

1. Introduction: Archaeological Anthropology

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Introduction

This book explores the disciplinary relationship between anthropology and archaeology. In doing so, the papers collected within it confront a series of fundamental issues of contemporary relevance to both subjects including the theorisation of temporality and materiality, the construction of disciplinary epistemologies, and the nature of inter-disciplinary encounter.

Archaeology and anthropology arose from a common project which aimed to understand human social and cultural diversity in its totality; since their inception there has been considerable intellectual traffic between the two disciplines. However, in recent years the balance of this relationship has shifted. Whilst the ‘post-processual’¹ turn in archaeology has been accompanied by a vigorous interest in anthropological theory and ethnographic insight, anthropological interest in archaeology has waned. Within a range of theoretical and geographical contexts, this has led to a situation in which archaeology has been a net ‘importer’ of anthropological ideas and descriptions, leading to what a number of archaeologists have described as a theoretical ‘trade deficit’ (Gosden, 1999, Tilley, 1996). In this context theoretical convergence seems, paradoxically, to have diminished collaborative possibilities.

This book explores possible reasons for the development of this imbalance, and looks at what it can tell us about the construction of knowledge in both disciplines. Its aim is not to seek synthesis or consensus but to shed critical light on the ways in which disciplinary commitments variously frame, enable or constrain the exploration of what it means to be human, both in the present and in the past. It also asks why this perception of asymmetry persists and what it might reveal about the disciplinary theories and practices of archaeology and anthropology. Anthropologically informed archaeological accounts have become commonplace in recent decades, as archaeologists have sought to exploit ethnographic descriptions as ways of understanding past societies by analogy (e.g. Wylie, 1985, Parker-Pearson, 1998, Schmidt, 2000) as well as for the wider theoretical possibilities that anthropological approaches open up (e.g. Fowler, 2004, Jones, 1997, Parker-Pearson and Richards, 1994)ⁱⁱ. By contrast, contributors to this volume seek to chart new territory in opening out the possibilities for an ‘archaeological anthropology’, by which we mean forms of collaboration and relationship that do not straightforwardly reproduce existing understandings of disciplinary hierarchy and asymmetryⁱⁱⁱ.

It is important to acknowledge that this book focuses predominantly on the ways in which this relationship has played out in the context of British institutional and theoretical contexts (although see Lucas, and Robinson, this volume). Nonetheless, it picks up on wider issues concerning the underlying epistemological foundations of archaeology and anthropology, and the possibilities and problems for collaborative relationships between these. The American ‘four-fold’ system (of cultural, physical and linguistic anthropology,

and archaeology) has often been held up as a model for such collaboration. However Segal and Yanigisako's (2005) recent account points to a situation in the US that is more similar to the European academic context than archaeologists and anthropologists have often cared to admit, characterised, as they and other contributors to the volume suggest, by misunderstandings, ruptures and profound theoretical differences.

We frame the volume as an experimental endeavour in the sense that the form of inter-disciplinary relationship we have in mind does not as we understand it entail the application of 'known' forms of disciplinary expertise to common and agreed upon problems. Indeed for many of the contributors this has entailed a leap of faith; an attempt to reach beyond their own understandings and assumptions of the epistemological and ontological bases of archaeology and anthropology in order to re-perceive the relationships and boundaries between these in new terms.

Importantly the list of contributors to this volume includes people working in both archaeological and anthropological institutional contexts. However, for many, their theoretical and substantive interests blur any neat distinction between the two disciplines. This is reflected in the complex range of disciplinary identities represented by the authors: some were originally trained as archaeologists and have since undertaken mostly ethnographic or anthropologically informed research (Rowlands, Filippucci); others have been led by research from anthropology towards archaeology (Yarrow, Ingold) or from archaeology towards anthropology (Fowler, Robinson); and many have undertaken forms of research that itself transcends any neat categorisation into either discipline (McFadyen,

