2. Not Knowing as Knowledge: asymmetry between archaeology and anthropology

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Asymmetry

This paper explores the widespread understanding that archaeology and anthropology exist in an asymmetrical relationship to one another characterized by an archaeological theoretical 'trade deficit'. While the paper questions the basis on which this asymmetry has been imagined, it explores the effects that this has had. Through examining how archaeologists and anthropologists have historically imagined the relationship between these disciplines, the article sets out to understand the implications of this asymmetry for both. Rather than seek to redress this asymmetry, it demonstrates how asymmetry has in fact been archaeologically productive, leading to an explicitness about archaeological procedures and their limits and concomitantly to an openness to other disciplinary insights. On the other hand, for anthropologists the perception of asymmetry simultaneously arises from and leads to assumptions that have foreclosed certain lines of enquiry, relating to a disciplinary narrowing of horizons.

In the introduction to *An Ethnography of the Neolithic*, Chris Tilley starts by describing an archaeological fantasy that is revealing of wider assumptions both about the kinds of knowledge that archaeologists and anthropologists produce and about the relationships between these disciplines:

I have sometimes imagined what it might be like to be transported back into the past in a time capsule, to arrive somewhere in Sweden during the Neolithic and to be able to observe what was really going on, stay for a couple of years and then return to the late twentieth century and write up my ethnography. I have thought how much richer, fuller and more sophisticated the account would be. I would actually know who made and used the pots and axes, what kind of kinship system existed, how objects were exchanged and by whom, the form and nature of ethnic boundaries, the details of initiation rites, the meaning of pot designs and the significance of mortuary ceremonies.

(Tilley, 1996: 1)

Tellingly, whilst such archaeological fantasies of time-travel are common, the corresponding fantasy does not seem to capture the anthropological imagination: anthropologists, to my knowledge, do not often fantasize about the possibility of travelling forwards in time and viewing their own field-sites through the material remains of the people who once lived there. Why might this be? My suggestion is that the asymmetry is indicative of a wider perception, shared by archaeologists and anthropologists alike, that the 'partial' and 'fragmented' nature of archaeological evidence leaves archaeologists with less to say about the issues of social life taken to be at the heart of both disciplines (see also Lucas and Filippucci, this volume).

Tilley himself deconstructs aspects of this common archaeological fantasy of time travel, arguing that archaeological and anthropological accounts are both constructed from different elements that need to be interpreted and made sense of in similar ways (cf. Lucas, 2005). However, as he rightly points out, such fantasies are indicative of a

wider *perception* of disciplinary asymmetry, that underscores the theoretical 'trade' between archaeologists and anthropologists: archaeologists commonly imagine themselves to lack the kinds of theories and insights that anthropologists can provide, and routinely draw on these in their descriptions and analyses of the past. Despite some notable exceptions (e.g. Ingold, 1992, Layton, 2008) anthropologists rarely seem to incorporate the ideas, theories or descriptions of archaeologists in their own accounts.

In pointing to the mutual entanglements of archaeology and anthropology, the archaeologist Chris Gosden (1999) argues that it would be impossible to imagine the discipline of archaeology in the absence of anthropological writing on subjects such as gift exchange, kinship, symbolism, and gender. By the same token he also suggests that archaeological writing has contributed to the discipline of anthropology in terms of an understanding of long-term chronology. Yet even if we accept that this is the case, an almost total lack of any explicit anthropological acknowledgement of this 'debt' remains puzzling.

Despite a long history of archaeological claims for the potential theoretical and substantive contribution of the discipline, a disciplinary 'trade deficit' (Gosden, 1999, Tilley, 1996, 2006) therefore seems to persist. As Tilley has noted, a concern with the 'mutual relationship' has taken place almost exclusively within archaeological discussions, suggesting that 'while most archaeologists read some anthropology, few anthropologists seem to read any archaeology' (1996: 2). Some time ago Rowlands and Gledhill similarly described this imbalance of interest, suggesting that Gordon Childe was 'the only archaeologist that many anthropologists in this country ever

admit to having read' (1977: 144). Tellingly, archaeologically authored introductions to anthropology such as Bryony Orme's (1981) *Anthropology for Archaeologists*, Ian Hodder's (1982a) *The Present Past* and more recently Gosden's *Archaeology and Anthropology* (1999), do not have their counterparts within anthropology.

