But what is common to both these elements is the fact that more broadly, archaeology reconstitutes a past material world in the present—albeit in localized and usually small-scale ways. It brings new things—sites and objects—into the world, and it is the power of this material production that distinguishes much of archaeology from ethnographic studies of material culture. This is not to deny other correspondences; indeed, all material culture studies, whatever their field methods, perform an act of making materiality ‘matter’; i.e. bringing it out of the shadows (Buchli and Lucas 2006b). But while ethnographic fieldwork attempts to understand material things in the presence of other human subjects, for whom these things matter, archaeology (conventionally) has the harder task of doing this in the absence of such subjects.

Of course archaeology, like every discipline, works within a discursive field that is both ethically and emotionally charged; the politics of archaeological fieldwork and collecting reveal that there are multiple and often conflicting interests surrounding archaeological objects (Robson et al. 2006a). However, it is important to distinguish the processes whereby objects enter the scientific field in the first place, i.e. through being found (excavation) or being given (exchange). It is as if found objects can be ascribed a null or neutral value prior to contemporary claims in a way that is impossible with exchanged objects. This is achieved quite simply through a temporal disengagement: these objects existed before the present, within a different discursive field with no connection to the contemporary one. This recalls Thompson’s rubbish theory, which argues that to enable the transition from one value system to another, objects have to pass through a null stage, where they are valueless—i.e. rubbish (Thompson 1979).

The temporal distance which has always been the singular challenge of archaeology (‘making the mute stones speak’), has also perhaps been the reason why archaeologists have been able to continue to interact with objects in a way more intimately than any other discipline. The fact that the value and meaning systems of the past society and present archaeologist are so distinct—the fact that crossing this divide is precisely the problem for archaeologists—has the advantage of neutralizing any conflict between such systems (but not of course, between the archaeologist and other contemporaries). For ethnography, conversely, the fact that the two meaning systems necessarily interact because they occupy the same temporality may enable greater understanding, but it also allows conflict and, in doing so, threatens the detachment and impartiality that ethnographers seek to maintain with their subject. It is this difference that perhaps explains why contemporary material culture studies adopt an ethnographic rather than archaeological methodology. For collecting given objects entails very different ethical consequences from collecting found objects in the context of an academic discipline (or indeed, in any context), which is why collecting remains central to archaeological fieldwork but has largely been abandoned or marginalized in ethnography. Despite the shared reflexive turn in both disciplines towards the nature of their practices, and despite the historical common ground, they remain fundamentally divided in their deontological relation to objects. To what extent this difference has wider epistemological repercussions about the nature of the two disciplines and their interpretation of material culture is an obvious, subsequent question—but one that cannot be pursued here.
CHAPTER 10

GIFTS AND EXCHANGE

HIROKAZU MIYAZAKI

Since the publication of Marcel Mauss' essay, *The Gift: the form and reason for exchange in archaic societies*, in 1923-1924 (Mauss 1990), the relationship between persons and things has been a central subject for the anthropological study of material culture. For Mauss, a gift contains within itself a part of its giver: 'to make a gift of something to someone is to make a present of some part of oneself' (Mauss 1990: 11). Mauss' argument about the intermingled character of persons and things in gifts constitutes his solution to what he viewed as the general problem of reciprocity: that is, the question of how a gift generates an obligation to reciprocate: 'What 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: 3).

This chapter traces the trajectories of debates in socio-cultural anthropology that have stemmed from Mauss' solution to the problem of reciprocity, with a view to stepping outside of these trajectories. In the first half of the chapter I seek to demonstrate that the succession of debates following Mauss' essay consists of repeated attempts to rework the relationship between Mauss' original problem and solution. I then turn to Marilyn Strathern's critique of the Maussian formulation of gifts and exchange, set out in her study *The Gender of the Gift: problems with women and problems with society in Melanesia* (1988), and subsequent work, in order to explore the possibility of moving away from what I term the problem-solution framework of Mauss' original essay and ensuing debates in the anthropological study of gifts and exchange. I suggest that the shift will afford an opportunity to reappreciate the relationship between persons and things as neither a problem nor a solution.

MAUSSIAN PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

Mauss' essay, *The Gift*, has generated a long chain of debates. These debates have continually rediscovered the significance of Mauss' insight about the relationship between persons and things. Perhaps the most influential discussion of Mauss' work was Claude Lévi-Strauss' introduction, published in 1950, to a collection of Mauss' essays that included *The Gift* (Lévi-Strauss 2001). Here, Lévi-Strauss suggested that Mauss mistook a Maori theory of *hau*, or the 'spirit of the thing given' (Mauss 1990: 10) for a general theory of exchange. In *The Gift*, Mauss had quoted a statement made by the New Zealander ethnologist Elsdon Best's informant Tamati Ranapiri on the meaning of *hau*:

I will now speak of the *hau*... That *hau* is not the *hau* (wind) that blows—not at all. I will carefully explain to you. Suppose that you possess a certain article, and you give that article to me, without price. We make no bargain over it. Now, I give that article to a third person, who, after some time has elapsed, decides to make some return for it, and so he makes me a present of some article. Now, that article that he gives to me is the *hau* of the article I first received from you and then gave to him. The goods that I received for that item I must hand over to you. It would not be right for me to keep such goods for myself, whether they be desirable items or otherwise. I must hand them over to you, because they are a *hau* of the article you gave me. Were I to keep such equivalent for myself, then some serious evil would befall me, even death. Such is the *hau*, the *hau* of personal property, or the forest *hau*. Enough on these points.

Best (1909: 439)

Mauss had interpreted this statement as follows: 'What imposes obligation in the present received and exchanged, is the fact that the thing received is not inactive. Even when it has been abandoned by the giver, it still possesses something of him' (Mauss 1990: 11-12).

In Lévi-Strauss' view, this was nothing but an example of 'mystification, an effect quite often produced in the minds of ethnographers by indigenous people' (Lévi-Strauss 2001: 47). As a result, Lévi-Strauss argued, Mauss was only able to see exchange in terms of the 'three obligations': that is, the obligations 'to give, to receive, and to reciprocate' (Mauss 1990: 39). In Lévi-Strauss' view, exchange was the 'primary, fundamental phenomenon... which gets split up into discrete operations in social life' (Lévi-Strauss 2001: 47). Instead of approaching exchange
as a totality, in other words, Mauss sought to 'reconstruct a whole out of parts; and as that is manifestly not possible, he has to add to the mixture an additional quantity which gives him the illusion of squaring his account. This quantity is *hau* (Lévi-Strauss 2001: 47). Despite the commonalities between the goals of Mauss' essay and Lévi-Strauss' own project of structural anthropology, which sought to tackle the general sociological problem of how to understand social life as a system of relations (Lévi-Strauss 2001: 50), for Lévi-Strauss, Mauss failed to think in systemic terms to the extent that he found a solution in an indigenous theory, that is, *hau*.

Lévi-Strauss' critique of Mauss subsequently became the starting point of Pierre Bourdieu's effort to construct a theory of practice in which the disjunction between subjective and objective understandings of exchange was a focus of analysis. In Bourdieu's view, actors' misrecognition of exchange as a discrete act of giving, receiving, or reciprocating, such as in the Maori theory of *hau*, is critical to their strategic manipulations of the timings of giving (Bourdieu 1977: 4-6). In his view, social actors do not approach giving, receiving, and reciprocating as a single chain of related activities that unfolds over time. Such a systemic understanding of exchange only results from an outside observer's objective perspective. The time lag between giving and reciprocating makes it possible for social actors to misrecognize these acts as separate and 'irreversible'. But the temporal lag that enables such misrecognition (*inequivalence*) also affords social actors space for strategic manipulation, that is, agentive calculation (Bourdieu 1977: 5).

Despite Lévi-Strauss' attempt to background the problem of *hau*, therefore, the quest of what to make of this particular indigenous concept lives on in anthropological debates. In his 1972 essay, 'The Spirit of the Gift', for example, socio-cultural anthropologist Marshall Sahlins pointed out that Lévi-Strauss and other earlier critics of Mauss' rendition of *hau*, such as Raymond Firth (1959) and J. Prytz Johansen (1954), missed the 'true meaning' of *hau* (Sahlins 1972: 152-157). In a way this is characteristic of his attention to historiographical details (e.g. Sahlins 1995). Sahlins closely examined Tamati Ranipiri's above-mentioned statement, proposing to understand *hau* as equivalent to a notion of yield: 'The *hau* in question really means something on the order of "return on" or "product of", and the principle expressed in the text on *taonga* is that any such yield on a gift ought to be handed over to the original donor' (Sahlins 1972: 157).

Sahlins' broader goal here was to unpack the political implications of Mauss' formulation of exchange. Focusing on Mauss' conception that '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: 13), Sahlins contrasted Mauss' essay with Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan* (1998) in order to 'bring out the almost concealed scheme of *The Gift*'. (Sahlins 1972: 171), that is, the idea of the gift as a remedy against the human propensity to war: 'The compulsion to reciprocate

built into the *hau* responds to the repulsion of groups built into the society. The force of attraction in things thus dominates the attractions of force among men' (Sahlins 1972: 174). For Sahlins, both Mauss and Hobbes were seeking a solution to the political problem of human nature. In Mauss' terms, according to Sahlins, 'The gift is Reason. It is the triumph of human rationality over the folly of war' (Sahlins 1972: 175). Sahlins thus sought to elevate Mauss' essay to the status of a piece of political philosophy on a par with Hobbes' text.

If Sahlins found a philosophical problem in Mauss' theory of gifts and exchange, Annette Weiner has drawn attention to the problem of social reproduction at the heart of Mauss' discussion of the inalienability of a gift from its giver. In Mauss' terms, a gift's inalienability derives from the fact that it contains within itself a part of its giver and hence demands reciprocation. This led many to make a distinction between gifts and commodities in terms of their respective alienability (see e.g. Gregory 1980, 1981). In contrast, Weiner's argument decoupled the question of alienability from the question of reciprocity. In particular, Weiner focused on the problem of identity and 'inalienable wealth'—those objects that are 'kept rather than given to others' and stay 'out of circulation' (Weiner 1985: 211). For Weiner, what was really at stake in exchange was the problem of 'keeping while giving' (Weiner 1985: 223): that is, the question of how individuals and groups maintain their identity while engaging in acts of giving: 'Keeping things instead of giving them away is essential if one is to retain some measure of one's social identity in the face of potential loss and the constant need to give away what is most valued' (Weiner 1985: 211). Her ethnography highlighted 'a range of solutions to the inherent problem of how one can keep while giving' (Weiner 1985: 211; see also Weiner 1992).

Weiner's (1980) attention to 'inalienable wealth' grew out of her earlier critique of the anthropological preoccupation with the problem of reciprocity, since Bronislaw Malinowski's study of *Circumambience* and *Savage Society* (1926). Weiner (1980: 71) urged anthropologists to 'move beyond traditional approaches that treat reciprocity and generosity as central analytical features or structures in exchange systems and to move away from a Western construct of linear sequences basically concerned with discrete acts of giving and receiving'. Instead, Weiner (1980: 72) proposed a 'cyclical view in which the processes of reproduction and regeneration are perceived as essential cultural concerns'. Weiner's argument rested on the critical place mortuary exchange occupies in Melanesia as a device for reassembling and re-enacting social relations:

A death must be understood as the moment when huge amounts of re-sorting occurs: when all retrievable elements (including the deceased's body and bones) are reordered and redefined by the *dala* [matrilineal lineage and its property] owners. In this respect, death triggers the return of the deceased's body and property to the members of its own *dala*, followed by the concern to make the loss of the deceased (and the loss of social relations) into a positive resource for the regeneration of equivalent social relations.

Weiner (1980: 81)
In this view, "norms of reciprocity" must be analyzed as part of a larger system—a reproductive system—in which the reproduction and regeneration of persons, objects, and relationships are integrated and encapsulated (Weiner 1962: 71). Weiner's attention to the central significance of mortuary exchange as a mechanism for reproduction and regeneration in Melanesia leads her to focus on the operation of replacement (of things and persons) as a solution to the general problem of loss and decay (Weiner 1980: 85; see also Foster 1990).

Weiner's revision and renewal of Mauss' thesis of the inalienability of gifts has had a significant impact on subsequent debates about gifts and exchange. Her work has opened up space not only for a series of investigations expanding the scope of analysis beyond instances of reciprocal transaction toward a system of social reproduction (e.g. Turner 1989; Fajans 1993; Godelier 1999) but also for a series of studies drawing attention to the centrality of the problem of materiality in exchange. As Fred Myers has noted, 'subtly but significantly, Weiner's formulation shifted attention from the mechanics of exchange to the movement of objects into or out of different circuits of exchange and control' (Myers 2001: 13). In particular, Myers (2002) has extended Weiner's insights to his study of Australian Aboriginal acrylic paintings and their circulation.

Like Weiner, Jonathan Parry has sought to move away from the dominant emphasis on the problem of reciprocity in the anthropological reading of Mauss' essay. In his essay 'The Gift, the Indian Gift and the "Indian Gift"' (1986), Parry re-examined Mauss' discussion of instances of free and pure religious giving in India. Mauss presented the relationship between persons and things as a 'general principle' (Parry 1986: 457). Mauss' Melanesian and Polynesian examples focused on reciprocal giving, while his Indian examples dealt with un-reciprocal giving. What unites both, in Parry's view, is the problem of 'the absence of any absolute disjunction between persons and things' (Parry 1986: 457). It is precisely because persons and things are not easily separable that conscious effort needs to be made to keep Indian religious giving non-reciprocal (see also Laidlaw 2006):

The gift threatens to cement the two together in a dangerous interdependence; but every attempt is made to sever their bond by insisting on the complete alienation of the thing... While Mauss originally introduced this notion of 'spirit' to explain the inalienability of the object and the necessity of making a return, what it in fact explains in this context is why the gift must be alienated, should never return, and should endlessly be handed on.

Parry (1986: 461)

Parry effectively reversed the relationship between Mauss' problem and solution. The inseparability of persons and things now became the problem, not the solution, and reciprocal and non-reciprocal gifts became two different solutions to that problem. Parry proceeded to advance a speculative argument concerning the stark contrast between reciprocal and non-reciprocal exchange underlying the dominant reading of Mauss' essay. In Parry's view, Mauss' emphasis on the simultaneously interested and disinterested nature of gifts, and his proposal of a 'new morality' committed to 'a good but moderate blend of reality and the ideal' (Mauss 1990: 69) and a combination of one's 'own interests, and those of society and its subgroups' (Mauss 1990: 76), only made sense as an alternative to the dominant ideological separation of the two: 'Mauss' real purpose here is not to suggest that there is no such thing as a pure gift in any society, but rather to show that for many the issue simply cannot arise since they do not make the kinds of distinction that we make' (Parry 1986: 458). Parry's ambitious speculation about the correlation between the ideology of a free and pure gift and the ideologies of the market and of salvation religion makes a radical departure from the tendency to romanticize the idea of the gift that often underlies anthropological studies of gifts, including Sahlin's reinterpretation of the political dimensions of Mauss' essay (cf. Parry and Bloch 1989).

Parry's observations about the work entailed in keeping gifts pure and free in his Indian examples resonates with more recent ethnographic attention to the way actors perceive the precariousness of the boundaries between gift exchange and commodity exchange. For example, Webb Keane's study of Eastern Indonesian exchange focuses on actors' efforts to control the risks of ritual failure through the intricate performance involving the strategic manipulation of ritual objects and words (Keane 1994, 1997): 'In Anakalang, successfully conjured words and things help portray their transactors as bearing an agency that transcends the physical individuals and temporal moment of the event' (Keane 1994: 606).