Lucas). We highlight this institutional and theoretical diversity not so much as a representational claim, as for the way in which authors' biographies highlight the fluid and contextual ways in which disciplinary distinctions are evoked and the variety of ways in which people experience, assert or alternatively transcend such boundaries. From this point, it not only follows that archaeology and anthropology represent internally contested and heterogeneous forms of knowledge (Segal and Yanagisako, 2005), but also that the boundaries between these can take many forms – a point elaborated by a number of the contributors. Writing of interdisciplinary relations more generally, Barry, Borne and Weszkalnys make the important point that 'Disciplinary boundaries and contents are neither inherently fixed nor fluid; rather they are relational and in formation...' (Barry et al., 2008: 27). For our purposes, it follows that even if it is important to appreciate the sociological and institutional ways in which institutional differences are upheld, the distinctions we are talking about do not delimit sociologically or institutionally discrete groups of people (see also Edgeworth, and Lucas this volume).

Contributors to this volume seek to re-appraise the relationship between the two disciplines in the light of contemporary theoretical debates and preoccupations within both. Although many of the authors are concerned to interrogate the existence and consequences of perceived disciplinary asymmetries, they do so from perspectives that in different ways challenge the widespread belief (within archaeology and anthropology alike) that archaeology has less to offer in the way of theoretical and substantive interest. In framing the problem in these terms, this volume builds on existing accounts of the relationship between archaeology and

anthropology but diverges from these in important ways. It thus marks a departure from previous work, which has generally conceived the relationship between the two disciplines in relatively abstract historical and/or theoretical terms. Whilst contributors engage with these theoretical and historical legacies, they focus on how such differences variously manifest themselves in contemporary scholarly attempts to understand human social and cultural diversity.

In his influential book *Anthropology and Archaeology: a changing relationship* (1999), Gosden argues for a re-appraisal of the relationship between archaeology and anthropology along less hierarchical lines, a position that many of the contributors to this volume share. However, Gosden's book is itself conceived as 'an account of anthropological concepts and trends which may be of use to archaeologists' (1999: xi). Thus, to extend his own metaphorical conception of the relationship between these disciplines, the book functions as a major 'importer' of anthropological ideas. From the perspective of a rather different set of theoretical preoccupations, earlier works by Hodder (1982) and Orme (1981) are both founded on, and contribute to, a similar sense of asymmetry. In seeking to move away from the universalising and generalising impulses of earlier processual archaeologists, Hodder set out 'to achieve a more comprehensive review than is at present available of the use of ethnographic data and anthropological concepts' (1982: 9). Orme's interest in the relationship between archaeology and anthropology reinscribed a similar sense of asymmetry by casting anthropology as a source of 'structured comparative studies' (1981: i) from which archaeologists may draw in order 'to look beyond the horizons of their own culture when they seek to understand the raw material of their discipline' (1981: i). In all these

accounts anthropology is therefore seen as a source of theoretical inspiration and substantive knowledge for archaeologists, whilst the concomitant possibility of archaeological knowledge inspiring anthropological scholarship is largely overlooked.

By contrast, the accounts within this volume aim to address the relationship between archaeology and anthropology in ways that seek to speak to debates within both. As Edgeworth points out in his paper, it can be very revealing to highlight the metaphors chosen to describe that relationship. Within the thirteen papers gathered here, we find the following terms used: bridge, blockage, field, pool, hole, wall, connection, disconnection, siblings, rift, fracture, imbalance, trade-deficit, asymmetry, symmetry, locale, spaces, terrain, fuzzy domain, blind-spot, absence, gap. Whilst contributors quite naturally offer a varied and sometimes very different set of perspectives on the nature of the relationship between archaeology and anthropology, all are unified in their recognition that prevailing ideas within both disciplines have acted to mitigate against an appreciation of what anthropologists might learn from archaeology.

In this context, the question then becomes: how might we render the subject of archaeology relevant *to* anthropology? How do the theories and practices of archaeologists already challenge those of anthropology, or how could they be made to do so? On the other hand, what is it about anthropological descriptions and accounts that make those of archaeologists seem surplus to requirement? Indeed it is the seeming intractability of these problems that provides the very reason for pursuing them. In rendering archaeology anthropologically relevant it

may be that anthropology rejuvenates itself in the process, bringing home fresh conceptual ‘provisions’ (Rosga, 2005) in the form of new contexts and conceptual usages.