Interestingly the recent theoretical convergences that have taken place around areas such as material culture, gender and the body do not seem to have fundamentally altered this relationship. While Hodder points to the origin of many of the theoretical frameworks that have informed these developments in disciplines such as philosophy and sociology, he notes that within archaeology '...there was still a "looking over ones shoulder" at cultural anthropology to see how translations and applications of the ideas had been made in a related discipline.' (2005: 132)

The fact that anthropological accounts of the disciplinary relationship are rare is itself symptomatic of a perceived asymmetry on the part of anthropologists. Until recently, Tim Ingold has been a notable exception in his insistence that 'anthropology needs archaeology if it is to substantiate its claims to be a genuinely historical science' (1992: 64). In the wake of the 2009 Association of Social Anthropology conference on 'Archaeological and Anthropological Imaginations: past, present and future', this may be set to change. Calls during this conference, by archaeologists and anthropologists, for an increasing anthropological sensitivity to archaeological thinking are clearly to be welcomed. Nonetheless, it is important to be sensitive to the terrain in which such exchanges take place and the asymmetries – actual or perceived – that have attended these.

Taking up one of the central themes of the volume, this paper explores the question of why this perception of asymmetry persists and asks what this might reveal about the disciplinary theories and practices of archaeology and anthropology? In pursuing this line of enquiry my intention is not to 'overcome' this asymmetry. Rather I want to examine its theoretical and practical consequences. This entails considering the possibility that an archaeological perception of absence – whether of data or theory – is itself constitutive of a distinctive disciplinary ontology and that as such it need not be considered in negative terms. Thus my aim is not simply to put 'the other side', by showing how archaeological concepts or findings may be of use to anthropologists. Instead my analysis highlights how archaeologists and anthropologists have imagined how 'sides' are drawn up in the first place. Rather than pre-suppose a distinction between 'archaeology' and 'anthropology' as the self-evident starting point of analysis, I suggest that this distinction is itself an artefact of various debates within and between these disciplines. As such it has taken a variety of different forms.

My own interest is not, to highlight where archaeologists might fruitfully contribute theoretical or substantive insight (as other contributors to this volume do convincingly). Rather I want to argue that successive theoretical developments have been driven by a perception of disciplinary asymmetry with regards to anthropological knowledge practices. To borrow again from the imagery of theoretical 'trade', my intention is not to engage in this trade but to try to understand the underlying ideas and assumptions that have driven it.

In this way, I hope to contribute to a 'symmetrical' (Latour, 1993, Latour, 1987) understanding of the issue of asymmetry. Rather than take asymmetry as the taken for

granted starting point of analysis I suggest that it needs to be accounted for in terms of an analysis of the practices, relationships and ideas that produce it. This entails an attempt to understand the ways in which a disciplinary sense of deficiency is itself constitutive of particular forms of interpretation and analysis and how a *perception* of absence has proved a stimulus to very different kinds of theorising.

Connections and Disconnections

Through an exploration of the shifting ways in which the relationship between archaeology and anthropology has been understood, I seek to highlight the different theoretical positions that have variously been used to explain and redress a sense of theoretical 'deficit'. In doing so, I do not propose to provide a comprehensive historical overview of disciplinary trends (see Hodder, 1982a, Gosden, 1999, Orme, 1981, Trigger, 1989) but rather seek to shed light on the *terms* within which the relationship between archaeology and anthropology has been explicitly conceived within archaeological and anthropological debates.

As a number of authors have argued (Gosden, 1999, Orme, 1981, Ingold, 1992, Wylie, 1985), the social evolutionism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century provided a theoretical context in which the study of past and present societies were seen to be inextricably linked. In attempting to account for contemporary cultural and biological diversity archaeological and anthropological material was treated equally, in the sense that both shed light on the common processes of evolution by which that difference came about. In other words a single theoretical framework both necessitated and enabled the collection of different kinds of data. Because archaeology and anthropology were not at this point institutionalised as

distinct disciplinary endeavours, the issue of their 'relationship' did not explicitly arise.

The formal distinction between archaeology and anthropology can be seen to arise from a set of methodological and institutional changes that took place during the beginning of the twentieth century: the creation of distinct departments and the formalization, differentiation and specialization of different fieldwork techniques acted as processes of 'mediation' and 'purification' (Latour 1993) through which the disciplinary distinction between archaeology and anthropology became increasingly solidified (Lucas, in press).