One compelling case Keane discusses concerns an episode of marriage negotiation in which an inexperienced spokesman for the bride's side slipped into an informal manner of speaking. The groom's side took advantage of the situation and negotiated for materially favourable terms but, as a result, ill feeling developed between the two sides: 'For Anakalangese, the act of giving without the appropriate verbal exchange resembles a low-status market transaction, an isolated encounter lacking spiritual or social consequences, and underwriting no future memories and obligations' (Keane 1994: 607).

Underlying Keane's analysis is the precariousness of the distinction between gift exchange and commodity exchange (Keane 1994: 623). If not performed properly, an episode of gift giving simply becomes a version of commodity exchange. According to Keane, Anakalang actors deliberately invoke these risks of 'slippage': 'Slippage represents this possibility of denial and shame, and success is conceptualized not in the orderly workings of reciprocity but in the victorious power of one's down—one's spirit, good fortune and personal relations with the dead—to draw objects towards itself in a flood' (Keane 1994: 620-621). In his later work, Keane has examined the use of money in gift exchange and the problems money poses as a material object of gift exchange, noting that
the status of money itself is not entirely stable: in this case it serves as a formal token whose referent is confined to ceremonial exchange, yet it retains the potential for reinterpretation as cash value. In either case it is 'symbolic', but its vulnerability to slippage is a function in part of its irreducible materiality. Even money shares with other objects the property of taking on forms, and, by semiotically underdetermined, is subject to reinterpretation.

Keane (2001: 69)

Keane's concern is thus with the instability of material objects. This embrace of the ambiguities of material objects stands in contrast to the durability of material objects that at least implicitly underlies Weber's earlier attention to inselbarkeit. Keane, and to some extent Parry's, ethnographic attention to the conscious efforts human actors make to separate gifts from commodities is particularly interesting in light of the broader emphasis on the blurred boundaries between gifts and commodities in the anthropology of gifts and exchange (Miller 2000c). In his important essay on gifts to Men and Gifts to God; for example, Chris Gregory drew attention to the affinity between sacrificial gifts, that is, gifts to gods, rather than competitive reciprocal gifts, and commodities in terms of their shared alienability (Gregory 1986). Subsequent contributions to the debate inspired by Gregory's later book Gifts and Commodities (1982), which sought 'to affirm the existence of gifts and commodities in colonial Papua New Guinea' (Gregory 1997: 10), have, however, focused more on the boundaries between gifts and commodities. For example, both Arjun Appadurai's edited volume, The Social Life of Things (Appadurai 1986a), and Nicholas Thomas' Entangled Objects (1993), point to the multiplicity of meanings attributed to a single object in a sequence of transactions. Although these insights have often been contrasted with Mauss' original formulation of gifts (e.g. Lock 2002), as the literary theorist Mark Osteen has pointed out, Mauss' concern with the instability and ambiguity of the gift category anticipated these recent moves to blur the boundaries between gifts and commodities (Osteen 2002).

In contrast to these efforts to point to the blurred boundaries between gifts and commodities, Webb Keane (1994, 1997) paid close ethnographic attention to the labour entailed in demarcating the boundaries of gift exchange. Here the ambiguities inherent in gifts, and material objects more generally, constitute a problem for human actors. The focus of Keane's analysis is on actors' efforts to exert control over those ambiguities.

In my view, Keane's work implies a way out of the problem-solution framework that has hitherto conditioned the debates about the relationship between persons and things, because actors can be understood to be deliberately making problems visible in order then to solve them, rather than endlessly seeking to solve universal human problems. I have developed this aspect of Keane's analysis further and have examined the way Fijians gift givers and gift receivers sequentially make appear and disappear their shared concern with the potential inadequacy (and resulting negative effects) of gifts and speeches exchanged (Miyazaki 2000). In the carefully crafted speech presenting gifts, the gift-giving side's spokesman makes explicit his concern with the quality of the gifts as well as that of his speech before asking for the gift-receiving side's forgiveness. The gift-receiving side's spokesman in turn accepts the gifts as plentiful and the speech as respectful. He then declares that the only valuable to be valued is love, that is, God's blessing. In this context, I suggest, the concern with the efficacy of the exchange of gifts and speeches among humans gives rise to a renewed hope for the efficacy of God's ultimate gift (Miyazaki 2004). In both East Indonesian and Fijian cases, therefore, the ritual exchange of valuables and speeches serves as a sequential production and display of problems and solutions. This deliberate display of problems and solutions in turn reminds ritual participants of the human agency and responsibility required for appreciating the enabling quality of supernatural entities' work.

This attention to the delicate work entailed in producing both gifts and exchange constitutes an important innovation in the field. It implicitly builds upon Nancy Munn's analysis of the 'spatiotemporal extension of the self' (Munn 1986: 11) associated with the construction of a canoe's shape. As Munn has shown in his analysis of Gawan canoes and pearlshells as part of the kula exchange system, set out especially in his classic study, The Shape of Gawan: a symbolic study of value transformation in a Massim (Papua New Guinea) society (1986), Here, Munn's focus was on the production and circulation of fame alongside the production and circulation of canoes and shells. One particularly compelling part of Munn's analysis concerns the decoration of canoes and human bodies entailed in kula exchange (Munn 1986: 138-147; see also Munn 1983b): 'a canoe, as the medium within which Gawan travel, and in which they first arrive on non-Gawan soil, is itself a reappearing of the person. Just as men going on kula should decorate themselves and present the best impression possible to seduce their hosts into releasing shells, so also the canoe that carries them should be beautified' (Munn 1986: 147).

Although the Gawan canoe is decorated after the 'image of the ceremonially decorated person, especially a youthful man' (Munn 1986: 138), the construction of a canoe demands a complex process of implicating both male and female elements and substances (Munn 1986: 139-146). In this sense, 'the canoe encodes its producers in itself. From interior to exterior, it is an artifact identified with the human body, which makes it. This production includes inputs of both male and female producers who, through their differential levels of potency create the extended level of Gawan spatiotemporal control embodied in the canoe' (Munn 1986: 147).

As David Graeber has argued, Munn's attention to people's 'investment of... time and energy, intelligence, [and] concern' (Graeber 2001: 45) in the use of material objects in the creation of social relations obviates any a priori dichotomy between gifts and commodities. In doing so, in Graeber's view, Munn's work took a step toward a general theory of value in which material things are implicated. This attention to work, perhaps reminiscent of Marx's labour theory of value, unfolds in a consequentially different direction in Marilyn Strathern's feminist critique of Mauss' work, to which I now turn.
Gifts as aesthetic constraints

As we have seen, the trajectories of debates deriving from Mauss’ original essay have continually redefined and renewed what counts as a Maussian problem. Marilyn Strathern’s 1988 study of Melanesian exchange, The Gender of the Gift, took a radical departure from the Maussian framework of problems and solutions in at least two different ways.

First, and most concretely, Strathern found Mauss’ preoccupation with the relationship between persons and things too narrow. She proposed a much more inclusive scope of inquiry:

one cannot, out of the workings of Melanesian social action, extract one set of relations as typical of ‘gift relations’ and another as typical of non-gift relations: the unmediated mode takes its force from the presence of the mediated mode, and vice versa. I therefore use the paradox of there being gift exchange without a gift. The paradox in fact usefully points up the crucial absence (no gift) that characterizes the unmediated mode of symbolization.

Strathern (1988: 79)

Secondly, in a more general sense Strathern moved away from the problem-solution framework of Mauss’ original essay and subsequent debates: ‘Scholars trained in the Western tradition cannot really expect to find others solving the metaphorical problems of Western thought. Equally absurd, if one thinks about it, to imagine that those not of this tradition will somehow focus their philosophical energies onto issues such as the “relationship” between it [society] and the individual’ (Strathern 1988: 3).

Strathern’s critique focused on the idea of society in anthropology and the general sociological problem of the relationship between society and individuals; however, the implications of her critique of the problem–solution framework suggest that it is in this context that Strathern’s more general focus on aesthetics as ‘constraints of form’ (M. Strathern 1988: 180–181) needs to be understood.

At first glance, Strathern’s critique of Mauss’ original framework fits nicely with the scope of inquiry by adding in other aspects of social and economic life. Unlike the Lévi-Strauss or Annette Weiner’s divergent proposals for a more systemic investigation of exchange, Strathern’s investigation focused on the specific kind of relationality entailed in Hagen exchange, and its implications in turn for analytical bring to light a range of forms of analytical relationality (between individuals and society, parts and a whole, and so forth) at work, but taken for granted, in Mauss’ essay and its subsequent critiques.

Strathern’s rejoinder to Annette Weiner’s critique of her earlier work, Women in Between: female roles in a male world (Strathern 1972), is a useful point of entry into this argument. In her own work, especially Women of Value, Men of Renown (1976), Weiner had paid particular attention to the way anthropologists had neglected women’s wealth and women’s power. Weiner famously indicted Malinowski (1922) for paying virtually no attention to Trobriand women’s exchange valuables, such as banana leaf bundles: ‘A critical difference between myself and my male predecessors is that I took seemingly insignificant bundles of banana leaves as seriously as any kind of male wealth. I saw Kiriwina women as active participants in the exchange system, and thus I accord them an equal place beside Kirivi men’ (Weiner 1976: 11). In this context, Weiner criticized Strathern’s approach in Women in Between:

Marilyn Strathern began with a beautiful description of the importance of net bags in dovery exchanges. She then went on to say that ‘women’s things are divided among women: men are not particularly interested in the netbags’ (1972: p. 19). Nevertheless, whether men say they are interested, there are many references throughout the book to the distribution of net bags across affinal, consanguineal, and intergenerational lines. But Strathern does not seem to take these transactions seriously and analyze them fully. She therefore falls into the traditional male trap.

Weiner (1976: 11)

In response, Strathern first called attention to a technique Malinowski repeatedly uses in his works, that is, that of the ‘straw man’ (Strathern 1981: 666) and to the way Weiner uses the same technique in her critique of Malinowski: ‘In discarding the chauvinistic past Weiner actually reproduces as analytical technique Malinowski’s presentation of his radical view of primitive man’ (Strathern 1981: 672).

Strathern proceeded to challenge Weiner’s equation of women’s wealth with women’s power. In Strathern’s view, this assumption is unsustainable, at least when it comes to Hagen women’s netbags, since in Hagen exchange, transactions, not objects are gendered (Strathern 1981: 679):

In Hagen it is the acts of ‘production’ and ‘transactions’ that are given gender, such that the production of wealth in the form of pigs is seen as dependent upon women and its public manipulation and display the prerogative of men. Hagen women do not publicly transact with netbags, because Hagen women are not publicly transact.

Strathern (1981: 679)

In this sense, since women are “in between” the male partners, both fundamental and marginal (Strathern 1981: 673), ‘a proper consideration of Hagen women’s roles in exchange would take us from objects over which women have primary control to domains of male activity’ (Strathern 1981: 674). Strathern proposed a kind of anthropological knowledge based on the juxtaposition of different analytical aesthetics.
Anthropology cannot truly parade as an innocent child of culture. It is true that there seems no way to control the fact that at one point we are satisfied with explanations of one order, and at another tack back to a promontory that will yield a different view. Nevertheless in so far as anthropology is a craft, in the other sense of the word, and in so far as anthropologists are aware of their manufacturing role, certain choices do present themselves. In looking at objects women have at their disposal, various courses are open. In looking at objects women have at their disposal, various courses are open. We may see the predicament of Highlands women as (metonymic) extensions of our own, their netbags self-evident symbols of a continuous femininity; or rather we may see that predicament in an analogous manner, and present the netbags as (metaphorically) standing for an aspect of their position comparable to our own; or we may frame the experiences of Highlands women and instead juxtapose their artifacts and ours. There is no way to obviate bias... But surely we should be reasonably well equipped to perceive at least some of our own symbolic strategies.

Strathern (1981: 68)

The language of 'choice' was critical here. Strathern showed how choosing to see from one perspective shifts into the background what can be seen from other perspectives (cf. Strathern 1991). What was at issue was the particular effect of entertaining this relativistic and relativizing stance. If Weiner's problem focused on male bias and her solution rested on careful attention to women's objects, therefore, Strathern here did not seek to 'obviate bias' but instead to obviate the problem--solution framework itself. Thus her goal was to 'learn something about the techniques which, without thinking, we use ourselves' (Strathern 1981: 666).

Strathern's distinctive contribution to the anthropology of gifts and exchange becomes clearer if her analysis of Hagen exchange is contrasted with Andrew Strathern's earlier approach to the same subject. The notion of 'men as transactors' and 'women as producers' appeared prominently in Andrew Strathern's important 1979 paper 'Gender, Ideology and Money in Mount Hagen'. In that paper, however, this ethnocentric insight was submerged under a general problem--solution analytical framework. Andrew Strathern examined the effects of the replacement of pearl shells with money upon gender relations in Hagen exchange. He first draws attention to the particular way Hagen men used to lay claim over pearl shells: 'At public moka occasions men laid down rows of shells with great care while women saw to similar rows of pigs tied to stakes' (Strathern 1979: 534). But he also noted this claim was contradicted by the symbolic significance of the colour of pearl shells. Red is symbolically linked to women and consanguineal relations established through the exchange of women:

The men's special admiration for a rich, ruddy colour in pearl shells can itself be seen as a statement that, while men appropriate and control shells, they depend on links made through the exchange of women to obtain them. The statement, if it is such, is made non-verbally, and partially contradicts men's verbal claims that shell production is entirely a male achievement.

Strathern (1979: 533)

He then turned to a new problem Hagen men face in the ceremonial presentation of money in place of pearl shells.

Men, after laying out the money in a careful, artistic way, and decorating it further with bright yellow flowers and red leaves (the same colours as the red ochre and the pearl shells), invite their women to come and admire it and 'shake their hands in wonder' ('oldi riti'). Women do so, responding well to the rather formal invitation. The men clearly treat this money, ready for moka, as theirs, and invite the women to come and view it and praise the men for 'raising it'. ...Much of the money has been produced by the women's labour. Yet they seem to have less say in what will happen to the money than they do in the case of pigs which they have reared and which their husbands give to moka partners.

Strathern (1979: 538)

Hagen men's problem was defined here in terms of their pursuit of power and prestige. Men's problem becomes, then, to obtain the money back from women so as to ensure that they do not gain power, and they call on ideological resources and established values in which women share to do this' (Strathern 1979: 539). Andrew Strathern then inserted his problem into a familiar analytical framework of exploitation and mystification, in which

the men were engaged in a remarkable feat of appropriation and mystification, symbolised by their quest for exotic pigs. For home pigs they would be directly dependent on wives... But in taking money and seeking out pigs reared by totally unrelated persons, indeed commercial firms, they assert that even the process of obtaining pigs can now be done independently of women.

Strathern (1979: 544)

Andrew Strathern was aware of the problem--solution framework, which he imposed on his ethnographic data; how his chosen vocabulary, 'the language of intention, strategy, and problem-solving, sharpens up what is in reality a rather more fuzzy perception which people have of their situation' (Strathern 1979: 539). Yet he insisted that Hagen men are also aware of the problem: 'men are in fact at least partially aware of their problem and deliberately act so as to solve it' (Strathern 1979: 539).

The Gender of the Gift presented a very different analysis of gender relations in Hagen exchange. Here the analysis was focused on the production of pigs, which are important exchange items in Hagen exchange.

