

CHAPTER 2

THE MATERIAL- CULTURAL TURN EVENT AND EFFECT

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INTRODUCTION: EXCAVATING ‘MATERIAL CULTURE’

The terms ‘material culture’ and ‘material culture studies’ emerged, one after another, during the twentieth century in the disciplines of archaeology and socio-cultural anthropology, and especially in the place of intersection between the two: anthropological archaeology. Today, ‘material culture studies’ is taught in most undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in archaeology and anthropology. In Britain and North America, four distinct traditions of material culture studies in archaeology and anthropology might be discerned. In the eastern United States, one tradition, associated especially with the work of Henry Glassie and his students, including Robert Saint George, Bernard Herman, and Gerald Pocius (e.g. Glassie 1975, 1999; Pocius 1991; Herman 1992, 2005; Saint George 1998), has developed from American folklife studies and cultural geography (see Saint George

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this volume, Chapter 4). This field has developed to include studies in architecture, landscape, and historical archaeology, especially through the work of Dell Upton and James Deetz (e.g. Deetz 1996; Upton 1998, 2008). Secondly, a parallel tradition of thought, which might be termed the ‘decorative arts’ approach, has been closely associated with the graduate programme at the Winterthur Program in Early American Culture in Delaware. Including scholars such as Barbara Carson, Jane Nylander, and Arlene Palmer Schwind (Carson 1990; Nylander 1990; Palmer 1993), this tradition has worked more with art historians and historians of the domestic interior, and also with the commercial antiques trade. Thirdly, during the 1990s a group of British archaeologists and anthropologists at University College London (UCL), including Danny Miller, Chris Tilley, and Mike Rowlands, developed, especially through the *Journal of Material Culture* and a popular graduate programme, an influential model for material culture studies, grounded in anthropology but self-consciously interdisciplinary in outlook (Tilley *et al.* 2006). Fourthly, a much looser, more widespread, and less often explicitly discussed body of material culture work ranges from the physical examination and scientific analysis of objects in laboratories and museums, to the material engagements of archaeological and anthropological fieldwork (including collecting and fieldwork, see Lucas this volume).

Given the currency of the idea of material culture in these fields over the past three decades, it is to be expected that archaeologists and anthropologists might have a clear and distinctive contribution to make to the interdisciplinary study of material things in the social sciences, and especially to a *Handbook of Material Culture Studies*. This chapter considers the potential nature of that contribution. This is not, however, a straightforward task. The varieties of ‘material culture studies’ that emerged in the 1980s built upon the emergence of ‘material culture’ as an object of enquiry for twentieth-century archaeology and anthropology, which in turn developed from museum-based studies of ‘technology’ and ‘primitive art’ during the late nineteenth century. The idea of ‘material culture studies’ gained a sense of coherence and significance because it was deployed to solve a number of quite specific, long-standing archaeological and anthropological problems. These related to the idea of *relationships* between the ‘social’/‘cultural’ and the ‘material’. It is in relation to these problems that the field came to acquire during the 1990s a kind of paradigmatic status: falling across, but never quite integrating, archaeological and anthropological thinking. Moreover, it is against the continued relevance of these problems—the idea of *relating* human and non-human worlds—that the contemporary value of the idea of ‘material culture studies’ must be considered, especially at a time in which there are so many reasons for turning away from the very idea of studying something called ‘material culture’. Central here is the question recently posed by Amiria Henare, Martin Holbraad, and Sari Wastell: ‘What would an artefact-oriented anthropology look like if it were not about material culture?’ (Henare *et al.* 2007a: 1).

The contemporary discomfort with the idea of ‘material culture’ in archaeology and anthropology has three dimensions. First is the idea of culture. The past

two decades have seen a range of postcolonial, feminist, and historical critiques of the essentialist, static, synchronic, and normative tendencies of the ‘culture concept’, and its place within the discipline’s colonial legacies (Clifford 1988; Abu Lughod 1991a; Daniel 1998; Trouillot 2003). Secondly, there are the long-standing arguments over the utility of a separate category of the ‘material’: whether it is helpful, or even possible, to define some form of ‘culture’ that is *not* materially enacted (Olsen 2006, 2007; Ingold 2007a). Thirdly—a complement to these tendencies to reduce explanation to the human, or to the non-human—is the nature of the connection, relationship, or boundary between the two halves of this unhyphenated term—‘material culture’ (Miller 2007: 24; see Pinney 2005). Or, of course, the very idea of the existence of such a fundamental boundary in the first place, apart from in certain modernist discourses that beyond their textual accounts could only ever be partially enacted, rather than fully realized (Latour 1993a).