As others have suggested, these distinctions were institutionalized and theoretically elaborated in different ways within North American and British traditions. In North America there has tended to be a closer relationship between archaeology and anthropology, a fact that Hodder (1982a: 38) attributes in part to the ways in which the presence of native American societies created awareness of the potential for using ethnographic analogies to explain archaeological phenomena. In this way the 'direct historic' approach developed in the 1930s and 1940s, based on the assumption that the accounts of ethnographers and ethno-historians could be fruitfully employed as a way of understanding archaeological remains within the same area (see also Robinson this volume). From this perspective Taylor claimed that the archaeologist was 'Jekyll and Hyde, claiming to 'do' history but 'be' an anthropologist' (1948: 6). Archaeology was squarely defined in anthropological terms, as part of the four-fold approach that persists today (Segal and Yanagisako, 2005).

In the UK, by contrast, the functionalism of anthropologists such as Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowski led to the increasing institutionalization of disciplinary difference in ways that mitigated against collaboration. In the wake of Radcliffe-Brown's rejection of 'conjectural history', Gordon Childe (1946) sought to reinstate a sense of archaeology's distinctive contribution to the study of humanity, arguing that an understanding of the contemporary functions of particular social institutions has to be complemented by an understanding of their historical evolution in order to move beyond a descriptive technique to the classificatory science that he proposed should be the common aim of both. In this way the essential parity between archaeology and anthropology was seen to derive from methodological differences that acted to define a particular kind of collaborative relationship. Anthropological participant observation led to an integrative model of society that archaeologists could not hope to replicate on the basis of the archaeological record. Nonetheless, archaeological evidence was seen to enable an historical analysis of the development of social institutions that would provide, 'a valid clue to the rank of a contemporary culture and its position in an evolutionary sequence'. (Childe 1946: 250). Archaeology and anthropology were seen as 'complementary departments of the science of man related in the same way, as palaeontology and zoology in the science of life' (1946: 243).

In a similar vein the British archaeologist Christopher Hawkes (1954) proposed a form of collaboration that depended on the pursuit of common aims and objectives through complementary and distinctive forms of theory and methodology. Hawkes' famous 'ladder of inference' points to the paradox that whilst archaeology is defined in terms of the study of people in the past, the ideas, beliefs and social and political arrangements of these people have to be inferred in their absence. While he suggests

that it is relatively easy to infer the techniques by which archaeological artefacts are produced and even the subsistence economies that would have prevailed, he is more pessimistic about the possibility of inferring information about social and political organisation on the basis of the kind of information that prehistorians have access to. Thus he asks rhetorically:

> If you excavate a settlement in which one hut is bigger than all others, is it a chief's hut so you can infer chiefship, or is it really a medicine lodge or a meeting hut for initiatives, or a temple? […] How much could the archaeologist of the future infer, from his archaeology alone, of the Melanesian institutions studied by Malinowski? (1954: 161-162).

Hawkes' recognition of the limits of archaeological evidence led him to suggest that anthropologists could provide information on non-material aspects of culture that the archaeological record does not preserve. Anthropology, in other words, provided the means by which 'gaps' in the archaeological record could be 'filled in'. In this view anthropology not only provided information of use in the reconstruction of past societies, but also, by implication, a *model* of society and in this sense 'the making more fully anthropological' of the past was taken as the goal of archaeology.

In different ways, the accounts of both Childe and Hawkes thus locate an underlying asymmetry between archaeology and anthropology in the unequal access that these disciplines respectively have to 'society'. In the light of subsequent critiques, it could rightly be objected that this apparent asymmetry rests on a misunderstanding in so far as both these theories reify and objectify society as a knowable, tangible and holistic entity. Not only does this negate the theoretical and ethnographic work of

anthropologists in making this entity appear, it also effectively places ethnographically informed knowledge beyond critical scrutiny as a form of 'information' or 'data'.

Whether or not we agree with the theoretical positions adopted by these archaeologists, however, is not really the point. Rather I want to direct attention beyond their own explicit understandings in order to suggest that this *perception* of asymmetry in fact had productive effects. In particular, the understanding that archaeological data was in certain respects deficient stimulated archaeologists to look beyond the discipline in search of new ideas and theories. In doing so, the understanding was that knowledge could be 'applied' from anthropologically 'known' contexts, to archaeological contexts that were less well known. Yet this language of 'application' conceals the extent to which archaeological borrowings of anthropological ideas change and extend them. Regardless of the view one takes of Hawkes' 'ladder of inference', it makes explicit limits to archaeological data and the interpretations these give rise to. By contrast, during the same period, anthropological faith in functionalist models and methods tended to preclude understanding of the limits to interpretation and analysis. Consequently both Hawkes and Childe's assessment that these limits lay in the absence of historical consideration, went largely unheeded. A holistic vision of society had its counterpart in a holistic vision of the discipline of anthropology, in ways that precluded the historical dimension that archaeological accounts could have helped provide.