The Hagen ethnography (e.g. M. Strathern 1972) apparently gives the unfortunate impression that domestic labor is women's labor. It was never the case, of course, that domestic production of pigs in Hagen was described as engaging female labor alone. Men and women are both producers; it is in the rhetorical context of evaluating transactions that men distinguish 'male' transaction from 'female' production, thereby feminizing their own productive efforts. They eclipse their own productive activities as well as women's.

Strathern (1988: 155 emphasis added)

Andrew Strathern's preoccupation with men's problem of concealing women's labor, contrasts with how Marilyn Strathern drew attention to the way men's solution to their problem eclipses their own contribution to the production of pigs.
The analytical image of eclipse as contrasted with the idea of exploitation was highly significant.

I use the metaphor ‘eclipse’ to draw attention to a special feature of this concealment. It is not the case that transforming pigs into gifts re-produces them, re-authors them in terms of production. It is not their own (male) labor that is made the basis of their claims...the evaluation of Hagen pigs as male wealth entails the apparently paradoxical corollary that the contrary, the work that women do in their gardens and in tending the hords is duly acknowledged.

Strathern (1988: 335)

In distinguishing between two kinds of concealment—exploitation and eclipse—Marilyn Strathern brought to light what different anthropological analytical strategies make 'appear' and 'disappear'. Strathern's attention to familiar anthropological analytical strategies and categories is often regarded as an effort to expose the implicit assumptions of Euro-American anthropological knowledge. But of our present purposes what is more significant is the way she insisted on seeing 'anthropological' and 'Melanesian' analytical strategies or gifts and commodities side by side, as discrete entities. This was a response to a broader tendency in anthropological knowledge towards collapsing such opposed categories as gifts and commodities and 'Euro-American' and 'Melanesian' in the name of historical interdependence and mutual entanglement. While these categories are admitted 'fictions' (Strathern 1988: 134) in the sense that they are constructed by anthropologists for analytical purposes, the operation of collapsing itself is enabled by these fictional oppositions. Strathern sought to hold the specificity of the character of analytical relations in Euro-American anthropological analysis itself in view and to stop ourselves thinking about the world in certain ways (Strathern 1988: 11). For her, such stoppage requires the relativization of the kind of relationality that unfolds from fictional oppositions such as 'gifts' and 'commodities' (see also Strathern 1990). In other words, Strathern moves away from the propensity to collapse dichotomies. Instead, she seeks to 'make explicit' (and re-appreciate) the propensity itself. In place of collapsing, Strathern deploys a series of juxtapositions across levels of analytical abstraction to hold opposites in view. In other words, Strathern redeploys a series of constructed opposites to hold such unfolding itself.

Through Marilyn Strathern's move, what is made to appear is a different kind of analytical labour: that is, the labour required to sustain the viewing of different analytical strategies, such as exploitation and eclipse, and different analytical 'constraints of form' (Strathern 1988: 180–181). Such labour entails resistance to the demand of each analytical strategy or category to unfold itself over time. This resistance in turn has allowed Strathern to circumvent the series of problem-solution sets that have unfolded from Mauss' problem and solution.

EXTENSION VERSUS JUXTAPOSITION

In recalling her ethnographic fieldwork in Hagen, Papua New Guinea, Marilyn Strathern has argued that 'my attention has been transfixed at certain ethnographic moments I have never been able—wanted—to shake off' (Strathern 1999: 6), and

I shall never forget my first sight of mounted pearl shells in Mt Hagen, in 1964, heavy in their resin boxes, slung like pigs from a pole being carried between two men, who were hurrying with them because of the weight, a gift of some kind. It was only a glimpse; the men were half-running and their path was almost out of my field of vision. But it belongs to a set of images which have mesmerized me ever since.

Strathern (1999: 8)

She reflects on the way the Hagen aesthetics of exchange have shaped her analytical sensibility.

I have come to realize the extent to which certain Hagen practices have had enduring effect on my anthropology. These include the gestures and practices of ceremonial exchange by which men, as donors and recipients, alternate their perspectives on one another. What is revealed to the audience on the occasion are the signs of capacity—the properties of persons and things, the substance of body and mind—to which people lay claim; what is simultaneously revealed (to whomsoever might be paying attention) is the already known fact of the origin of these capacities in other people.

Strathern (1999: 12)

What is significant in this admission of influence and borrowing is not so much the fact that Marilyn Strathern has borrowed the Hagen aesthetics of exchange as her analytical aesthetics, as her insistence on the comparability between the two. This represents a reversal in analytical relationality that dispenses with the familiar problem-solution framework. In other words, she presents the possibility of seeing something other than human actors either solving anthropological problems or solving their own. In order to explore the implications of this move, in this section I want to turn to contrasting efforts to extend theoretical insights of the anthropological studies of gifts and exchange to contemporary issues, such as organ transplants, intellectual property rights, and bureaucratic practices.

Mauss' insights regarding the inseparability between persons and things have been extended both positively and negatively to various forms of giving in the contemporary world (compare with Richard Titmuss' influential 1971 discussion of altruism with reference to blood donation). For example, Margaret Lock (2002) has analysed specific ethical issues at stake in the practices of organ transplantation in Japanese society, which is a well-documented gift economy where a pervasive logic of reciprocity and associated sociality of indebtedness makes altruistic gifts, such as anonymous donations of human organs, almost inconceivable (see also
Oluruki-Tierney (1994) while making the motivations behind gifts quickly ambiguous (see Beuf 1968: 153; Rupp 2003). Here Lock seems to equate Mauss’ work with the tendency to romanticize the category of the gift and finds inspiration in efforts, such as those by Appadurai (1986b) and Nicholas Thomas (1991), to blur the boundaries between gifts and commodities. Lock’s analysis focuses on the multiple and competing meanings of gifts as they are passed on from one person to another. Likewise, Bob Simpson’s analysis of various kinds of transaction in body parts and human tissues in Sri Lanka points to a complex field in which local religious conceptions of giving and global discourses of the ‘gift of life’ generate contradictory and competing meanings of giving (Simpson 2004). In all of these works, Maussian problems (and solutions) have been extended to contemporary forms of giving to the effect of producing a view of complexity.

In contrast, the body of works that apply Marilyn Strathern’s critique of the Maussian field of problems and solutions to the study of contemporary issues seem to generate an entirely different effect. I want to focus on two examples of Strathernian analytical juxtaposition: (1) Marilyn Strathern’s own discussion of Malanggan, New Ireland sculptures created and disposed of during the course of mortuary exchange, alongside intellectual property rights, and (2) Annelise Riles’ juxtaposition of Fijian mats, Fijian women’s exchange valuables, and bureaucratic documents some Fijian female bureaucrats and non-governmental organization workers have produced in the context of preparation for a United Nations conference on women. In both studies, the problem–solution framework gives way to a strategy of juxtaposition as well as a particular kind of analytical labour aimed at keeping what is juxtaposed from collapsing into one another.

In her essay, ‘The Patent and the Malanggan’ (2001), Marilyn Strathern juxtaposes the New Ireland sculptures, Malanggan, with Euro-American intellectual property rights. What prompted this move is Strathern’s interest in ownership as a central issue in the relationship between persons and things entailed in Melanesian exchange and Euro-American knowledge practices. Her comparison reveals divergent conceptions of creativity and associated techniques for linking the past to the future.

Strathern draws attention to the ephemeral quality of Malanggan sculptures which are typically prepared for the final phase of a cycle of mortuary rites and are destroyed or given away to foreigners upon the completion of the cycle or exchanges (Kitchler 2002): ‘The moment when the Malanggan is discarded is also the moment at which it or its components may be dispersed to others, the moment people from other localities looking at the sculpture pay for the ability to reproduce parts of the designs at some time in the future’ (Strathern 2001: 6). Strathern considers how Malanggan crystallizes and concentrates dispersed social and property relations following a clansman’s death for further future dispensation: ‘like technology which combines knowledge, material form and effectiveness, the reproduction of the Malanggan body makes it possible to capture, condense and then release power back into the world’ (Strathern 2001: 7).

In going back and forth between Malanggan and the Euro-American notion of the patent, Strathern points to commonalities and differences between the two in the way her analysis ‘deliberately echo[s] the New Ireland analysis’ (Strathern 2001: 9). For example, Strathern draws attention to the similarity between the two in terms of the role it plays in articulating the past with the future.

The fabrication of Malanggan results in a form which condenses a whole history of interactions, and in the process makes it possible to channel clan powers—the clan and its relationships with others—for future benefit; we might say that the patent results in a form—the potency of information made product—through which technological power is also channeled to the future.

Strathern (2001: 9)

Likewise, Strathern contrasts the ways the Malanggan and the patent imagine the relationship between the origins and the future of knowledge:

Now New Zealanders remake people out of people, so to speak, bodies out of bodies, and the competition is over claims to ancestral power, that is, making claims to what is already specifically identified as theirs. Patent-holders, on the other hand, deal with people in terms of property claims, and instead make their devices out of things, materials and knowledge ultimately part of a ‘commons’ belonging to everyone and no-one.

Strathern (2001: 16)

Strathern uses the terms of analysis deriving from her analysis of Malanggan to describe the features of the Euro-American intellectual property regime, not the other way around. That is, she is not undertaking a project of applying the Euro-American notion of intellectual property to an analysis of Malanggan with a view to showing the limitations of the parameters of the Euro-American regime of intellectual property rights. Rather, ‘the comparison perhaps enables us to grasp some of the imaginative, and ideological, potential of Euro-American intellectual property concepts, one of the many forms which modern rationalities are given’ (Strathern 2001: 15).

Strathern’s explicit effort to reverse analytical relationality points to what drives these and other modern forms in an analogous fashion to the way Malanggan enables social relations to be renewed again in New Ireland. This is Strathern’s long-standing strategy. As in the case of her work in feminist anthropology discussed above (Strathern 1988), the goal is not simply to critique ‘Euro-American’ anthropological knowledge in light of ‘Melanesian’ knowledge. Rather, it is to re-appreciate ‘Euro-American’ knowledge with ‘Melanesian materials in mind’ (Strathern 2005: 13).

Inspired by Strathern’s analytical juxtapositions, the anthropologist and legal scholar Annelise Riles draws attention to an ‘aesthetic device’ seen both in the way Fijian women handle mats and the way Fijian NGO workers handle bureaucratic documents. Here Riles focuses on the way a sense of infinity is generated in each.
The focus of Riles’ attention focuses on the Fijian vivivivi, a bundle of mats, presented and unfolded in the context of Fijian gift giving.

According to Riles, a vivivivi is simultaneously both concrete and abstract in that it consists of the concrete number of mats while it also serves as a unit for counting any number of mats in more abstract terms.

One was never sure at the point of exchange how many mats a vivivivi contained, as the number of mats in the vivivivi was concealed in the layering of one mat on the next... In it (counting), Fijians came to terms with the potential infinity literally bundled into a vivivivi—a device, in short that defined the specificity of number.

Riles (1998: 31)

Riles pays particular attention to the way a pattern emerges in layered mats at an exchange event:

At the moment at which counting stopped, ... pattern emerged. The turn to pattern was a distinct turn to the visual, as one kind of mental apprehension (counting) gave way to another (seeing). Another way of describing this turn to pattern is that the boundaries of the artifact were no longer foreclosed. Instead, when the mats were laid on the floor of a ceremonial space, the viewer suddenly apprehended a pattern that extended from one mat to the next, from the mats to the plaiting of the walls... or the arrangement of flowers, or the placing of bodies in a ceremonial context, infinitely inward and outward.


Significantly, ‘the pattern of the vivivivi always anticipated its own disintegration into concreteness’ (Riles 1998: 385). Riles finds similar oscillations between concreteness and abstractness, or materiality and pattern, in the negotiation of bureaucratic documents. ‘Just as the layered mats brought into view a continuity in pattern from one mat to the next, the organizational pattern of the document also was repeated in the way documents at each level of negotiation mirrored the others in form and function’ (Riles 1998: 386). Completed documents are regarded as ‘valuable collection items’ and ‘concrete objects’ (Riles 1998: 389). But ‘the documents emerged as such objects only after the fact, when the negotiation was complete. During the negotiations... the negotiator’s attention was turned only to language and pattern’ (Riles 1998: 389). Once again, Riles compares these documents with Fijian mats: ‘Like mats layered one upon the next in ceremonial contexts, therefore, documents were entities that at key periods of time faded into patterns replicable at seemingly infinite levels’ (Riles 1998: 389).

Riles is not using Fijian women’s valuables as a framework for understanding bureaucratic documents that Fijian female bureaucrats and NGO workers negotiated. Rather, in her analysis, both mats and documents entail a similar aesthetic device that she terms ‘a figure seen twice’ (Riles 1998: 394). More importantly, in a way that is somewhat more methodologically explicit and ethnographically mediated than the way in which Strathern borrows the Hagen aesthetics of switching perspectives, Riles deploys this aesthetic device as her own analytical strategy. As Riles makes mats and documents appear ‘seen twice’, she replicates the very oscillation that makes both these objects generate a sense of infinity and a simultaneous apprehension of different levels of generality (concreteness and abstractness, the local and the global, etc.) to the effect of producing a glimpse of a horizon of new opportunities for ethnographic research beyond the impasse in the anthropology of global forms (see also Riles 2000; Sykes 2005). Thus, Riles’ work on exchange is not framed at all in terms of problems and solutions created by persons and things.

Conclusions

By tracing the trajectories of debates deriving from Mauss’ classic essay The Gift, I have sought in this chapter to demonstrate how Mauss’ original problem and solution have generated a series of efforts to redefine Maussian problems and solutions. I retraced here how these debates led to analytical attention to the labour entailed in producing gifts and exchange. I then sought to demonstrate how Marilyn Strathern’s critique of Mauss’ theory of gifts and exchange moved away from these trajectories of problems and solutions by performing a different kind of analytical labour. Strathern’s insistence on keeping contrasting analytical strategies and categories in view has enabled a view of the relationships between these strategies and categories as a series of oscillations between opposed strategies and categories.

If the shift from the problem of reciprocity to the problem of materiality Weiner and others made replicated the problem–solution framework underlying Mauss’ original essay, the Strathernian strategy of juxtaposition offers a view of the relationship between persons and things as neither a problem nor a solution. This in turn has brought to light various aesthetic devices and techniques deployed across different kinds of engagement with persons and things, including the anthropology of gifts and exchange itself.

If attention to the parallel uses of similar aesthetic devices and techniques releases the relationship between persons and things from the confines of the problem–solution framework, such attention to parallel aesthetic devices in turn also makes visible certain aspects of gift giving that have escaped rigorous analytical attention. In my own study of indigenous Fijian mortuary exchange, I have examined the exchange of valuables and speeches and the record keeping of gifts and their amounts as parallel but temporally disjointed processes that are not retroactively accessible once the exchange and the record keeping is complete.
(Miyazaki 2006). Likewise, I have shown how the indigenous Fijian urge to extend the protocols of gift giving to touristic encounters parallels the anthropological urge to extend Maussian insights to various contemporary issues. What I have termed the 'hope' Fijians and anthropologists see in the category of the gift derives from the extensibility of the category (Miyazaki 2009).