The purpose of this chapter, however, is to excavate the idea of ‘material culture studies’, rather than to bury it (cf. Miller 2005a: 37). Excavation examines the remains of the past in the present and for the present. It proceeds down from the surface, but the archaeological convention is to reverse this sequence in writing: from the past to the present. In the discussion of the history of ideas and theories, a major risk of such a chronological framework is that new ideas are narrated progressively, as paradigm shifts: imagined as gradual steps forward that have constantly improved social scientific knowledge (Darnell 1977: 407; Trigger 2006: 5–17). Noting this risk, nevertheless archaeologists and anthropologists cannot divorce the kind of histories that they write of their own disciplines from the conceptions of time that characterize their own work. As an anthropological archaeologist, my focus here is upon the taphonomic processes of residuality, durability, and sedimentation of the remains of past events. Such processes constantly shape the intellectual landscapes of archaeology and anthropology. In seeking to generate knowledge of the world we encounter these processes, just as we do any chunk of the landscapes in which we live our everyday lives, in the present as a ‘palimpsest’ of layered scratches (Hoskins 1955: 271). Archaeological accounts of historical processes operate by slowly working through, documenting, and making sense of the assemblage, rather than standing back and explaining the whole (Hicks and Beaudry 2006b). By undertaking such an iterative process, the chapter explores how the ideas of ‘material culture’ and ‘material culture studies’ are themselves artefacts of particular disciplinary conceptions of ‘the social’. In conclusion, discussing the current reception of actor-network theory (ANT) in archaeology and anthropology, the chapter explores the limitations of the ideas of the ‘actor-network’ and of ‘material culture’ for archaeology and anthropology, especially in relation to their interdisciplinary contribution.

The process of excavation is, however, a time-consuming one. The reader will forgive, I hope, the length and the pace of this chapter. The purpose of working

back over disciplinary histories will, I also hope, become apparent as the chapter proceeds.

Virtually no historical overviews of this very recent episode in archaeological and anthropological disciplinary histories have been previously attempted (but see Buchli 2002a, 2004 and Schlereth 1981 for North America). Nevertheless, anthropological archaeology routinely explores the very recent and contemporary past, rather than waiting until ‘after the dust settles’ (Rathje 2001: 67; Hicks and Beaudry 2006b: 4). The chapter is written in the conviction that such excavation of recent disciplinary histories is not only possible, but is an essential first step in thinking through the contribution of archaeological and anthropological thinking about things beyond these two disciplines. My focus is explicitly upon British debates where the emergence of material culture studies from archaeological and anthropological thought has been particularly strong, and upon Cambridge-, London-, and Oxford-based researchers because of their central role in the emergence of the idea of ‘material culture studies’; however, the international dimensions of the shifting debates over the study of things will be considered along the way. Like all anthropological writing, it is both a situated and a ‘partial’ account in the sense evoked by Marilyn Strathern (2004a): neither total, nor impartial (cf. Haraway 1988).

The main argument of the chapter relates to the distinctive form taken by the ‘cultural turn’ in British archaeology and social anthropology during the 1980s and 1990s. For both fields, *the cultural turn was a material turn*. An explicit and rhetorical use of the study of ‘the solid domain of material culture’ (Tilley 1990a: 35) was deployed in order to shelter research into humanistic themes such as consumption, identity, experience, and cultural heritage from the accusations of relativism or scholasticism that accompanied the cultural turn during the late twentieth-century science wars between ‘relativism’ and ‘realism’. In other words, whereas in many disciplines the cultural turn was characterized by a shift from objectivity to subjectivity, the situation was more entangled in British archaeology and anthropology, because considerable intellectual effort was focused on the idea of relationships between cultural subjects and cultural objects. The legacy of this epistemological move, which I shall call the ‘Material-Cultural Turn’, has in practice reinforced earlier divisions between archaeological and anthropological thinking—between the ‘material’ and ‘cultural’. I shall argue that these distinctions derived in turn from an earlier set of debates, which had led to the emergence of the idea of ‘material culture’ during the second quarter of the twentieth century. Thus, the chapter seeks to document what remains after this Material-Cultural Turn, and how these remains might be put to work today.

A longer-term perspective, as this chapter suggests, reveals that the contested place of material objects in the study of human cultures or societies has represented a fault-line running throughout interactions between British archaeological and anthropological thought and practice. By working back and forth across this

fault-line, rather than down towards any solid bedrock, I shall argue that the idea of distinguishing between the material and the cultural, and of distinguishing relationships between them, was a distinctive artefact of modernist anthropology and archaeology. The challenges for the two disciplines today, therefore, lie neither in sketching out such dualisms, nor in seeking to overcome them, but more fundamentally in shaking off those modernist representational impulses of which the very concept of ‘material culture’ is an effect.