With the advent of 'processual' or 'new' archaeology during the 1960s, a rather different conception of the relationship between archaeology and anthropology

developed. By contrast to the 'culture-history' approach of archaeologists such as Childe, processual archaeologists responded to a perceived disciplinary asymmetry by arguing that rather than simply contribute to the explanation of difference within particular locales, archaeologists should seek to generate general laws to explain broader processes of cultural evolution. For Lewis Binford, the North American archaeologist at the forefront of this approach, processualism was explicitly seen to provide a framework within which archaeology could make a more significant contribution to anthropology. In outlining his vision of 'Archaeology as Anthropology', Binford aimed, 'to escalate the role which the archaeological discipline is playing in furthering the aims of anthropology and to offer suggestions as to how we, as archaeologists, may profitably shoulder more responsibility for furthering the aims of our field.' (1962: 217). In this view, anthropology was defined as the attempt to explain the total range of physical and cultural similarities and differences within the entire temporal span of human existence. Since most of the evidence for this difference was understood to be available only through an examination of archaeological material, this was seen to give archaeology an advantage in one key respect:

> We as archaeologists have available a wide range of variability and a large sample of cultural systems. Ethnographers are restricted to the small and formally limited extant cultural systems. (1962: 224).

While Binford argued that archaeologists could not dig up social systems or ideology, he saw these limitations to be offset by the extensiveness of the archaeological record and its ability to enable examination of long-term processes of cultural change in ways that the ethnographic record does not allow. Moreover he was far less circumspect about the possibility of inferring reliable information about the

functioning of extinct cultural systems on the basis of archaeological remains than many of his archaeological and anthropological contemporaries, suggesting that:

> Granted we cannot excavate kinship terminology or a philosophy but we can and do excavate the material items which functioned together with these more behavioural elements within the appropriate cultural sub-systems. The formal structure of artefact assemblages together with the between element contextual relationships should and do present a systematic and understandable picture of *the total extinct* cultural system. (1962: 218-9)

Within America this processual or 'new' archaeology paved the way for increasing collaboration between archaeologists and anthropologists. In particular evolutionary anthropologists such as Lee and Devore (1968) saw the potential for synergy in terms of their aims of understanding processes of cultural development through the generation of generalized laws. Thus in the introduction to *Man the Hunter* Lee and Devore's (1968) proposition that the emergence of economic, social and ideological forms is as much a part of human evolution as developments in human anatomy and physiology, provides the context in which archaeological and anthropological approaches are seen to provide different forms of data on the same basic problems.

Within the UK, by contrast, the advent of the 'new' archaeology was accompanied by a conception of the relationship between archaeology and anthropology in rather different terms (cf. Gosden, 1999, Hodder, 1982a). While David Clarke's 'analytic archaeology' shared many of the aims and objectives of Binford's processualism, his assertion that 'archaeology is archaeology is archaeology' (1968: 13), contrasted with Binford's view of 'anthropological archaeology'. Renfrew's 'social archaeology'

(1984) was heavily influenced by American processualists such as Binford but also differed in highlighting the distinctiveness of an archaeological approach in terms of an emphasis on material culture. While Renfrew's (1973) edited volume *The Explanation of Culture Change* sought to bring archaeological and anthropological perspectives to bear on a set of common issues, the concluding remarks written by the structuralist anthropologist Edmund Leach serve to highlight how far apart – from an anthropological perspective, at least – these disciplines were imagined to be.