CHAPTER 11

ART AS ACTION,
ART AS EVIDENCE

HOWARD MORPHY

INTRODUCTION: A METHODOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE
ON THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF ART

My aim in this chapter is not to produce another review of the state of studies of art in anthropology and material culture. I have in the past produced two such reviews (Morphy 1994; Morphy and Perkins 2006a) and repetition is in the nature of reviews. There has recently been a tendency in art history as well as anthropology to question the category of 'art' and to replace it with a more general term such as 'visual culture' or 'image', yet the same subset of material culture objects remains as the subject of analysis. I began academic life as a student of material culture and then found myself focusing almost by accident on a subset of objects that fell into many people's ordinary language category of 'art object' (Morphy 1977). I have come to believe in the utility of the concept of art and that the practice and performance of art reflects particular ways of knowing and acting in the world. So this chapter is a strong defence of the idea of 'art' but it also recognizes its complexity and the fact that as a concept, 'art' is fuzzy around the edges. I use a concept of family resemblance and see

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art objects as forming polythetic sets. The category contains within it an immense diversity and includes objects that have little in common with each other and require very different methods of analysis. However, at the heart of this concept of art lies a set of loosely connected features or themes around which the idea of art coalesces: art is a form of action, art production is integral to meaning creation processes and requires a sense of form, and art is associated with aesthetic experience. It does not surprise me that, at a very general level, these themes resonate with those of art history and the philosophy of art since European art is equally a part of the family or a member of the set. I define meaning in a very broad way so that it embraces both decorative effect and dense iconographies: meaning merges with meaningful.

I believe art is worth studying for a number of methodological and theoretical reasons. Regarding method, art is often produced in durable and, today, in recordable form. It is analysable from many different perspectives and can become part of the process of interaction between researcher and producer: works of art can be interrogated in their cultural contexts. Many artworks outlast the moment of their making and their maker and hence they are part of the durable record of human action. Unpacking those sequences of action through the analysis of form and connecting form to context are ways in which history can enter anthropology and archaeology can enter history. Works of art enable anthropologists to work with art historians to analyse formal relationships and contextual data that reflect trajectories of change and regional dynamics. Finally, in theoretical terms, if I am right that art production is a significant way in which human beings act in the world—one that reflects emotional and experiential dimensions of being in the world—then art provides us with access to something that is too important to neglect.

Interestingly, if anything in recent years, anthropology has had a greater impact on art history than the other way around. The work of David Freedberg (1989), Hans Belting (2001), and Mariann Westerlund (2005) exemplifies the theoretical impact that anthropology has had on some art historians. The impact of art history on anthropology occurred earlier and can be seen to influence anthropologists of art from Boas (1897) to the present; but interestingly art history and its findings have little impact on the discipline of anthropology as a whole. Archaeology’s relationship with art history has been both continuous from the early days of the disciplines and contentious (e.g. White 1992; Scott 2006). The contention I believe is located in precisely the same dialectic between a fine art concept of art and a cross-cultural or generic concept of art that has had its impact on art history and anthropology. In anthropology and archaeology, it has resulted historically in a neglect of art as a research resource, and in art history, it underlies the discomfort with the category of art for the analysis of images. This chapter is structured as an argument in which I move from the reasons why non-Western art has been neglected in art history and in anthropology through definitional issues concerning what kind of thing art is, to a methodological perspective that flows out of that definitional prelogomena. Art has to be seen in its full complexity.

In the 1970s, Peter Ucko led a revival in the study of material culture in Britain. In giving the Curl lecture on the topic of penis sheaths (Ucko 1969) he expressed his surprise that material culture had been long neglected as a source of evidence in anthropology both because of what it could contribute to the study of society as a whole but equally for its intrinsic interest. Ucko’s study of material culture was interdisciplinary. It cut across anthropology, archaeology, and art history, and it was inclusive of all categories of artefact from prehistoric clay figurines to house types, to humble and not so humble penis sheaths. In recent years, there has been a considerable growth in the cross-disciplinary study of material culture. However, in many respects Ucko’s original concerns apply as much today as they did then to the study of one branch of material culture studies: the study of art. It is not that art is unstudied, but that its study has remained the province of art historians or other specialists in the study of art (see Heye 2005: 1 ff. for a relevant discussion). The study of art in other disciplines tends to be quarantined off as the concern of subdisciplinary specialists. The neglect of the study of art by anthropologists is at first difficult to explain. The societies that anthropologists study—Western and non-Western—all seem to produce works that fit into a broadly defined category of artwork. I will leave matters of definition for the moment. There is great interest in the arts of different cultures: major institutions collect and exhibit it, art is proffered as an arena for cross-cultural discourse and understanding, and art is integral to value creation processes in many different societies. Art ought to be both a source of evidence and a medium for communicating values, knowledge, and ideas cross-culturally. It would seem that in neglecting the audience for art, in standing aside from the spaces for art discourse within the anthropologist’s own society, and in failing to capitalize on the interest that students have in Western and non-Western art, anthropologists are missing out on considerable opportunities.

The neglect of art as a source of data is not confined to anthropology and archaeology. The American philosopher Mark Johnson chides his contemporaries for their attitude to art:

Contemporary Anglo American philosophers recognise that the nature of meaning is a pivotal philosophical issue, but they almost never regard art or aesthetics as relevant to this topic. They labour under the illusion of the cognitivist view that meaning is properly only a linguistic phenomenon—a matter of words and sentences. Moreover they tend to think of meaning as involving the truth condition of sentences... [If considered at all] meaning in painting gets reduced to the representational element.

Johnson (2007: 207)

Johnson opposes this to popular attitudes to art in Western society where 'a sharp contrast with this traditional philosophical disparagement of the arts, most people
turn to art not just because of its entertainment value, but precisely because it is meaningful and because it helps to understand our human condition’ (Johnson 2007: 208). Art has this peculiar characteristic of being highly valued and very visible in contemporary Western society, yet at the same time of being separated as a source of data from general studies of human society and often disregarded as a source of knowledge. Yet if it is accepted that art should be treated as a source of information like any other, the question that then arises is what, if anything, makes art different. My answer will in part be that the very thing that makes art different is what makes it a vital source of data for the study of human society. And here it is necessary to provide a minimal definition of art. It is the production and use of expressive and meaningful forms—aesthetic and representational—for particular purposes. Art objects are usually multifunctional: they can serve an infinity of purposes and need to be treated in the context of the material culture of a society as a whole. Consequently, art as a form of intentional human action can only be understood in the context of the relationships and objectives of human beings acting in the social world.

Alfred Gell in his thought-provoking book, *Art and Agency: an anthropological theory* (1998) appears to oppose an action-oriented theory of art with semantic and aesthetic theories. I will later address other aspects of his theoretical approach to agency and to the overly narrow concept of aesthetics that he adopts. However, at this stage in the development of my argument, it is worth pointing out that the attributes of artworks are precisely what enable them to be used to act in the world and what in some cases enables agency to be attributed to them. As the distinguished archaeologist and art historian Irene Winter has written:

Once the relational nexus surrounding and generating the artwork is seen to function as part of a holistic system, affective properties and meaning intersect with social agency. That is instead of having to choose art as a system of action intended to change the world rather than encode symbolic propositions about it’ (Gell 1998: 6) one is enjoined to see art both as a system of meaning encoding propositions about the world and as a system of action intended to change the world, precisely because the excitation generated by the art work lies in the interaction between the two.

Winter (2007: 62; see also Layton 2003)

It is important to stress at this point that the art that I am referring to is not the category of Western fine art or high art. Indeed that particular narrowly defined and conceived category of art object is where much of the problem has lain and is in part the source of the neglect of art by anthropologists and to a lesser extent by archaeologists. The Western category of fine art is generally accepted to have developed over the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Its history is extremely complex and its generalizations about it are likely to be contested at the level of detail. In essence, it is art as a set-apart category of objects viewed independently of their function, housed in institutions of fine art, and appreciated for their aesthetic value, on the basis of disinterested viewing and judgement (see e.g. Winter 2002: 31). Johnson (2007: 210) sees the paradigm shift involving the separation of art from scientific reason as crucial:

‘The rise of the sciences of human nature during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries prompted philosophers interested in the arts to change their focus from the nature of art to an almost exclusive concern with how the mind works in aesthetic judgement. By focusing on the faculties of mind that give rise to judgements about beauty—especially the faculties known as imagination and feeling—these philosophers ceased to regard art as a way of worldmaking.

Johnson (2007: 250)

The philosophy of art has tended to collapse aesthetics into beauty (Johnson 2007: 211). Although the concept of beauty associated with Kantian aesthetics is itself highly complex, the association of art with beauty has encouraged some to reject art (and aesthetics for that matter) as a useful category for cross-cultural analysis either on the grounds that it is subjective or that it inevitably involves Western aesthetic evaluations (Overing 1996; Gell 1998). Rather than rejecting the category of aesthetics, it is important to disaggregate it from its entanglement with beauty and investigate it in the context of the societies who produced the artworks (see the essays in Coote and Shelton 1992).

There has also been a tendency to assume fine art production with individual creativity. Consequently, connoisseurship in art history has in part been directed to authenticating artworks by identifying the individual hand of the artist, and evaluating them according to qualitative judgements applied to the artist’s oeuvre. The focus of this chapter is on the visual arts, but parallel histories can be written for music (see e.g. Goehr 1992).

As sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1984) demonstrated, fine art is deeply connected to value and status creation processes in Western societies, which are linked in turn to the value of objects in the market (see MacClancy 1988 with reference to the market in “primitive” art). The value creation processes of the fine art category have become centred on European art history and on the identification of a canon of Western fine art, which provides, at least in part, the skeleton for Western art history. The canon encompasses non-Western and ‘ancient’ art to the extent that the latter can be thought to contribute to the historical trajectory of form in Western art. The canon is additive. Conventions are traced back in time to Greece, Ancient Egypt, and Mesopotamia. The inclusion of indigenous art occurred after non-Western forms began to influence the development of Western art. Once acknowledged, non-Western art tended to be placed in categories such as Oriental or primitive art, and occupied spaces in art museums and exhibition calendars reserved for non-Western art. To an extent, non-Western artworks were included not in their own right but as they were ‘discovered’ and appreciated by Western art worlds. In Jacques Maquet’s terms, set out in his book *The Aesthetic Experience an*
anthropologist looks at the visual arts (1986), they were art by metamorphosis, incorporated within the Western framework of fine art. The Eurocentric nature of this 'inclusion' was reflected in the fact that until recently, works by contemporary indigenous artists were in general excluded from the primitive fine art category—primitive art was the art of societies before they were 'contaminated' by outside influence (Price 1989; Errington 1998).

It is certainly important for anthropologists to include 'fine art' as a source of evidence for the analysis of economic and value creation processes in contemporary Western society. This is not only because it encapsulates the ways in which cultural production is caught up in economic and political processes in Western societies but because of the hegemonic nature of the Western fine art category in global processes and its influence on the history of world arts and on contemporary art production. However, in order to understand these very processes and the contemporary challenges to the category of Western fine art, a broader conception of art is required.

The majority of works included in art galleries and museums were not initially produced as works of 'fine' art, but for use in particular contexts—as religious objects, symbols of status, bodily adornments, functional artefacts, embellishments of everyday objects, 'scientific' illustrations, and so on. The status of art by metamorphosis applied as much to medieval and Egyptian art as it did to the arts of Africa or Oceania. Placing works in the original contexts of their production is a main part of the job of art history. Art history is likely to be biased in the direction of the works that are included in art museums—because of the resources that they provide and because of the interest the public has in these works of art they contain. And indeed, art historians and curators do place most works of art included in museums of fine art in the context of their own place and time, researching their history independent of their subsequent recognition as fine art. The iconographic significance of Byzantine icons or Renaissance religious paintings is considered relevant to understanding them as works of art; function and significance is considered relevant to understanding Egyptian or Roman art (Figure 11.1). Even so, as archaeologist Sarah Scott (2006) argues for Roman art, the bias from fine art has had a considerable impact on how they are researched, interpreted, curated, and exhibited. Until recently, this has been even more so in the case of most non-Western art.

Perhaps because so-called 'primitive' art came late to influence Western traditions, perhaps because it was harder to view as antecedent to European traditions, its art history has been largely neglected. In some cases, this omission has been deliberate. For example, art historian and curator William Rubin wrote 'the ethnologists' primary concern—the specific function and significance of each of these objects—is irrelevant to my topic, except in so far as these facts may have been known to the modern artists in question' (2006: 130). Rubin was writing with reference to the 1984 exhibition Primitivism in Modern Art that he co-curated with Kirk Varnedoe. The exhibition created considerable controversy precisely
because it seemed to subordinate non-European art to Western art (see essays in Morphy and Perkins 2006b: Part II—Primitivism, Art, and Artefacts). The neglect of non-Western art by Western art museums and art historians has tended to create a disjunction between works of art that are treated in their own right and for which information about the context of production and intention of the artist are considered relevant and those for which it is not. As a consequence art historians, with notable exceptions (see e.g. Boone 1986; Blie 1987; McNaughton 1987; Philips 1998), have neglected to study non-Western art in its own contexts of production.

One of the tasks of the anthropology and archaeology of art is simply to provide the equivalent data on non-European artworks that the art historian provides for works in the Western traditions. This does not mean it is assumed that they are the same kind of things.

Art as a cross-cultural category

I have argued in detail elsewhere that if anthropologists are to find the concept of art useful, valid or relevant in their research they must employ a cross-cultural and cross-temporal category, one that is distanced dialogically from the concept of art in any particular society (Morphy 2007b). The argument applies equally to archaeologists and art historians. Anthropological categories are derived from cross-cultural comparison and hence are likely to cover great variation in the phenomenon under investigation whether it is religion, gender, aesthetics, or art. Categories are therefore always emergent as understanding of human behaviour across space and time changes. They are reflected as much in the sets of things that people write about as in any substantive definition that they may attribute to them. To an extent, an anthropological category is an intuitive one that attempts to contain the intuitions of people from different cultures. This is why I have argued that the cross-cultural category of artwork is best seen as a polythetic set linked, in Wittgensteinian terms, by ‘family resemblance’ (Wittgenstein 1953: aphorisms 65–66). Of the things people refer to as games, for example, Wittgenstein wrote ‘if you look at them you will not see something that is common to all, but similarities, relationships, and a whole series of them at that’ (Wittgenstein 1953: aphorism 66). I would argue that art, like games, is a well worked category, one that has been subject to dialogue in the long term, and that while no single attribute, feature, or essence is going to be a common relationum, ‘aesthetic effect broadly defined is likely to be a core feature of the set even if it is not an attribute of every member (artwork)’ (Morphy 2007b: 198n12).

In her article on art and archaeologists, Sarah Scott argues that it is important to distance the study of Roman art from the post-Enlightenment aesthetic criteria with which it has become entangled (Figure 11.2). She shows how criteria associated with Western fine art are applied to Roman art in such a way that Roman art becomes seen and categorized according to the aesthetic judgements of the present: ‘we are placing them into an artificial category that has more to do with the development of modern art history and aesthetics than with the contexts for which such objects were originally created’ (Scott 2006: 628). Scott is also critical of many of the categories and concepts of art history, terms such as schools and workshops that have been applied directly to what she refers to as ancient arts (2006: 651). The point is not so much that such concepts may not be relevant for cross-cultural analysis. Rather, it is that they should come out of the analysis of the objects in context rather than being imposed on the past as part of an interpretative framework.

The art historian David Freedberg has been equally critical of the constraining nature of the categories of ‘fine’ art or ‘high’ art (Freedberg 1989: 22–23). In his analysis of ‘realistic’ images derived directly from a person’s features, he draws
connections between, among other things, Roman death masks, the early modern religious sculptures encountered by pilgrims on the climb up the Sacro Monte di Varese in northern Italy, and the wax figures in Madame Tussauds in London. Freedberg notes that in the present day the representations in the wax museum are generally not classified as works of art. Indeed, he argues that we have been taught to see them as not being art. He might also have pointed out that 'sculptures' very similar in their illusionistic realism do have a place as contemporary art.