From the perspective of anthropology, calls for renewed engagement with archaeology, have been relatively few and far between. At least until the recent 2009 Association of Social Anthropologists conference convened around the theme of ‘Anthropological and archaeological imaginations: past, present and future’, Tim Ingold has been a notable exception in his insistence and demonstration of how archaeology might inform anthropology. In an editorial for *Man* (1992), he suggested that social and cultural anthropology, together with biological anthropology and archaeology, form a necessary unity and that unless these subjects are brought closer together, we will fail to understand how the practical skills of language, speech, memory and cognition are all developmentally embodied in the human organism through processes that operate at radically different time-scales. Life, he argues, entails the passage of time in ways that anthropological frameworks are ill equipped to understand. From this perspective time and landscape are seen as potentially unifying themes, that archaeologists are uniquely capable of illuminating:

‘The specific contribution of archaeology lies in its ability to demonstrate the essential temporality of the landscape regarded as no mere backdrop to human history, but as forever coming into being in and through the activities of the people who live in it ... Archaeologists reading the landscape as historians read documents are alone able to give the landscape back to the people to whom it

belongs ... Thus anthropology needs archaeology if it is to substantiate its claims to be a genuinely historical science' (1992: 694).

Although many of the contributors to this volume are broadly in sympathy with this perspective, a number of them also demonstrate some of the ways in which acknowledgement of difference need not lead to resolution or agreement. Thus, we would argue that a re-appraisal of the relationship between archaeology and anthropology does not entail simply putting 'the other side' across, by showing how archaeological concepts or findings may be of use to anthropologists. Rather it entails analysis and appraisal of the ways in which 'sides' are drawn up in the first place. It follows that we are in agreement with Hodder, when he suggests:

'... A productive link between archaeology and anthropology emerges only in a limited space. At a particular contingent moment, there is desire for interaction. What is also of note is that potential for interaction is greatest where the two disciplines are sovereign and bring their own expertise and questions to the table' (Hodder, 2005: 138).

Chris Tilley (1996) notes that debates about the disciplinary relationship between archaeology and anthropology have generally taken place in relatively abstract terms, and have often recycled idealised representations of what archaeology and anthropology are about. If one result of this has been to reinforce and entrench a boundary, then another has been a general failure to overlook internal diversity on both 'sides'. We would also add that these stereotypical portrayals have acted to stabilise and regulate interactions in ways that have tended to mitigate against new

and un-predictable forms of collaboration. Some time ago, Roy Wagner described the problem that ‘anthropology is theorised and taught as an effort to rationalise contradiction, paradox and dialectic rather than to trace out and realize their implications’ (1975: x). In framing our discussion in terms of an attempt to understand disciplinary differences is there a danger that we reify and codify the practices of both archaeologists and anthropologists and in doing so lend them an unwanted sense of solidity?

By focusing on the myriad ways in which archaeologists and anthropologists are practically and theoretically entwined, we hope not. Our interest is not so much in ‘the’ relationship between archaeology and anthropology as in the nature of actual and possible relationships between archaeologists and anthropologists. Accordingly contributors examine wider issues of disciplinary difference in the context of particular ethnographic and archaeological research. In doing so, they trace out disciplinary and inter-disciplinary contradictions, paradoxes and dialectics as these are realised in relation to specific kinds of analytic and descriptive problems. In this sense, disciplines are not taken to inhere in codified norms, or bodies of knowledge (cf. Segal and Yanagisako, 2005). Rather they are seen as particular forms of embodied practice through which people variously relate to one another and to the artefacts and people they seek to understand.