For Leach the search by processual archaeologists for general laws of cultural and social behaviour directly contradicted anthropological evidence for the infinite variability of social and cultural life, a view reflected in his candid assessment of the conference from which papers from the volume were drawn:

> 'All along contributors were making remarks that could only make sense if you were to take as given a unilinear theory of social development of a kind which the social anthropologists finally abandoned about forty years ago. As far as social anthropology is concerned, I appreciate your difficulty as archaeologists; you would like to use the data of ethnography to give fresh blood to your archaeological remnants. Used with great discretion I believe that ethnographic evidence can in fact help you to do this; but far too many of the participants at the seminar seemed to think that the analogies between ethnographic society and archaeological society are direct ... i.e. that 'primitive' societies from the 20th century can be treated as fossilized survivals from proto-historical or even paleolithic times.' (Leach, 1973: 761)

In this vein he denigrated the functionalism of such 'new' archaeology and the concomitant emphasis on economic subsistence, settlement patterns and demography, arguing these overlooked the more fundamental issue of what was 'in the minds of the actors' (1973: 769), namely, religion and politics.

Leach's critiques of the processual archaeology of the time were in many ways pertinent and despite his own assessment of the barriers to meaningful dialogue, his intervention was important in helping to push archaeological theory in new directions. Foreshadowing later post-processual archaeological critiques, he highlighted the problems of treating the ethnographic record as 'information' and of reducing 'primitive' contemporary societies to the status of fossilized survivals of an archaeological past. However in overstating the theoretical and methodological scope of anthropology (a point to which I return below), I suggest that Leach mistook the *perception* of deficit that archaeologists themselves articulated, with a literal absence of insight or understanding. Taking archaeological assessments of the 'partiality' of their data at face value, he overlooked the space that this *perception* creates for archaeological theorisation and imagination.

Whether or not we find the theories of processual archaeologists convincing is not really the point. What I want to highlight is rather the way in which an archaeological perception that kinship and philosophy are 'missing', opens up a space for ideas and data beyond the discipline. The middle range theory of processual archaeologists departs from earlier archaeological formulations such as those proposed by Childe and Hawkes in imagining ethnography not as a source of 'direct' analogies but as the basis upon which cultural universals could be derived. Nonetheless both constitute

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theoretical and analytical frameworks that effectively account for what archaeology is imagined to lack. Although the theoretical context had changed considerably, a holistic and systemic vision of society opened up archaeological interest in anthropology, whilst closing down anthropological interest in archaeology. Understanding society as a holistic entity, albeit one that was symbolically rather than functionally integrated, led to the anthropological perception of disciplinary self-sufficiency, leaving little space for archaeological ideas.

Against this backdrop, contributors to a conference that later appeared as a volume edited by Spriggs (1977a) sought to build a theoretical 'bridge'. Although different contributors had a range of perspectives on the form that this might take, the reconciliation of structuralism and Marxism was seen by many to provide a theoretical framework within which archaeological and anthropological perspectives could be reconciled. Spriggs, for example, advocated a form of structural Marxism suggesting that by contrast to the ahistorical structuralism of anthropologists such as Leach and Levi-Strauss this would, 'create a more comprehensive theory, allowing the explanation of socio-cultural change in ways that 'could provide a useful framework for archaeologists, anthropologists and historians' (1977b: 5). In a similar vein Rowlands and Gledhill (1977) argued that in anthropology history was treated at best as 'background' and analysis of more dynamic social processes remained limited, and hence:

> At the present time ... the responsibility lies with archaeologists to develop theoretically the structural models that will be required to achieve recently stated aims concerning the explanation of long-term processes of change. (1977: 155)

Marrying structuralist concerns with socially and culturally embedded systems of symbolisation and meaning with a Marxist concern with historical transformation, was thus seen by a number of British archaeologists of the late 1970s to create the theoretical context in which both archaeology and anthropology could contribute to the elucidation of long-term cultural change on the basis of equals. As with earlier paradigms, the development of a new theoretical framework came largely from within archaeology and was concerned to redress an existing relationship of theoretical inequality.

While Hodder's 'post-processual' or 'contextual' archaeology (1982a, 1982b) arose in a similar theoretical context, it took a rather different form. In critiquing the processual concern to develop universal laws of cultural change, Hodder drew extensively from anthropological theory and description. Yet anthropology was not seen (as it was for Binford) as a source of information from which to formulate empirically testable hypotheses relating to processes of cultural evolution. Rather ethnography was taken to constitute a heuristic resource, enabling archaeologists to step outside the western frameworks within which archaeological interpretation otherwise proceeds. In proposing that all interpretations of the past necessarily draw on theoretical and common sense assumptions of people in the present, Hodder implicitly recognised a disciplinary asymmetry: the present was knowable in ways that the past was not.