Duane Hanson's (1925–1996) sculptures of accident victims, American tourists, or a woman pushing a shopping trolley were intended to look like real people, and the 'artist' employed analogous techniques to those used to make the 'non-art' waxwork figures (Figure 11.3). In writing about his work, art museum curators are required to distance it from the craftsmanship of Madame Tussauds, for example, by endowing it with a higher purpose. The website for the exhibition at the Tennis Palace Museum, Helsinki, Duane Hanson—Sculptures of the American Dream, asserts that 'Hanson's aim was not to copy real people, but to depict typical humans and humanity in general' (University of Helsinki 2007). The comparison between Madame Tussauds and Hanson's sculptures brings out the diversity of criteria used to separate fine art from its opposite. Philosopher Nick Zangwill, hinting at an institutional definition of art, notes that 'few would think that the waxworks at Madame Tussaud's are works of art. But how are they different from Hanson's sculptures? It seems to be important that Hanson's figures are intended for exhibition in the contexts we normally see sculptures' (Zangwill 2002: 113). The distinction between fine art and non-fine art (or even non-art) in these cases is not helpful either to understanding the particular histories of the works themselves as forms or the impact that they have on the viewer. They are, of course, relevant to understanding the Western fine art category and its articulation within the art market. Freedberg argues for similarities in the ways in which the sculptures at Varese act on the viewer and the impact of images in Madame Tussauds.

Freedberg suggests that if we trace the history of such images back to the Roman period and beyond they can be seen as belonging to the same sequence. The images that he focuses on are ones that create the illusion of the actuality of the person, which make the absent present. They include a great range of different types of images from supposed direct impressions of a person's features as in the case of the Turin shroud, death masks, and wax images. He extends his analysis to include images that are less direct in their representation of the features of a person but which convey attributes of movement or form that are taken to be the person themselves. He argues that a similar range of responses is engendered by such illusionistic representations, irrespective of whether they are or are not classified as 'fine' art. In many respects, they belong to the same set for analytic purposes. Concluding his discussion about wax images, Freedberg notes that 'we need to treat the claim of aesthetic differentiation with caution' (1989: 23). Here Freedberg is arguing for a wider category than works of art in order to include the relevant body of data. However, I would argue that this must be seen as a separate issue from a wider definition of the category of art. Freedberg argues that we have been taught to see Madame Tussauds as something other than an art gallery and so we remove the works collected within it from the category of fine art and displace them from the category of art altogether.

Much of the controversy over the category of art is caused by two factors. One is the collapsing of the broader cross-cultural category of art as a mode of human action into the narrower and relatively recent Western category of fine art as an institutionally defined set of objects. The other is the desire to make the cross-cultural category of art all encompassing and self-contained. All categories of material culture object are defined by or include attributes that they share with other categories of object. It is not a sufficient argument against the category of art
that all art objects share some attributes with objects belonging to other categories. Many analytic concepts cross-cut categories defined by other features. Boats, for example, share common with houses, carriages, and drinking vessels the fact that they are containers. Scott and Freedberg both express unease with the category of art because it is too closely associated with the Western category of fine art. Scott is wary of an aesthetic approach to 'ancient' art objects and Freedberg sees a category wider than fine art as necessary to his analysis of affect, of the power of the works concerned, and hence he subsumes 'art within the history of images' (Freedberg 1989: 53). In Freedberg's case he both gives priority in his definition of art to the category of objects defined as fine art and then sees that many of the objects he has analysed need to be analysed as a part of a wider set. Most of the examples he includes do fit well within the broader concept of art that I have defined. Even if they did not, the fact that a wider set of objects is required to analyse a particular topic—for example, the spiritual power attributed to objects—does not undermine the category of object concerned. Munn's (1986) analysis of value creation processes in Gawe, for example, brings together sets of objects on the basis of criteria such as lightness and heaviness that cross-cut categories of material objects defined on other bases, for example canoes or boundary markers.

Despite its resilience, the issue of developing a substitute term for 'art' is a recurrent theme, so it is worth briefly considering the question of the dissolution of the category of art altogether. There are two main issues: first, whether any of the substitute terms are adequate; secondly, whether or not a cross-cultural category of art can be usefully developed that is free from the biases of Western fine art. Clearly it is possible, as George Kubler (1962: 9) argued, to include artworks under the category of 'the history of things'—his substitute for what he referred to as the 'bristling ugliness of material culture'. Others have included art under the more euphonious rubric 'visual culture' (e.g. Mitchell 1986, 2006). And as Jenny Coote (1992) argues in the case of the 'everyday vision' of cattle-keeping people in southern Sudan it may be more useful to apply a broad concept of aesthetics rather than art. It is also possible to include many artworks under rubrics such as 'images' (Freedberg 1989; Beling 2003) or 'pictures' (Clegg 1987; Mitchell 2006). All of these concepts are relevant ones for cross-cultural analysis. However, I would argue that the former categories are too broad and the latter categories too narrow to encompass the set of objects that are generally brought together under the category of 'art'. In addition, the need to substitute them for art is either because the focus of the study is wider than art or because the definition of art (and in some cases the definition of aesthetics associated with it) is too narrow. In Freedberg's case it was necessary to replace 'art' with 'images' in order to avoid the narrowness of the definition of fine art, while archaeologist John Clegg, like Scott, wishes to escape from overly narrow concepts of the aesthetic.

A central issue is thus to free ourselves from the narrow conception of art associated with Kantian aesthetics and the Western fine art category. By foregrounding fine art, we have been unable to see the family resemblances that connect similar practices across cultures in space and time. The correction is equally relevant to understanding art as a form of action in Western society, bringing together the diversity of practices that intuitively fall into the same broad category, connecting, for example, fine art, with design, craft, decoration, graffiti, and so on. It might be argued that we should encompass art within the broader category of aesthetics rather than arguing for it as a distinct category in its own right (see Coote 1992 for a relevant discussion). Aesthetics, however, while integral to many people's conception of art, is also a much broader category of experience that can be applied equally to features of the natural world as to most areas of human life, whereas 'art' refers specifically to the products and forms of human action. The concept of art emphasizes the connection between aesthetics, representation, and action; art is a way of acting meaningfully in the world. Perhaps it is simply that aesthetics itself has become so closely associated with the idea of disinterested contemplation that it is necessary to reconnect it with purposive action to signify its more general relevance to understanding human history and society.

It is an irony of anthropogeography and archaeology that by placing objects in the contexts of their own times we are likely to see that they have much in common cross-culturally. It is the narrow Western concept of fine art that has been the distancing mechanism. However, I should stress that the cross-cultural category of art does not correspond to any indigenous or historical category or concept of art any more than it does to Western fine art. Gell's advocacy of 'methodological philistinism' is relevant here. By analogy with agnosticism, as far as other cultures' religious beliefs are concerned, methodological philistinism is 'an attitude of resolute indifference towards the aesthetic value of works of art' (Gell 1998: 42). There is, however, a distinction that needs to be made between the analyst's own aesthetic response to the object and the aesthetic value it has in the context of the producing society. The matter is more a question of suspending aesthetic judgement rather than adopting a position of philistinism. In his later book Art and Agency (Gell 1998), he goes even further than this in criticizing the utility of the concept of aesthetics in cross-cultural analysis. He does so by adopting a very narrow definition of aesthetics, which identifies the aesthetic object with the beautiful (Morphy 2000), and he has been criticized by Winter as reducing the art historians' enterprise by 'employing an old-fashioned definition of aesthetics that demands the work be alienated from its originating context' (Winter 2001: 10).

The absence of terms that can be readily translated into English as 'art' is not a challenge to the idea of a cross-cultural category (see Van Damme 1989 for a relevant discussion). The English category of art is complex and contested and itself comprises a polythetic set: there is no more than a family resemblance among the different things that can be included in the art category. Nonetheless it is an
important part of the method of studying non-Western art to analyse the terminologies that apply to 'artworks' and the language that is applied to them.

In approaching the study of visual art in an ethnographic, historic, or archaeological context, the initial approach needs to be pragmatic. Is the material object concerned one that fits into the category of art, or is the analyst’s concept of art useful in understanding the object or releasing its potential as evidence for the study of society? Some studies may of course have art as their initial focus: people whose main interest is in studying art, or people who might have a hypothesis about human development or evolutionary psychology or language origins that rests on a concept of art. That does not mean that their research should be restricted only to the body of works they include in the category of art works. Here I would agree with Freedberg that 'no history of art can afford to ignore these lessons of a history of images more widely conceived' (1989: 281). But the fact that it is necessary to place art objects within broader categories and contexts in order to analyse it does not mean that the category is not itself relevant.

**Methodological reflections on art as a cross-cultural category**

Given the features I see as central to the concept of art, analysis and interpretation will move in the direction of the use of artworks in context, the effect the work has on the observer, and the ways in which it is meaningful to members of the society. On a priori grounds, those questions involve understanding how it is made, how it is used and experienced, how it means, and to whom it means. In the actual research process, it should make little difference whether the works concerned are labelled as art or not. An ethnographically based anthropological study is centred on distinctions that are relevant to the society concerned and understanding the object in the context of the society as a whole. For the anthropologist the most useful thing about the idea of art is that it acts as a flag to signal the kind of thing the object might be. It acknowledges that the semantic and aesthetic dimensions of material culture objects may be integral to their use and places the objects concerned in a broader comparative framework. It directs attention to the form of the object in order to discover what it contributes to the context in which it is used. It requires the researcher to engage with the question of what art, as a form of action, achieves that would not be achieved otherwise.

Thus, my main reason for defending the usefulness of the category of ‘art object’ is that art is a particular way of acting in the world. If we neglect the art dimension of objects, we fail to understand their significance and overlook a source of data that is often crucial to understanding many aspects of society. As the introduction to Thomas Heyd and John Clegg’s book on the aesthetics of rock art suggests, ‘If the task of the social scientist is to provide explanations of the forms of life of people in society, neglecting to consider the aesthetics of objects that have aesthetically salient values may lead to the omission of significant sources of information on those societies’ (Heyd 2005: 4).

The approach I adopt is in a number of respects almost the antithesis of Alfred Gell’s (1992b, 1998). He denies that there is a cross-cultural category of art object but argues for an anthropological approach to objects as agents— through a more theoretical and ethnographic approach to art. It is certainly important to understand the ways in which material culture objects are integral to social life and to value creation processes, and how in many contexts they stand for, represent, or take the place of human actors and are endowed with agency by people. However, I am resistant to applying concepts like agency to the objects themselves just as I think that metaphors such as the ‘social life of things’ (Appadurai 1986a) are overused. And ironically I am cautious precisely because I share Gell’s belief that a form of agnosticism lies at the heart of method in anthropology (Gell 1992b). Seeing objects as agents—as persons—collapses theory and ethnography in a way that diverts anthropological analysis from its analytic task. Social relationships are an important focus of anthropological analysis, though I would not quite give them the central role that Gell does. All material objects are entangled in social processes and, clearly, they often do mediate relationships between people and domains of existence, for example, the earthly and the spiritual. And material culture objects can be believed to be animate and can be endowed with the attributes of persons and responded to as if they were persons—though it needs to be established in particular cases that this is so. But the analyst who elides the difference between the social relations entailed in the use of objects and the observed belief that some objects are animate, by endowing the objects themselves with agency, cuts too many corners. The agnosticism, the suspension of belief that the anthropologist is required to espouse, is in practice very different from that suggested by Gell. It is necessary to get to see the images in the context of the viewing society and to enter the minds of the makers as much as possible, an exercise that requires an exploration of the cognitive and expressive dimensions of objects, answering the question of how they are seen and how they mean. It is vital that anthropologists acknowledge that certain material culture objects are thought to have agency and are believed to affect the world. Indeed some do affect the world as a result of the conscious or unconscious agency of people, for example, works that have a performative function, or mark status, or move people emotionally. But the job of the anthropologist, of the analyst, is to determine how they have that impact on people and an effect in the world, how it is that people can believe that objects have agency. As Winter (2007: 42) has written it is important ‘to distinguish between agency ascribed by the analyst of a given work from
the agency marked by cultural practice, and even grammar, within the originating culture, if we are to fully understand the historical role(s) accorded to artworks...to avoid conflating indigenous and analytical perspectives until and unless they can be shown to be congruent. The work of the anthropologist may begin with the insight that a sculpture is thought to be alive or that death is thought to result from the performance of a dance. Consequently the anthropologist places the questions of what kind of impact a work of art has in context, how it has that impact, how it means or has meaning, at the centre of the analysis of art. Indeed, in many of the analyses that Gell undertakes in Art and Agency he exemplifies that method.

The methodological core of an anthropological study of art forms around two sets of questions. The first concerns how the work of art operates in context; the how of meaning and the how of aesthetic effect, 'how...intention has been realised' (Wicks 1997: 395). Given the understanding of what art is, set out above, 'how' is directly linked to what the object means, what its impact is on the viewer, and what its aesthetic effect is. Indeed analytically 'how' is a prerequisite of understanding what something means even in contexts where we can ask the producers, viewers, or participants. What something means requires analysis. It is seldom reducible to a simple gloss or a particular exegetical interpretation, however useful the latter might be. In archaeological contexts it is essential to the interpretative process: 'how' involves bringing context into the analysis of form.

The second and complementary set of questions centres on the explanation of form itself. Why does the object have the shape it does? Why is it made in the way it is? These questions are clearly interrelated, but each provides an independent perspective on objects. They place them in somewhat different temporal frames.

The first set of questions are centred on the power, meaning, and significance of objects in context, and the second set focuses on their historical trajectory, how they came into being and what technical and cognitive processes are involved in their manufacture. The two come together in the bodies of knowledge that are required to make the objects, in the embodied processes that influence the form of the work, and in the technical skills needed and that may be directly connected to the meaning and significance that the object has to the maker or viewer. The explication of form encourages a journey into the past to trace the histories of designs, techniques, and raw materials. This in turn provides evidence that is essential for a dynamic and historically informed view of the trajectories of regional systems as a whole. The core questions are no different for art than for any other material culture object. The difference lies in what it is necessary to take into consideration in answering them.

The analysis of form is central to both questions of context and questions of process. Form needs to be broadly defined to include all of the material attributes of the objects in addition to shape: the raw materials, their properties such as weight or sheen, colour and texture, and so on. In context, attributes such as lightness or heaviness, as Nancy Munn (1986) showed in her classic study of kula exchange on the island of Gawa, or the quality or composition of the raw material, as Lechtman (1977) demonstrated in the case of Andean gold alloys, are central to understanding the value creation processes associated with art. Such qualities often cross-cut components of form. For example, in the case of the designs on Trobriand canoe prows, the decorated canoes convey a sense of lightness and speed in addition to seductive beauty that is in harmony with the objectives of the voyagers on the kula (Campbell 2002) (Figure 11.4). The analysis of details of the form of designs or the different colours or materials used in different contexts provides the basis for asking questions about the structure of systems of meaning and expression. Those questions themselves can only be answered fully by placing the material artwork in the context of action. Nonetheless, if the analyst carries forward information about the diversity of possible forms, and knowledge of the forms that could have been used, he or she is able to view the event more from the perspective of the actor. The wealth of knowledge and experience that the actor brings to the situation, much of which does not find expression in a particular context, in part explains how the object functions in context. Hence part of the method of the study of forms in art must be an initial analysis of the range of material available—museum collections, photographs from the past and observations from the present—to begin to understand the parameters of variation as well as to get a feeling for how the art might work.