While this approach leads to a sense of the diversity of disciplinary relationships and interfaces that exist, it also underscores the point that self-awareness about disciplinary forms, methods and assumptions need not equate to self-consciousness or self-referentiality in ways that obscure the various people and

artefacts that we study. Ingold cautions against this possibility, alerting us to the danger that within anthropology, the post-structural turn has led to a situation in which increasingly texts ‘...are studied not for the light they throw upon the world but for what they reveal about the practices of anthropologists themselves and the doubts and dilemmas that surround their work’ (89). Such dangers notwithstanding, we follow Riles and Jean-Klein (2005) in suggesting that care for anthropology’s disciplinary identity need not be to the detriment of care for those we study. By extension we would add that an explicit understanding of archaeological theory should reveal rather than foreclose understanding of the specific artefacts, sites – and by extension people – that they study. If both archaeology and anthropology are necessarily ‘mediative’ (Wagner, 1975), creating ‘cultures’ and ‘societies’ for people who may not imagine – or may not have imagined – their own lives in these terms, then there is no necessary trade-off between appreciation of the forms of inventions that our disciplines take, and appreciation of the inventiveness of those we study. As Wagner suggests, if we do not invent by extending our concepts and categories, then we conceal the inventiveness of others, reducing them to static models.

The anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (2003) argues that the lack of ‘native’ interpretation (by which he means the interpretation of whoever anthropologists happen to study) has the great advantage of allowing the proliferation of anthropological interpretation of this lack. Extending this argument, it could be suggested that the substantive asymmetry that is often imagined between the discursivity of anthropological subjects and archaeology’s lack thereof is not quite the problem that it is often imagined to be. Indeed lack of

discourse could from this perspective be imagined as a resource, in the sense that it acts as an imaginative stimulus (a point elaborated in different ways by Lucas, McFadyen and Yarrow, this volume).

This approach departs from an increasingly widespread view of inter-disciplinary collaboration in which disciplines are taken to be self-evidently distinct bodies of knowledge to be applied as complementary forms of expertise, the whole supposedly emerging as more than the sum of its non-interdisciplinary parts. As Barry, Borne and Weszkalnys (2008) argue, this understanding arises as a relatively recent response to intensifying demands for research to be integrated into the wider economy and society, feeding from and into new forms of governmentality. From this view, particularly widespread amongst policy-makers, disciplinary difference is taken as a starting point. As Strathern puts it:

'Interdisciplinarity is premised on the subsequent merging of what once had distinct origins and looks ... to an undivided future' (2004: 38)

Earlier concerns with the relationship between archaeology and anthropology arose in a time before which 'inter-disciplinarity' had been elevated from a means of producing new forms of knowledge to an explicit end in itself. Nonetheless earlier scholars have also tended to see the theoretical and methodological differences between these disciplines as the essential problem facing the possibility of collaboration. For example the archaeologist Orme suggested that 'it is feared that the lack of common ground makes it impossible to create a scientific link between the two subjects' (1981: 2), whilst contributors to an edited volume

on 'areas of mutual interest' (Spriggs 1977) similarly elucidated how theoretical differences mitigate against the pursuit of common themes.

By contrast, contributors to this volume move towards to an understanding of the activities and interests that constitute such differences in the first place. Here theoretical and methodological distinctions are not seen as barriers to collaboration but as the very factors that enable it. This does not simply equate to the idea that both disciplines have distinctive and complementary theories, through which common problems are pursued. Indeed as some of the contributors suggest, the very 'problems' with which archaeologists and anthropologists grapple are different. In a context in which archaeology and anthropology increasingly draw their inspiration from a common body of theory (Gosden 1999), it might be that their differences are not straightforwardly theoretical.

While the papers collected in this volume shed new light on the relationship between archaeology and anthropology, we also suggest that these contribute to wider discussions of inter-disciplinarity. They do so not by providing general models of disciplinary difference or normative prescriptions for how such encounters should or might take place; rather they contribute to the more modest but arguably more important goal of understanding the disciplinarily specific ways in which such encounters occur. Just as it has been argued (among others by anthropologists) that multi-culturalism runs the risk of reducing culture to forms of difference that are knowable and prescribable in advance (e.g. Benson, 1996), when inter- (and multi-) disciplinarity becomes an end point to which, crucially, large sums of money are often attached, then ends become means and all that any

given discipline can do is exemplify that difference (cf. Strathern, 2004). Whilst this volume emphatically highlights the potential generativity of such disciplinary differences, we would join with Strathern in her recent insistence that the explication of such difference should be taken as an end point rather than a starting point of analysis.