This provided the rationale for drawing on ethnographic analogies and undertaking ethno-archaeology 'in order to clothe the skeleton remains of the past in the flesh and blood of living, functioning, acting people' (1982b: 12. As such, Hodder continued to define archaeology partly in terms of anthropologically derived models of society, by

which archaeological data was seen to offer less than the complete picture. This perception of the missing subject stimulated a renewed interest in the conditions under which analogies could legitimately be asserted between past and present societies. In contrast to earlier theorists, Hodder also highlighted the possibilities of such absences and gaps in their own right. In particular he argued that lacking direct access to people, archaeologists are forced to concern themselves with the non-discursive aspects of culture, leading to a unique perspective on social and cultural processes: 'material things can say things which words cannot or do not' (1982b: 207), Hodder suggested, arguing in a related way that, 'As archaeologists we are not digging up what people said and thought but we are digging up a particular type of expression, which, through its ambiguity and subtlety, is powerful and effective' (1982b: 207).

Archaeological understandings of the relationship between archaeology and anthropology have therefore taken a variety of forms, reflecting different perspectives on what the aims and theoretical objectives of these disciplines should be. This account provides an admittedly partial view that is intended to illustrate some of the assumptions that have informed the ways in which archaeologists and anthropologists have imagined their relationships to one another. While different theorists have located this difference in a range of ways, my suggestion is that archaeology has tended to be defined (by archaeologists as well as anthropologists) in terms that make it appear to lack the kinds of insights, knowledge or data that anthropology can provide. I am not proposing that there is any inherent reason why this has to be the case, nor am I suggesting that it could not be otherwise. Nonetheless the account highlights how the perception of archaeological deficit has acted as a stimulus to make explicit the distinctive nature of archaeological theories and practices.

Asymmetry re-considered

In his 'concluding remarks' discussed above, Edmund Leach (1973) explicates what he sees as some of the key disciplinary differences between archaeology and anthropology, in terms of a set of asymmetries. In particular he suggests that whilst anthropologists can observe the workings of social systems 'first hand', archaeologists are only capable of observing these on the basis of 'patterned residues' and hence their meaning must 'forever remain a mystery' (1973: 767). Archaeology, he suggests, is properly about the study of people, yet the nature of the archaeological record is such that most aspects of human behaviour remain absent: things may reflect the meanings that people give them but are not the meanings themselves; moreover since archaeological evidence is necessarily 'partial' many of these are lost. Thus archaeology's absence of people is seen as the basis of a theoretical asymmetry between the two: whilst anthropologists can study people directly, archaeologists can only study them on the basis of the things they left behind.

In the light of subsequent theoretical discussions, this view can be called into question on a number of different levels. In particular archaeologists, anthropologists and social studies of science have questioned both the absolute ontological separation of people and things (e.g. Latour, 1999, Ingold, 2000, Strathern, 1988, Strathern, 1990, Law, 1994, Henare et al., 2007), and the idea that the material world simply reflects passively the meanings and ideas of society (e.g. Gell, 1997, Miller, 1998, Miller, 1987). If the thoughts and ideas of people do not end at their corporeal limits (Bateson, 1972, Ingold, 2000) then Leach's characterisation of the distinction between archaeology and anthropology as that between the study of people and the study of

things, seems problematic. And if the material world actively participates in the construction of meaning and the distribution of agency (e.g. Latour, 1993, Holtorf, 2002, Knappett, 2002) then a methodology that focuses on material culture seems at least in theory to have as much to say about that meaning as one that focuses on the spoken words and actions of 'people' (Hicks, In press). Recent calls for a 'symmetrical' archaeology (Shanks, 2007, Webmore, 2007, Witmore, 2007) make precisely this point.

Moreover, whilst Leach characterises the archaeological record as 'partial', subsequent theoretical discussions call into question his assumption that anthropologists themselves have access to the kinds of social 'wholes' that his account seems to presuppose. If, as a number of anthropologists have argued (e.g. Tyler, 1986, Gupta and Ferguson, 1997, Marcus, 1998, Thornton, 1988) the social 'whole' is an artefact of ethnographic description, as opposed to an actually existing empirical reality, then it would seem that Leach is guilty of conflating anthropological models, descriptions and theories with 'the people' these purport to explain. The archaeologist Groube (1977) makes a similar point about the abstraction necessarily entailed in ethnographic description, suggesting, after Durkheim, that 'the immobile man he studies is not man'. Seen in this light, anthropologists do not straightforwardly study 'people': they study the societies and cultures they belong to. As a comment on the process of synthesis and abstraction entailed in arriving at these analytic entities, Roy Wagner suggested some time ago that in their representations of 'culture', anthropologists, 'keep the ideas, the quotations, the memoirs, the creations, and let the people go' (1975: 26).