Form will also give access to representational processes manifest in the art and to iconographies that may be central to the functioning of a particular system. I find it useful, following Nancy Munn's study, "Hilbiri Iconography (1973), and influenced by semiotic theory, to distinguish broadly between motivated and arbitrary systems.

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Fig. 11.4 Kula canoe setting off on a voyage from Vakuta to Kitava (Papua New Guinea) laden with goods for exchange (photo: Shirley Campbell 1977).
of representation, though with a strong note of caution that the boundaries between the two are very fuzzy and that each contains within its ambit great diversity. The attraction of the division is that it acknowledges that most, perhaps all, human societies recognize that some representations are more like their referent than others. They are interpretable at one level by what they resemble. Mimesis falls into this category. In some cases, for example, the many analogues for blood or the hyper-realism of Duane Hanson, or perhaps the Kwakuitl and Haida portrait masks in the theatre of the Potlatch (Rosman and Rubel 1990) (Figure 11.5), the boundary between image and reality merges. And, of course, in representations of the unseen, of the spiritual or imagined, the artwork, the processes involved in art making and the way images enter peoples’ lives may in themselves be what makes up the ‘real’ (see Freedberg 1989: 159). Yet, in many other cases art comprises design elements or schema that are relatively arbitrary or unmotivated in terms of formal resemblance to their referent. The elements are part of systems for encoding meaning that may be limited in their scope to designating particular status categories or may have something of the complexity of verbal languages as a means of conveying information or expressing narratives. Frequently the arbitrary and the motivated are combined within the same overall system. Such systems may be relatively transparent and accessible to those who learn them, and are similar to pictographic writing systems. In some cases, the arbitrary nature of the sign and its uninterpretabiliy out of context or without interpretative guidance is part of what

Fig. 11.5 Haida portrait mask of a dead youth. Masks of this type were used in the winter ceremonial performances of the Haida and other societies of the north-west coast of North America. The rituals included spectacular theatrical performances in which the dead were brought back to life through masquerade. This particular mask of a dead youth is one of a series of four collected by the Reverend Charles Harrison in the 1880s now in the Pitt Rivers Museum. The mask has been attributed to the nineteenth-century Haida artist Simeon Stillithea (photo courtesy of Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford, accession number 1891.49.3).

creates its value. The capacity of human beings to create representations that take into account the ways they will be interpreted and the effect they will have in context is what makes art a powerful resource for action.

Methodologically it is important to analyse material form and connect that analysis to contexts of use in order to approach the ‘how’ of meaning and the ‘how’ of effect. Posing the question of how something is interpreted, or how it has the effect it does on the participants, places the object in the context of action, enabling the researcher to begin to understand the conditions that enable the work of art to be effective in context. It also ensures that the researcher recognizes that the meaning of the object in its wider sense will depend on who is viewing it and what experience and knowledge they bring to the event or context. Anthropologically we should be in a position to reduce the ambiguity of our interpretations and increase their accuracy through fieldwork. It is self-evident that the same geometric sign can mean completely different things within a culture according to context and that across cultures its meanings may vary even more widely. It is possible to gain an idea of the structural properties of an encoding or representational system through formal analysis, to get an idea of whether or not it is likely to encode meanings in a precise way. However, it is only by gaining additional contextual information, such as access to the range of meanings associated with particular graphic elements and to the information that the interpreter or viewer has in his or her head, that one can begin to see how such systems operate. Similar qualifications apply to expressive aspects of form, since although there may be some similarities in the impact of a design on the senses across cultures, there is likely to be enormous variation in how a particular visual effect is apprehended. In the case of New Guinea Highland body decorations or shields, it is going to depend on factors such as group affiliation or whether one is an aggressor or defender, big man or follower (see O’Hanlon 1995). Thus when interpretations are being sought for representational systems in remote archaeological time, quite different interpretations may be equally plausible.

Reflecting on archaeological contexts, in particular prehistoric ones, is salutary for anthropologists for a number of ironic reasons. Archaeology usually has to deal with limited information and has been forced to come to terms with the limited nature of its contextual data, in the recognition that socio-cultural context is a vital missing ingredient. The evidence that remains is always partial, especially in prehistoric archaeology. This favours certain kinds of representations: rock art and art forms made of durable material, art in burial contexts, and so on. In many cases, nearly all has been lost. Archaeologists need to reconstruct the interpretative context and to reconnect art works to the context of action. Many archaeologists have steered clear of the data from art because of the limited nature of the archaeological record and the difficulties that poses to the interpretative task. This is puzzling in some respects since, in a world that is short of information on qualitative dimensions of the human past, art is a potentially rich
source of data. Those archaeologists who have included art among their data have indeed been required to develop hypotheses about the 'how' of meaning in order to begin to develop plausible interpretations that can be tested in their archaeological context.

A major problem in archaeological interpretations of art is that the gap between hypothesis and data is often so great that several hypotheses may be equally plausible. The tendency has been to apply a singular interpretative framework, with one replacing another in sequence. Studies of rock art are particularly salutary in this respect with 'art for art's sake' (Halverson 1987), followed by 'hunting magic', followed by hypotheses about religion and gender (Leroi-Gourhan 1989), art as social communication (Conley 1982) and boundary maintaining mechanisms (Munn 1986), art as an adjunct to trance (Lewis-Williams 1981), and so on. On reflection, most of these hypotheses are equally tenable or at least contain elements that are worth continuing to apply to the data as they accumulate over time and as the complexities of the forms of the art become better known through analysis. It is vital in case studies of prehistoric art to integrate the analysis of the art within the archaeological data set as a whole, to try to place the art in the context of overall spatio-temporal sequences. Equally important is to develop hypotheses about how the art would have been viewed by placing it in the context of the overall landscape (Tilley 1994; Bradley 1997; A. M. Jones 2006).

Where there are historical data, linguistic evidence and, as we come closer to the present, evidence in the form of film and photography, then that evidence supplements the analysis of the formal properties of objects and needs to be set in dialogue with them. The resources available for analysing and interpreting art from the distant and middle distant past can be considerable. Winter (2007), using the evidence of grammatical structure of early Sumerian texts from 3000 BC, has been able to hypothesize how people responded to images of rulers and how imagery was connected in a nexus of relationships that linked the population to the ruler and with god. And the art historian Sarah Fraser (2004) has been able to use surviving sketches produced by wall painters in Dunhuang, China in the ninth century to reconstruct the performative aspects of the art and link them to Buddhist theology and aesthetics. While the addition of other forms of evidence enriches the analysis of art, the corollary of this is that art in turn provides a form of evidence that can contribute greatly to the understanding of society.

The lesson that should be learnt from the present and applied to the past is that art is likely to be determined in multiple ways and integrated in complex ways with social and cultural processes as a whole. Art is not one way of acting in the world but many ways of acting. Within the same society, different art forms require different interpretative frameworks yet in context they will often combine and interact. Different representational and expressive systems may be combined in the same complex artwork or performance, gaining coherence through association with an overall theme or set of themes.

As in archaeology, there has been a tendency in anthropology to oppose different attributes of artworks to different effects of artworks, as if they were simple alternatives. In this view, art is either expressive or semantic. Such oppositions are problematic not only because a work of art can be both semantically dense and aesthetically powerful, but also because the very oppositions between the aesthetic—the expressive or the semantic, or between the cognitive and the affective—may be unhelpful oversimplifications. Philosopher Nelson Goodman referred to the dominant dichotomy in Western thought between the cognitive and the emotive:

On the one side we put sensation, perception, inference, conjecture, all nerveless inspection and investigation, fact and truth; on the other, pleasure, pain, interest, satisfaction, disappointment, all brainless responses like and loathing... [But] the work of art is apprehended through feelings as well as through the senses... What we know through art is felt in our bones and nerves and muscles as well as grasped by our minds, that all the sensitivity and responsiveness of the organism participates in the interpretation of symbols.


YOONGU CIRCUMCISION PAINTING

These rather dense methodological points can be explored further through an example from my own research that illustrates the multidimensional nature of form in art and the complex place it can have in world making. The example I want to use derives from ethnographic work among the Yolngu, Australian Aboriginal people from eastern Arnhem Land in northern Australia (see Morphy 1991, 2007b).

On the day of his circumcision, a painting is made on the chest of a Yolngu boy. It is made over a period of several hours by men in a shady place. The painting is produced by a number of men working in turn, and their actions are accompanied by songs that relate to the meaning of the painting. The mothers, sisters, and other women relatives sit on the outside of the painting group. They sometimes perform dances that accompany the songs but they tend to look away from the painting itself. When the painting is completed, the child is carried to the place of circumcision on the shoulders of his mother's brother, decorated in parrot feather string ornaments, with a sacred dilly bag under his arm. At this moment, the child is on display and the ritual performance dramatizes his change of status and his separation from his mother (Figure 11.6).

We can understand much about the significance of the painting as an act without considering its form or aesthetics further. Indeed, that is where anthropological analysis of ritual form has often remained. The painting marks the status of the
The painting on the chest is elaborate (Figure 11.7). It combines figurative and geometric motifs and is finished with fine cross-hatching. The designs belong to a set of sacred clan paintings (likapuy mingitji) associated with djukirri ("foundation") places. The designs are believed to have had their origin in the ancestral past and they encode meanings connected to the ancestral being and events concerned. While sometimes a variant of the same painting may be painted on more than one boy, the number of possible designs is so great that the same design is likely to be repeated only after many years have passed. The painting may be produced in other contexts and on other surfaces, however. A detailed analysis of the overall set of designs reveals an archive of paintings that covers the entire mythological landscape of eastern Arnhem Land (Morphy 1991). The designs are connected to land ownership, mapping the relationships between people and land. By extending the data to include paintings in museum collections and photographs of body paintings over a 60-year period, it is possible to see both continuities in design generation over time and to detect any changes in the usage of the designs and patterns of ownership. In the Yolnu case, the individual painting on a child’s chest in a circumcision ceremony is part of the process of the social transmission of religious knowledge over time. This process is deeply connected to the political structure of Yolnu society and clearly contributes to the designs being seen as meaningful objects even if the boy has little idea of the system as a whole. The paintings are decodable and can be interpreted by someone learned in Yolnu art, just as the iconography of Renaissance paintings or Sydney Nolan’s Ned Kelly series, which is inspired by the exploits of the renowned Australian bushranger, can be ‘decoded’ by a knowledgeable person. And the circumcision ceremony is a context in which meaning is built in to the designs through the songs that are sung, the dances that are performed and the ritual process that is taking place. While there are core meanings associated with particular Yolnu designs, the paintings themselves are highly productive semantically and their meaning depends in part on context and on who is viewing them (Morphy 2007a). Some interpretations are restricted, while some depend on individual knowledge and experience.
During the performance of a circumcision ceremony, the aesthetic and aesthetic dimensions of the painting are what count for most of the participants. Yolngu paintings contain ancestral power that is expressed by the shimmering brilliance of the design produced by the technique of cross-hatching (Morphy 1992). A similar effect is created by the lorikeet feather decorations and the sheen of the red ochred body. The body shines with ancestral power, and the effect is augmented by the drama of the ritual as he comes out of the shade fully painted, to be displayed to the assembled company. The aesthetic effect in this context is relatively autonomous of the iconography of the design and can be understood without entering that domain. At the moment of circumcision, the detailed form of the design will surely be irrelevant to the boy. He has lain still for hours in an almost dissociated state as the design on his chest is infilled with the gentle strokes of the marwat, the long thin brush of human hair that is drawn across his skin. Experimentally the transition from the quiet time of painting to the sharp moment of circumcision is dramatic. But he will remember and be reminded for the rest of his life of the painting that was given to him that day. Yolngu art is something of the moment but it is also a compendium of knowledge that can be acquired throughout a lifetime. Such knowledge is applied in innumerable contexts, in the form of paintings or dances used for particular purposes. The purpose may vary from the transport of the soul of the deceased or the transfer of ancestral power to demonstrations of rights in land. The knowledge contained in paintings in part explains why they can be used to interpret the form of the landscape or to communicate the creative actions of ancestral beings, and how it is that they mark clan identity in ways that can be used to support claims of precedence in political and social life. All of these can be the subject of exegesis and be included in glosses of the meanings of components of paintings. And yet at any moment the practice of art can create a sensation or a transcendent experience, individual or shared, that comes out of the phenomenological experience of the work itself and its effect on the senses, and that gives reality to an idea or a belief. In the Yolngu case, it might be the innuma presence of spiritual power in the world or a feeling of communio at the culmination of a ritual.

Conclusions: Seeing the Light

The anthropological study of art as a form of action takes account of the multi-dimensional nature of sets of objects with properties that transcend conventional functional categories and divisions. Art is often deployed in social or religious contexts because it connects the cognitive and affective dimensions of human experience and facilitates complex ways of acting in the world. A work of art may encode meanings precisely, depicting an event, a sequence of action, a religious story, a particular person, or mythic being. Yet, the same work can also point towards ideas that cannot be so easily expressed, creating atmosphere, a sense of personality, or the state of a relationship. Art can 'communicate' through visual codes, the designs of distinctive forms of regalia that mark status, or the patterns that mark clan identity and more mundanely team membership. Visual properties can equally be used aesthetically to convey abstract concepts—time, space, atmosphere, chaos, order, and so on—and colours can be used to convey emotions or slumping again into the mundane, the appropriate ambience for a kitchen or bathroom. The cognitive and the affective, and the semantic and aesthetic, while relatively autonomous, are in actuality co-present in the form of works of art. The stretching of meaning associated with artworks often happens because some things can be best expressed through aesthetic forms. Such ideas may be expressed through material forms that have a powerful impact on the human body, which create sensations that are almost inescapable—the sensation of the body being filled with light or becoming overwhelmingly heavy. The relationship between physical stimulus and bodily sensation is something all humans experience and art is in part the use of this shared experience to create meaning and to share emotions. In Yolngu art, the brilliance of the design is the ancestral power that is the vital force behind the world. However, similar effects in the context of other societies, while having some synergies, may have quite different significance and be stretching towards very different ideas. The particularities of the meaning of form in context need to be understood before the metaphysics can be appreciated.

While superficially there are elements in common between the approach I adopt to art and that of Alfred Gell's, in that both of us could be interpreted to adopt an action-oriented approach towards art, there are fundamental differences. Gell adopts an explicitly anthropological approach to art in which art as a category more or less disappears. My perspective is centred on art as a particular way of acting in the world that requires an interdisciplinary approach. Aesthetics and semantics are integral to my conception of art but are clearly not confined to art. What is contained under the rubric of art varies widely across cultures and time, but the family resemblance that underlies art objects creates synergies cross-culturally and a sense that certain kinds of things fit within the same broad category. Given the perspective I adopt, then I would advocate that art can profitably be analysed from a similar perspective irrespective of when and where it was produced. A focus on art as action requires that attention is paid to form, to understanding why that kind of object was produced for use in a particular cultural and social context, including of course its impact on and reception by others. And because many artworks are durable, a different set of questions needs to be posed as it is exchanged or traded and outlasts its maker by decades or millennia. On a priori grounds, the same broad range of questions and methods of analysis are
going to be relevant to art whether it was produced by hunters in the Upper Palaeolithic, Buddhist wall painters of eighth-century China, Poole pottery painters, Yolngu bark painters, or contemporary graffiti artists. Those questions and methods are going to find that art encompasses many different kinds of things, since what is produced depends on the knowledge and technical accomplishment that goes into it and the purpose for which it is intended. But the archaeologist, the art historian, the anthropologist of art, while they may centre their research on different periods and societies and have access to different sources of data, should be involved in the same overall discourse.