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Perhaps inevitably given the scope of the volume, the papers collected within it engender profound differences of opinion and perspective. Nonetheless, a number of central themes can be discerned within the papers collected below., which intersect at various different levels.

One of the central themes is that of *the transformation of ideas* – the notion that in the movement of ideas between archaeology and anthropology concepts can and often do change, reinvigorating old debates and reinvigorating themselves in the process. Fowler, for example, traces the concept of personhood as it has flowed between the two subjects; Filippucci discusses the impact that archaeological ideas about material traces might have on anthropological thinking; Gosden the benefits that archaeology’s sophisticated powers of description might have to offer; and Robinson considers the transformations through which archaeological and ethno-historical evidence must go in order to ensure that a satisfactory account (which incorporates both) can be reached. Perhaps most radically, and

somewhat against the grain of many of the other contributors, Ingold's suggestion is that the disciplines of archaeology and anthropology must themselves profoundly change in order to dissolve the unhelpful foundational distinction between past and present.

Alongside these discussions of the transformative flow of ideas between archaeology and anthropology, several papers consider the notion that *history* might also productively be included in this relationship, creating a trialectic flow of ideas (see, for example, papers by Lucas, Feuchtwang and Rowlands, Filippucci, and Robinson). In terms developed in Strathern's concluding remarks, this common concern with history emerges in these papers as a form of 'boundary object'; a construct or concept that is imbued with enough shared meaning to facilitate its translation across those worlds without reducing the difference between these.

The second central thread we wish to highlight – *the conceptualisation of theoretical frameworks* – is closely related to these discussions of interdisciplinary flow. A number of papers within the volume argue that similarities and differences between the two disciplines not only arise from the existence (or absence) of common theoretical frameworks, but also derive from the ways in which 'theory' is discussed, and the place that explicit conceptual frameworks are taken to occupy within the processes by which archaeologists and anthropologists seek to understand and explain. Hence discourses about 'theory' as much as the theories 'themselves' have taken different paths within archaeological and anthropological debates. For example, in their discussions of the concept of

‘absence’ within archaeology, both Lucas and Yarrow explore how, in the long term, similar theoretical concepts have been made to do different work within archaeology and anthropology. Fowler highlights similar issues in his discussion of the effects on ‘theories’ as they move in both directions.

A third theme encompasses one area in which archaeology has generally always been seen as having something to bring to the academic table, that of *temporality*. McFadyen discusses the fact that archaeology’s long-term vision provides it with unique insight into processes of change, Feuchtwang and Rowlands explore the potential of accounts in which different and multiple conceptualisations of time are included, whilst Ingold considers the possibility of a hybrid discipline which no longer worries about things being ‘old’ or ‘contemporary’.

Perhaps inevitably in any discussion of a relationship, our fourth theme – *the boundary between the two disciplines*, and the manner in which it has been, or might be, conceptualised – is addressed directly by a number of the authors, and also by Strathern and Thomas in their commentary pieces. Both Yarrow and Lucas, for example, consider the important historical and contemporary effects of each discipline’s conceptualisation of itself in relation to the other, while Edgeworth describes the productive effects of his own (and others’) ‘transgression’ of that boundary. Thomas argues that we are perhaps wrong to erect a boundary, when that boundary is inevitably fluid and hard to pin down, whilst Ingold suggests that we could perhaps knock it down altogether. Strathern, on the other hand, considers potential ‘boundary objects’ (both material and immaterial) which might successfully be used in negotiations between the two.

A fifth and final theme developed within a number of papers is that of absence. Lucas, McFadyen, Yarrow, Strathern and Thomas all highlight the notion of absence as a central metaphor in the archaeology/anthropology relationship, discussing how conceptualisations of archaeology as having a lack of evidence in comparison to anthropology have led to a perceived *asymmetry* between the two disciplines. Whilst many have viewed this asymmetry in negative terms, Yarrow argues that, in fact, it can be an extremely productive position (a point also discussed by Strathern, Thomas and Lucas). From a slightly different perspective, McFadyen questions our conceptions of absence/presence in the material record, and how we see the relationship between ‘past’ people and ‘present’ things; Robinson highlights the fact that perceived absences in both the ethno-historical and archaeological records can actually be complimentary rather than contradictory; while Filippucci outlines what she feels archaeology has been able to teach her about her own (and by implication anthropology’s) conceptions of the ‘fragmented’ or ‘partial’ specifically in relation to social memory.