Seen from this perspective it could be argued that anthropologists do not have a privileged position when it comes to studying people; they simply face a different set of interpretive issues. Whilst archaeologists may lament an absence of 'people', the presence of living, talking humans simply brings to light a different set of methodological and interpretive problems. Indeed the (broadly post-structuralist) writing of a number of anthropologists (e.g. Fortun, 2001, Gupta and Ferguson, 1997, Rabinow, 1986, Clifford, 1986) has increasingly made some of these evident, through calling into question the means by which anthropologists elicit and represent the meanings and beliefs of those they study. In place of the image of the social 'whole', anthropologists have pointed to the partial and selective view that ethnographic fieldwork necessarily entails, to the ways in which the subjectivity of the fieldworker conditions the nature of his/her findings, and to the necessarily selective process by which disparate utterances, situations and acts are pieced together through writing and analysis. From this perspective it would seem that rather than a relationship of asymmetry there in fact exists one of difference. Yet to argue in this way that disciplinary imbalance is illusory, is to fail to account for the importance of this *sense* of imbalance and the theoretical and practical consequences this has had (and arguably continues to have) for archaeologists and anthropologists respectively.

If archaeologists confront a different set of interpretive and methodological problems then they have also developed a distinct set of theoretical 'solutions'. Over the years, archaeologists have made these explicit in a variety of different ways, suggesting for example, that an archaeological perspective leads to a unique understanding of processes of social evolution (e.g. Binford, 1962), long-term change (e.g. Rowlands and Gledhill, 1977), and material culture (e.g. Hodder, 1982b). In these various ways,

archaeology has brought unique insights on the wider issue of what it means to be human.

To be clear, I am not suggesting that these ideas are inherently less interesting, significant or valid than the kinds of theories produced by anthropologists. Rather my suggestion is that many of these developments have been driven precisely by the *sense* that archaeology lacks certain kinds of knowledge. This sense of deficiency or lack has taken a variety of different forms. Clearly not all of these are equally useful and I am not straightforwardly advocating any one of them. My point is that much archaeological thinking constitutes a particular knowledge of absence, that is not the same as an absence of knowledge.

In making this point I wish to draw an analogy between archaeologists and the Baktamin of Papua New Guinea, for whom Strathern (re-interpreting the work of Frederik Barth) has suggested: 'the knowledge that they are lost is not, so to speak, lost knowledge, it is knowledge about absence, about forgetting and about an unrecoverable background' (1991: 97-8). Confronted by a sense of loss, Baktamin initiators, she suggests, are forced into making the knowledge that they retain work, not by filling in the gaps, but by borrowing from the knowledge of their neighbours and by making that which remains do the differentiating work it has to. In this way they are forced to make what is to hand carry the marks of a lost complexity:

> 'Perhaps seeing their own activities like so many particles of dust against a huge background of ignorance is what spurs their efforts. This ignorance is not of the unknowable: it is of what has been dropped from their repertoire, the intervening particles that once completed what is now left' (1991: 98).

With this image of knowledge in mind, we might seek to reappraise the idea that the 'partiality' of archaeological data is the problem that many have imagined it to be. Although archaeological thinking has often been premised on an illusory conception of the 'completeness' of anthropologically informed models of society, the attendant sense of archaeological 'partiality' has been productive. As the preceding account demonstrates, it has acted as a wellspring for theoretical innovation, prompting archaeologists to re-imagine their own discipline in new terms and to critically appraise archaeological practices and assumptions; it has led to forms of analysis and theorising that are explicit in the acknowledgement of their own limits; and it has led to a focus on aspects of social life that are often overlooked.

As such, the perception of theoretical deficit has led to a kind of disciplinary reflexivity that anthropology has tended to lack. While many anthropologists would argue that the very strength of the discipline lies in its capacity to use other people's views of the world as a way of unpicking its own epistemological foundations, such openness has been largely absent in anthropological engagements with archaeology. Going against the grain of prevailing thought in both disciplines, my suggestion is that the perception of disciplinary asymmetry has actually been far more of a problem for anthropology than it has for archaeology.

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