CHAPTER 12

ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSEMBLAGES AND PRACTICES OF DEPOSITION

ROSEMARY JOYCE
JOSHUA POLLARD

Archaeologists routinely describe sites as composed of assemblages encountered in deposits. But what is actually meant by ‘assemblage’ and ‘deposition’? In this chapter, we explore how these concepts have developed and consider the implications of contemporary understandings of deposition and assemblage that depart significantly from conventional definitions, many still to be found in introductory textbooks.

We conclude that archaeology, as a result of a long history of employing things associated together in space as a primary basis for interpretation, has developed a set of approaches that if more widely used would fundamentally transform all aspects of our disciplinary practice.

DEFINING TERMS

Conventionally, the term ‘assemblage’ is applied to a collection of artefacts or ecofacts (animal bones, or seeds, etc.) recovered from a specific archaeological
context—a site, an area within a site, a stratified deposit, or a specific feature such as a ditch, tomb, or house. So, an assemblage is a collection of material related through contextual proximity. Inherent in the use of the term in archaeology is the idea that the contextual association makes it possible to interpret the group of materials as evidence for specific events, processes, or practices in the past. Assemblages are often characterized as being open to the assignment of a single date of formation, although the contents of an assemblage may include material of an earlier date recognized as having been curated, recycled, or otherwise moved through time.

In archaeological excavation, the definition of a number of objects as constituting an 'assemblage' rests indissolubly on the identification of delimited deposits whose contents make up the assemblage. Deposition in this sense refers to the process of laying-down or accumulation of sediments and materials to form an archaeological context (see Harris 1989). While early uses of the term assemblage, and most contemporary usage, do not include the bulk sediments that form the 'matrix' of a deposit, some approaches that we discuss further below promote the inclusion in the assemblage of all the contents of a deposit, including sediments.

While not a necessary part of the definition of assemblage, in some instances the association of materials in a deposit is understood to result from intentional actions in the past. For example, tomb assemblages may be considered to be the associated materials resulting from a burial event (Figure 12.1). Even an assemblage that is derived from a context understood as secondary, such as the materials from a cultural fill or from a midden, is interpretable in term of the human intentions that produced the fill or midden. In fact, this ambivalence is inherent in the use of the term 'assemblage', which references the verb 'assemble', raising the question, who is doing the assembling? While in mid-twentieth-century archaeology that role was clearly assigned to the archaeologist, the association of the term assemblage over the past 35 years with the concept of 'structured deposition' requires active consideration of the likely role of past actors in creating the material remains that the archaeologist describes and interprets.

The concept of 'structured deposition' was originally introduced to demarcate instances when materials were intentionally associated in a patterned fashion (Richards and Thomas 1984). In contemporary practice, the concept is being expanded as a way to recognize the structuring that results from much past human action, whether the structure was consciously intended or an unintended consequence of action, or something in between. The emphasis in the original definition of structured deposition on ritualized or symbolic action has been expanded to include both the structuring effects of everyday pragmatic action, and the phenomenological and experiential qualities of the actions through which structured deposits came into being.

**Fig. 12.1 Assemblage and deposition: Early Bronze Age (c.2000–1800 BC) grave goods—ceramic, bone, and stone—associated with a cremation burial from Butford, near Stonehenge, England.**

**Histories of Archaeological Approaches**

The conventional definitions of assemblage and deposition discussed above emerged from geological and processual models of archaeological 'formation processes' that developed from the nineteenth century through the mid-twentieth century (e.g. Schiffer 1976, 1983, 1987; Harris 1989; Rapp and Hill 2006: 4–16; see also Brown and Givens 1996; O'Brien and Lyman 1999). The initial definition of the idea of structured deposition in the early 1980s owes its inspiration to critiques of some of the perspectives of processual archaeology, and especially, to significant concerns with the place of the human actor and human meanings in late processual archaeological models. However, it would be a mistake to conclude that concerns with the phenomena described as 'structured deposition' are exclusively a product of post-processual archaeology.

The main genealogical line for structured deposition can be traced through the work of British prehistorians operating within a functionalist framework during the 1960s to 1970s. Recognition of the unusual context and deliberate juxtaposition
of deposits at certain Neolithic sites inspired the identification of these as "packages of 'ritual rubbish'" (e.g. Piggott 1962: 73; Smith 1965: 20; Case 1975: 193-195). Separate Americanist genealogies leading to similar concepts develop from the processual archaeology and site formation processes of Michael Schiffer (1987), and from contemporary archaeology that seeks to bridge the gap between older culture-historical approaches and contemporary archaeologies of practice and meaning (Pauketat 2002). These diverse genealogies for similar concerns with the human structuring of archaeological deposits raise issues of the coherence and compatibility of research that may at first glance seem similar operationally, but is based in different assumptions about the relationships that exist between human action in the past, the material deposits that archaeologists investigate, and the questions that they ask.

Stratigraphic models borrowed from geology were critical to the development of archaeology in the nineteenth century and underlie any archaeological understanding of deposition and its interpretation. In particular, the principle of superposition—the idea that the relative vertical position of materials can be read as evidence of the passage of time, with lower positions earlier and higher positions later—became a cornerstone of archaeological practice through the influence of nineteenth-century geology. In the parallel development of geology, the principle of superposition led to a general representation of temporal change as producing a sedimentary layer-cake, with materials embedded in distinct layers being understood as typical of the time period when the layer was laid down. Materials found together could be assumed to have the same date—an archaeological inference John Rowe (1963) labelled as the "principle of association", or "Worsaae's Law", based on the writing of the Danish archaeologist Jens Worsaae (1849). It is worth quoting Worsaae at length, as his work is generally regarded as critical to the development of ideas in archaeology relating the association of things in space to their association in time. Worsaae wrote that

we should scarcely have been able to refer... antiquities to three successive periods if experience had not taught us that objects which belong to different periods are usually found by themselves. It will not be the places where antiquities may be casually met with, but rather our ancient stone structures and burrows, which, with reference to the subject just mentioned, ought to be the subject of a more particular description; for as to the graves themselves we know that, generally speaking, they contain both the bones of the dead, and many of their weapons, implements, and trinkets, which were buried with them. Here we may therefore, in general, expect to find those objects together which were originally used at the same period.

Worsaae (1849: 76; emphasis added)

Archaeologists such as John Lubbock also borrowed from geology the idea of characteristic contents of each layer—the "type fossils" of geology becoming the artefact types of archaeology (Kehoe 1991; O'Brien and Lyman 1999). Archaeologists developed a specialized term for the distinctive materials enclosed in a specific layer of the stratigraphic sequence: the 'assemblage' (Childe 1926: 26-29). John Lubbock, the pioneer British archaeologist, used this collective term without defining it, describing the fauna from stratified cave deposits as an 'assemblage' in the first edition of his landmark book, Pre-Historic Times (Lubbock 1865: 303). Succeeding editions used the term 'assemblage' repeatedly for collections of artefacts from individual locations, particularly when his purpose was to compare a collection from one location with that from another (e.g. Lubbock 1865: 11, 107, 377). It appears that Lubbock was drawing on an existing, perhaps recently introduced, term linking geological and archaeological discourse. In 1881, a discussion of the interpretation of collections of stone tools found in geological sediments cited a presentation in 1860 in which Sir R. Murchison wrote that 'while the geological geographer who visits the banks of the Somme, and sees such an assemblage of relics beneath great accumulations formed by water... is compelled to infer, when such a phenomenon was brought about, the waters... had risen in great inundations... and swept over the slopes of the chalk in which the primeval inhabitants were fashioning their rude flint instruments' (Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland 1863: 100). These examples strongly suggest that the term was borrowed from the, by then, widespread use in geological publications of the term 'assemblage' for the group of fossils distinctive of specific geological sediments (e.g. Lyell 1835: 5, 7).

The term 'assemblage' continued to be used as an undefined descriptive term referring to the artefacts collected from a uniform geological sediment in the decades that followed (e.g. Lamplugh 1906; Childe 1943), especially in contrast to other such collections (Moir 1917: 396). By the mid-1940s, the use of the term 'assemblage' in Americanist literature became connected to debates about cultural identities based on specific types of artefacts (Griffin 1945; Wedel 1945). But assemblage truly comes into its own as a theoretical concept in the 1950s, possibly as a result of the influence of Gordon Willey and Philip Phillips' book, Method and Theory in American Archaeology (1958) and the article that preceded it (Willey and Phillips 1953).

Proposing to place culture-historical archaeology on a solid methodological footing, these authors define a series of specialized terms to be used by archaeologists. They were particularly concerned not to confine the descriptive terms proper to living societies with those used for describing the materials recovered by archaeologists. Citing V. Gordon Childe's (1926: 2) definition of the 'archaeological culture' as 'an assemblage of artifacts that recur repeatedly associated together in dwellings of the same kind and with burials of the same rite... assumed to be the concrete expressions of the common social traditions that bind together a people', Willey and Phillips (1953: 667) argued that such an 'archaeological culture' was in fact an 'arbitrary division of the space-time-cultural continuum defined by reference to its imperishable content'. This 'imperishable content' of a particular place in the space-time continuum was the archaeological assemblage. Unlike earlier
ways of organizing archaeologically recovered materials, in which contextual association was not critical, an assemblage was defined by its recovery in context. Assemblages were central to debates in the 1950s about the reality of types (Spaulding 1953, 1954; Ford 1954). Artefact assemblages were, for Spaulding (1955: 205), the basic units of analysis and comparison, as they were for many of his contemporaries. Willey and Phillips (1958: 22–24) saw assemblages, which they understood as the materials in use at one point in time at a particular place by a defined group of people, as the basis for defining site components, which singly or in groups made up their ‘phases’. The component was thus for them the abstraction of the activities of people who shared culture at one point in time, represented by the stratigraphically discrete deposited traces of those activities, or assemblages.

The model of archaeological site formation that went hand-in-hand with the culture-historical method and theory in which assemblages were specifically meaningful was for the most part only lightly changed from the basic geological model of the nineteenth century. Sites were understood to be composed of strata that were the products of occupations, but these occupations were not seen as continuously forming deposits. Rather, an emphasis on superposition and the identification of stratigraphic breaks provided the model of stacked strata that is still taught in most introductory archaeological classes and illustrated repeatedly in museums. Little or no explicit attention was paid to the question of the formation of discontinuities—breaks in deposition, episodes of erosion and the like were encompassed through concepts such as ‘reversed stratigraphy’ (Hawley 1937). Concepts such as reversed stratigraphy reinforce an overly simple model of depositional history as normally a series of episodes of varying length that produce corresponding differentiated units of deposition (O’Brien and Lyman 1999: 140–147). This geological way of thinking about archaeological stratigraphy corresponded to the concept of archaeological cultures as relatively conservative and homogeneous units that changed only through radical breaks, marked by the sharp lines of the nominal stratigraphic profile. When models of past social life changed with the development of processual archaeology, so too did the understanding of deposition, stratigraphy, and the significance of assemblages of contextually associated things.

PROCESSUAL AND POST-PROCESSUAL APPROACHES TO ASSEMBLAGES AND DEPOSITION

Lewis Binford’s initial call to create a new anthropological archaeology included an explicit claim that ‘the formal structure of artefact assemblages together with the
characterizes the daily lives of living peoples, and stratigraphic deposits as at best 'a massive palimpsest of derivatives from many separate episodes' (Binford 1981: 97).

Processual archaeology productively drew our attention to understanding assemblage formation through deposition; as Schiffer put it, we need to 'view deposits themselves as peculiar artifacts, the characteristics of which must be studied in their own right' (Schiffer 1985: 697). However, these archaeologists ultimately developed what we now see as an untenable separation of human and 'natural' agencies of deposition, requiring archaeologists to adjudicate which depositional events were natural and which cultural. Such concerns lay behind experiments conducted in the United Kingdom during the 1980s to explore the mechanisms by which artefacts entered ditch fills (e.g. Jewell 1985). The underlying models of deposition relied on an assumption that assemblages are the 'fall out' of human action, side stepping questions of human intentions and meanings.

A different perspective on the question of depositional histories was provided by early post-processual work on Neolithic Britain, in which human agency, intentionality, and the symbolically active qualities of material culture were highlighted (Richards and Thomas 1984; Thomas and Whittle 1986; Thomas 1988). At a routine level, even the deposition or disposal of refuse could be seen to play out symbolic structures—ethnoarchaeological work highlighted how semantically different categories of material were treated through deposition in different ways (Hodder 1982; Moore 1982). Other modes of deposition were seen to draw more actively upon the symbolic qualities and associations of material. Thus, in their study of Durrington Walls, Colin Richards and Julian Thomas (1984: 191) described the assemblages deposited as structured by 'highly formalised, repetitive behaviour' (Figure 12.2), key features for the archaeological identification of ritual (Joyce 2001). These early post-processual studies were heavily influenced by structuralist anthropology, inasmuch as they took as axiomatic an understanding that deposition was structured by and served to reproduce underlying rules or grammars of cultural order.

The idea that some deposits might be highly structured due to the deliberate symbolically charged actions that constituted ritual was actually already accepted in earlier archaeological discussions, even constituting one of the acknowledged cultural depositional processes of behavioural archaeology (Schiffer 1985: 29). But ritual depositional processes were not given substantial attention until after the rise of post-processual archaeology (Walker 1995a, 2002; LaMotta and Schiffer 1999). The recognition that ritual could produce enduring structured deposits automatically required consideration of the intentionality of past human action, not merely the symbolic potential of deposits. In Americanist archaeology, this thread was pursued mostly independently by scholars studying the archaeology of the US Southwestern Pueblos and those working on the city-states of the Classic Maya (Walker and Lucero 2000); while in the United Kingdom the concept was actively explored by prehistorians working on the Neolithic and Iron Age (Richards and

Fig. 12.2 Structured deposition in the late Neolithic (c.2500 BC) henge enclosure of Durrington Walls, Wiltshire, England. The scheme of depositional patterning identified by Colin Richards and Julian Thomas (based on Richards and Thomas 1984).
in archaeological deposits—has had a profound effect on methodologies of archaeological excavation, recording, and analysis. While offering a critique of what they see as too much emphasis on intentionality in discussions of structured deposition, Brudenell and Cooper (2008: 31–32) nonetheless accept a framework of analysis that treats deposits as evidence of sequences of events through which human actors positioned materials in relation to each other ‘not assuming from the beginning that it was compiled or deposited with any clear purpose’ (2008: 31). A reconsideration of the explanation of Neolithic British pit clusters as evidence of structured deposition concludes that the features in question were generated through everyday occupation, but describes these acts of dwelling as deliberate and ‘purposeful’ (Harding 2006). These shifts from the geological model of stratigraphic accumulation representing an interpretable coincidence of materials removed from cultural systems over vast periods of time, to the assumption that deposits can be understood in terms of the temporalities of human lives, are irreversible changes in archaeological perspectives. Contemporary scholarship requires us to set aside artificial distinctions between intentional and unintentional, deliberate and accidental, symbolic and quotidian action, and understand deposition as always the product of practices by different knowledgable actors whose work assembling sediments and worked and unworked things created the contextually associated assemblages we interpret (Joyce 2008a). In part, influence has derived from actor-network theory (Law and Hassard 1999; Latour 2005) and recent cross-disciplinary studies of materiality (e.g. Miller 2000c; Henare et al. 2007b). These have stressed the imbricated and indissoluble relationship between people and things—how each serves to constitute the other—and the multi-agent nature of networks of practice and effect. Such approaches do not seek to privilege the social (as defined in anthropocentric terms) over the material. Here, there is room to consider ‘material effects’ as well as conventionally defined social strategies in the study of deposition.