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Ingold has suggested that anthropology is ‘philosophy with the people in’ (1992: 696), highlighting the ways in which the concepts that anthropologists generate and the theoretical issues that they seek to resolve arise out of their encounters with people through the process of ethnography. Perhaps from this perspective archaeology could similarly be seen as ‘philosophy with the things in’, in the sense that the source of its theoretical generativity will always be precisely in the

ways in which the artefacts that archaeologists excavate elude and ‘stretch’ the ideas and concepts with which it starts.

Clearly this is not to suggest that each discipline confines its *interests* to these domains. Archaeologists do not for the most part study things as an end in itself: they examine these things in order to shed light on the contexts in which they were used and the meanings and uses that people gave them. Anthropologists on the other hand primarily adopt an ethnographic methodology that privileges the discursive and non-discursive ways in which people relate to one another, on the basis of speaking and relating to people as ‘participant observers’. However if ‘people’ are in this sense a methodological starting point, this often leads to consideration of the ways people think ‘through’ these things (Henare et al., 2007) and to a focus on the ways in which artefacts enable and support the relations that they have with one another (e.g. Miller, 1987, Gell, 1997).

Thus we suggest that archaeology and anthropology do not provide symmetrical or complementary perspectives on a common set of problems. Rather contributors to this volume illustrate how the different epistemological problems that they routinely face lead to different forms of ‘routine reflexivity’ (Wagner 1975), regardless of the specific theoretical interests at stake. Common theoretical positions have been drawn into the resolution of different sets of epistemological issues arising from the ways in which archaeology and anthropology make the world available to themselves. For all that archaeologists and anthropologists might themselves call an absolute ontological separation between ‘people’ and ‘things’ into theoretical doubt (e.g. Ingold, 1990, Bateson, 1972, Knappett, 2002,

Jones, 2002), their own methodological and epistemological practices do ultimately *start* from this difference (see also Hicks, In press, Lucas, in press).

We began our *Introduction* by noting that archaeology and anthropology arose from a common project, which aimed to understand human social and cultural diversity. While the paths of these two subjects may have diverged somewhat over the past century or so, this broad goal, ultimately, arguably remains the same for both. Our aim in this book, as we have said already, is not to bring the two subjects ‘back together’; given the often productive tensions that disciplinary differences engender, this would seem problematic. However, we certainly do hope that by examining in detail the relationship between the two subjects and the various methods and theories that each employs – in imagining an ‘archaeological anthropology’ – this volume will raise some interesting questions and future possibilities for both disciplines.

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Notes

ⁱ ‘Post-processual’ archaeology was a movement which began in the early 1980s (see Trigger 2006, Ch. 8 for a summary). Essentially, post-processual archaeologists began to incorporate post-modern thought into archaeological theory. Amongst many things, they sought to recover past meanings and symbolism, viewed material culture as ‘active’ within society, and self-consciously recognised archaeology as a subjective interpretive process.

ⁱⁱ The journal *Anthropological Archaeology*, founded in 1982, has published a range of papers describing and demonstrating how anthropological descriptions and approaches can be of use to archaeologists. As Gosden (1999) notes, these have generally been undertaken in ways that extend ‘processualist’ concerns to use ethnography as the basis of describing and documenting cross-cultural generalisations about human behaviour.

ⁱⁱⁱ In a recent paper Hodder Hodder, I. 2005. An Archaeology of the Four-Field Approach in Anthropology in the United States. *In*: Segal, D. A. & Yanagisako, S. J. (eds.) *Unwrapping the Sacred Bundle: reflections on the disciplining of anthropology*. Durham and London: Duke University Press. uses this term in making a similar challenge to the asymmetrical way in which these disciplines are conventionally imagined to relate.