The point can be illustrated by the practice of middening—a midden is defined here as a locus for the deliberate and sequential deposition of refuse (Needham and Spence 1997). A common feature of sedentary and semi-sedentary settlements from later prehistory onwards, middens are the outcomes of numerous depositional actions, many repetitive and largely unconsidered, others more self-conscious and structured (Figure 12.3). Engaging with issues of materiality, practice and temporality, and collapsing distinctions between the symbolic and quotidian and intentional and unintentional, allows us to understand these features (which are both deposit and assemblage) as more than refuse accumulations. While the product of largely prosaic acts of slow accumulation, knowledge of their formation and constitution sometimes transformed the currency of middens, such that they became an index of social and subsistence success, territorial dominance (Needham and Spence 1997: 84–85), and/or of occupational longevity and intergenerational connection—time and group genealogy are worked into the fabric of these structures as much as the
materials from which they are composed. Middens can become definable landmarks, even forms of monumental expression in the case of the massive late Bronze Age–early Iron Age ‘black earth’ sites of southern central England (McOmish 1996). Neolithic middens near Avebury, Wiltshire, were even incorporated into monumental architecture (Pollard 2005). Thus, the material qualities of middens and the networks of practices and temporalities embroiled in their creation are seen to ‘act back’ and restructure the possibilities for future social action in a way not envisaged at the outset of their formation.

**Contemporary approaches to practices of deposition**

In the original formulations of structured deposition, the identification of intentional patterns of the placement of materials that might otherwise have been taken simply as accidental refuse was relatively secure because the assemblages came from contexts recognized as likely sites of ritualized action (Richards and Thomas 1984; Thomas and Whittle 1986; Thomas 1988). In the succeeding years, the recognition of structured deposition has expanded greatly. With the broadening from a focus on structure and symbolism, and the idea of deliberate deposits as ‘representations’ of various kinds, or as the residue of ‘ritual action’, our analyses now include consideration of the sensuousness of things, phenomenological aspects of the experience of materials, and their agential qualities, as well as broader ways of thinking of signification itself (Pollard 2001; Joyce 2008a). Contemporary scholarship on depositional practices does not just encompass the treatment of those things conventionally defined as material culture; sediments themselves can comprise created deposits of considerable significance (Paulletat and Alt 2003, 2005; Boivin 2004a). Ongoing investigations of Stonehenge and its landscape show how even where the concept of ritualization evident in structured deposits is useful, intentional human action can also be conceptualized in such taken-for-granted aspects of site formation as the leaving of posts to decay… a process of rotting whose culmination was marked by the digging of a pit to deposit offerings as a “closing” ritual (Parker Pearson et al. 2006: 242). Even structured deposits that closely conform to the original definition of these as assemblages resulting from ritual practice profit from the broader perspectives brought about with a shift from analyses of ritualized or structured deposition to depositional practices.

**Depositional practices: the archaeology of Mantecales, Honduras**

Archaeological excavations in a number of sites in the lower Ulua River Valley have encountered structured deposits so dramatic that the intentionalities involved cannot be ignored. Rather than simply being encoded in a ritual system, the repetition of episodes of burning incense and deposition of ceramic incense-burning vessels at one of these sites, Mantecales, can be viewed as the product of complex memory work in which humans and non-humans were mutually active. Understanding of this complex deposit illuminates other deposits, burials, caches, and architectural fills, as equally part of memory work, evidence of the historicizing of practice in place.

The Mantecales site, CR-71, is located in northern Honduras, along a tributary of the Ulua river, the Quebrada Mantecales. This stream today runs in an abandoned course of the ancient Ulua river that was active during the Late Classic period (c. AD 500–800). At that time, along the entire course of this stream, a dense pattern of settlement developed. Most of these settlements were house sites, in which wattle and daub buildings were demolished and reconstructed for generations. These processes of building and rebuilding took place in conjunction with interments and other structured deposition, often associated with the start of rebuilding of houses.
The repeated rebuilding of house sites in place gradually created raised earthen platforms, which were relatively low but quite extensive. Four of these large low platforms were mapped as part of the Mantecales site. As in other such sites, bordering each platform were depressions, likely borrow pits from which sediments were taken to construct the features.

On two of the platforms, the remains of two to three small structures with stone features could be identified on the surface. Investigations begun in 1995 by the Honduran Institute of Anthropology and History recovered an assemblage consistent with the occupation of a small perishable house, including domestic pottery, grinding stones, and chipped stone tools, as well as impressions of the pole structure preserved in its clay covering, on one of the platforms.

A second platform, lacking any visible surface architecture, measuring 40 m by 60 m, was located west of the first platform tested. Excavation of what became a 36-m-long north-south trench was carried out by the Honduran archaeological team, which also conducted excavations every 3 m along a perpendicular east-west transect 36 m long. Near the centre of the platform, in an area approximately 14 m by 6 m, these archaeologists encountered remains of clay surfaces, circular patches of carbon and ash, and great quantities of broken ceramics, including complete figural whistles and figurines. Close to the centre of this area, the team recovered a fragment of an unusual green marble vessel. Throughout these excavations, the team encountered ashy deposits, figural artefacts, and broken pottery, along with occasional unusual objects, such as small quartz stones contained in a jar, polished celts, and chipped obsidian bifaces. But while they were able to identify traces of clay surfaces, this platform otherwise lacked the evidence of superstructures found elsewhere, and lacked features that would attest to residential use. Instead, the deposits were composed of surfaces with circles of ash, in some places thicker lenses of ash, alternating with clay, with several dense piles of broken pottery, and in one place, a particular focus of deposition in the form of the cist, green marble vase, and a dense sherd mantle covering this feature.

Later in 1995, a team from Cornell University and Berkeley continued excavation of this central focal deposit (Figure 12.4). These excavations eventually extended to a depth of 1.65 m. The team relocated the stone cist, which formed three sides of a rectangular chamber, open to the north. Here a dense deposit, 90 cm deep, consisted of lenses of burned materials (clay, ash, and carbon) alternating with large portions of unusual pottery vessels. The pottery vessels included polychrome painted serving vessels, red-painted and incised jars, and unassembled jars with handles, forms most likely used to contain and transport liquids. Also present were a number of more specialized vessel forms identified as containers for the burning of local resins. In all, part of at least half a dozen large vessels with modeled decoration, lids placed over burning resin, including two effigies of felines and one standing human figure, were recovered. A minimum of 10 vessels with tubular handles attached to pierced
shallow bowls for burning resin, and portions of at least 10 other bowls used for this purpose were also included in this sequence of deposition.

All these broken vessels, along with some miscellaneous unusual items (jade beads, obsidian blades, and portions of at least one, and no more than two, mould-made figurines), were carefully placed in the area enclosed by the stone cist. They flanked a feature located on the western edge of the cist, composed of what eventually proved to be seven complete jar necks (28–42 cm in diameter), stacked one on top of another. Below the seventh jar neck, excavations documented alternating layers of clay and dense carbon deposits. Within the cist, two clear stratigraphic breaks, marked by lenses of ash and carbon, were identified between deposits of broken pottery laid adjacent to the stack of jar necks. Based on the associated ceramics, these features were the location of repeated incense-burning episodes, lasting for at least 100 years and quite likely rather longer.

Late in the history of this platform, a major change was made to the use of the area, resulting in marked changes in depositional practices. A clay floor covered the cist, and there is evidence of a clay structure that was constructed and later demolished. About 150 years after the last activity in the stone cist, a dense deposit of pottery serving vessels was placed immediately above the cist, covering the lower half of a carved green marble vase placed almost precisely where the original stack of jar necks, no longer visible on the surface, was located. While the latest use of the place was markedly different in terms of activities (with no evidence of burning of resin), the existing ritual axis was clearly maintained by the people for whom this was a special location.

What the concept of depositional practices allows us to do is consider these unusual structured deposits not simply as the residues of rituals, the ceremonial trash of the updated behavioural archaeological framework explored by Walker (1995a), but as the evidence of a historical sequence of human actions. About AD 600, a visitor to Mantecales set a pair of jar necks in place on the summit of the platform. Painted with red linear designs, 40 cm in rim diameter, and standing 8 cm tall, the bottom jar neck supported a tall, unslipped jar neck with four handles modelled in the form of small animals. The handles on this vessel were carefully oriented to the cardinal directions. Together, these jar necks defined a focal axis and a container for the carbon produced when visitors burned resin in other vessels that were then broken and left at the place. Two censer lids, one with modelled spikes and crests, the other supporting a standing human figure holding a bag of resin, were placed north-east and south-east of the jar necks. Broken pieces of at least three hand-held censers with long handles were laid near the jar necks, and obsidian blades were placed carefully between the vessels. Burned clay and carbon was spread over most of the area, leaving the rim of the upper pot exposed.

The actions carried out at this location were probably replicated at many places on the platform at this time. Ash lenses in the eastern and southern extremes of the excavated areas suggest the same ritual actions, but in these other locations, there is no trace of the placement of orienting features like the stacked jar necks. While ash lenses continue to be deposited in these other areas of the platform, they are uncoordinated, and give no hint of the enduring connections between humans over generations that were being produced by the materials used, placed, and remembered at the stacked jar rims. The two stacked jar necks persisted in place, and when later people arrived intent on burning resin, the stacked jar necks oriented them to where to stand to carry out this action. The stack grew with the addition of a new pair of red-painted jar necks. A censer lid with a modelled feline was placed directly to the east of these stacked jar necks, and half a dozen handled censers were used and left to accompany the accumulating body of such vessels, also augmented by portions of at least four other censer lids. While free-form burning continued south and west on the platform, the stacked jar necks and the censers with which they were now connected remained as the core of the place, attracting new visitation.

The painted and incised designs on the red-painted jars, and the polychrome painted designs on plates and cylinders left next to them, show that the repetition of practice persisted over the ensuing generation. While fashions in pottery decoration changed, the stacked jar necks remained and structured the repetition of incense burning rituals. The stack grew with the addition of two more jar necks, one from an unslipped jar supporting another red-painted jar neck. Despite the intervening period, and the absence from the immediately visible, most recent, jar stack of the unslipped type, this couple reiterates the original pair of jar necks that established the stack. South-west of these stacked jar necks, another feline censer lid was placed, echoing the preceding deposit.

Up until this point the stacked jar necks alone had provided the central axis to orient the actions of the humans that visited. As part of the third generation of the life of the jar neck stack, selected stones were placed forming an enclosure with the jar necks near the south-west corner, and an opening facing north-east. Sometime after AD 850, a final jar neck was added to the stack. This seventh jar neck, like the second, was from an unslipped jar with four handles. As recovered, these were slightly off cardinal orientation, conforming instead to the axis established by the U-shaped cist.

The new, expanded focus of ritual action represented by the rectilinear chamber enclosing the stacked jar necks and used censers extended the space occupied by rituals involving burning east, south, and north. Where previously the ashes left behind by such actions had been scattered across the platform, now they were oriented by and to the stacked jar rims. In turn, this focus of action primed the repetition of a sequence of action—burning resin, dumping the residues into the stack, sometimes with jade beads or other small items, and breaking the censers and placing them next to the stack.

Covered over with a clay cap, the stacked jar necks and the censers they drew to them were apparently cut off from active interaction with the new generations of
people who followed as occupants and users of the site. Yet, the history of the stacked jar necks was powerful enough that a century later, another group of people was able to precisely place over it a new deposit. The core item in this deposit, the base of a green marble cylindrical vase, at first seems unrelated to the materials that made up the biography of the stack. But like them, it established a vertical axis rooted in the local earth. Spread over this broken vessel, covering it completely, were tens of thousands of sherds from serving dishes. A new network spread out from the place made by the stack, through the participation of the people whose shared meal at this place closed one stage in the network while initiating the next.

Once the first stacked rims were in place, they ‘caused’ human actors to rebuild the space in ways that preserved the ability of the stacked rims to engage in incense burning rituals with successive generations of humans. What we are seeing in the structured deposition is evidence of the production over time, through the entanglement of people with these things, of a form of depositional practice that was significant, probably meaningful, to those people who repeatedly engaged with the stacked jar rims. In a reflexive reference to incense burning actions by humans, the earliest figurative imagery at Mantecales included a censer lid supporting a human being holding a bag of the kind that contained the resins burnt in such vessels. The depositional practices here also connected humans that participated in these rituals with non-human animals. The following episode of growth of the stacked jar necks was accompanied by the deposit of a feline image, likely a jaguar or similar smaller wild cat. Another feline censer lid accompanied the next episode of remodelling.

Even though it is a decisive end to the kind of action previously centred on the jar neck stack, the pavement with smashed pottery covering the green marble vase fragment is still structured by the stack. It is through the use of new materiality that the effects of the orienting stack is changed: from a point-centred series of rituals involving censers and, given the size of the space, a small number of humans, to a horizontal space that perhaps may be the residue of a meal shared among a wider array of humans connected to this multigenerational place of memory.

**Discussion**

Our emphasis has shifted from specific bounded ‘structured deposits’ to broader structuring of deposition through which sites as wholes came into being. Pollard and Ruggles (2001: 80) draw our attention to a number of specific features indicative of the structuring of depositional practices at Stonehenge that provide one framework for consideration. They identify repeated emphasis on particular locations, sitedness, concentric spatial divisions, and relationships to external referents as structured by a cosmology that they can perceive through the structuring of the site as a whole. Similarly, research on Çatalhöyük employs concepts of depositional practices to understand everything from the recapitulated creation of postholes to the selection or even production of sediments from which mounds were constructed, in addition to more obvious structured deposits like a cache of axe heads (Pauketat and Alt 2003, 2004, 2005). In discussing the construction of early Neolithic long mounds, Lesley McFadyen (2007a) has sought to collapse the distinction between those materials regarded as deposits (e.g. antler, animal bones, and pottery) and those conventionally labelled as building materials (e.g. soil, chalk, wood, and stone). She highlights how all these substances were implicated in the practice of making architecture, a practice that involved the complex assemblage of things, and that allowed the generation of new material networks fundamental in people’s ability to proceed within the world.

Spatial patterning of depositional practices is increasingly understood as evidence of broader structuring principles of spatial organization, including cosmology (Pollard and Ruggles 2001; Boivin 2004a), rather than strictly as evidence of ritual practice. The depositional practices oriented by cosmology can be understood as forms of place-making in which specific materials (some with clear symbolic referents and all probably meaningful) are placed in relation to the expected or intended actions of people (Joyce 1992, 2004, 2007; Pollard and Ruggles 2001; Pauketat et al. 2002; Pauketat and Alt 2003; Boivin 2004a; Woodward and Woodward 2004; Parker Pearson et al. 2006).

Rather than seeking simply to identify structured deposits, contemporary archaeologists are concerned with the processes involved. Fragmentation and accumulation generate the deposits and assemblages we explore today. Rather than simply being matters of association, the production of assemblages makes use of relations such as juxtaposition of materials as an index of other places. While archaeologists encounter structured deposits in an ordered array, our analyses increasingly centre on the actions of display and social performances through which past actors experienced these acts of assemblage, and the participation and employment of deposits in memory work (Jones 2007; Mills and Walker 2008b).