The rest of this chapter falls across five broadly chronological sections, and a concluding discussion. The first section (pp. 30–44) considers the development of the idea of ‘object lessons’ during the late nineteenth century, and traces the subsequent terminological shift from ‘primitive art’ and ‘technology’ to ‘material culture’ during the second quarter of the twentieth century in British anthropology and archaeology. It examines the relationships of this shift with the emergence of structural-functionalist anthropology and (later) the ‘New’ or processual archaeology. I shall argue that, counterintuitively, the idea of ‘material culture’ emerged at precisely the same moment as a very significant hiatus in the anthropological and, to a lesser extent, the archaeological study of objects and collections took place. Thus, the emergence of the idea of ‘material culture’ was from the outset intimately bound up with a radical shift away from the study of things. The legacies of these debates continue to shape discussion of the idea of ‘material culture’ today.

The second section (pp. 44–64) considers how the development of structuralist and semiotic approaches in both fields brought a new attention upon the study of material culture. I shall argue that the emergence from the 1970s of the idea of ‘material culture studies’ developed especially from a desire to reconcile structuralism and semiotics. Tracing the alternative influences upon British archaeology and anthropology, this section a shift from the late nineteenth-century idea of ‘object-lessons’ to the new conception, derived especially from practice theory, of ‘object domains’. Just as practice theory emerged from two principal thinkers—Bourdieu and Giddens—so its reception in British archaeology and anthropology was mapped out through the work of two scholars and their students: Ian Hodder at Cambridge and Daniel Miller at UCL. This body of work used the idea of ‘material culture studies’ to craft the cultural turn in British archaeology and anthropology as a Material-Cultural Turn.

A shorter third section (pp. 64–68) outlines the ‘high period’ of British material culture studies since the early 1990s, outlining the principal themes in this field during that period. It also explores alternative conceptions of disciplinarity in this period, and especially the idea of material culture studies as a kind of post-disciplinary field. The fourth section (pp. 68–79) traces the gradual unfolding of the idea of ‘material culture’ as a fixed and coherent object of enquiry: in debates over the idea of objects as texts, various uses of phenomenology, and the idea of ‘material agency’. Discussing the critique of the idea of ‘materiality’ by Tim Ingold, a fifth section (pp. 79–94) explores how two themes in his recent work—formation

and skill—might be reoriented in the light of recent work in historical anthropology and historical archaeology, to account for the positionality of the researcher in material culture studies. Central here is an understanding of both things and theories as simultaneously *events* and *effects*: rather than as passive objects, active subjects, or caught up somehow in the spectral webs of networks (Latour 2005a), meshworks (Ingold 2007c), or dialectical relations (Miller 2005a). In this light, a concluding section (pp. 94–98) takes stock of prospects for the idea of material culture studies in anthropological archaeology after the Material-Cultural Turn.

I: FROM ‘TECHNOLOGY’ TO ‘MATERIAL CULTURE’

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The idea of studying technology in archaeology and anthropology crystallized during the two disciplines’ ‘Museum Period’ in the last third of the nineteenth century from earlier Western colonial and antiquarian collecting practices (Sturtevant 1969: 622; Stocking 1985: 7). Between c.1865 and c.1900, when firm boundaries between the two disciplines had not yet emerged, material things—especially human ‘technology’—came to be central to attempts to order human cultures across time and space in a scientific manner: in self-conscious contrast with earlier antiquarian collecting practices. However, although it has often been used with reference to nineteenth-century museum anthropology or ethnographic collecting, the term ‘material culture’—the definition of a ‘super-category of objects’ (Buchli 2002a: 3)—was not current in British archaeology and anthropology until the inter-war period of the early twentieth century. This section traces the emergence of evolutionary, diffusionist, and culture-historical models of technology, and the intellectual contexts in which gradual replacement of the term of ‘technology’ with that of ‘material culture’ took place, especially as part of the critique presented by structural-functionalist and early processualist approaches between the 1920s and 1950s.

Evolutionary, diffusionist, and culture-historical studies of technology

During the mid-nineteenth century, the ‘Three Age’ system, in which the technological use of different materials (stone, bronze, iron) defined changing time periods of Old World prehistory, gave structure to the earliest integrative accounts of European prehistory (Worsaae 1849; Lubbock 1865). During the 1870s and 1880s ideas of artefact typology (the analysis of archaeological and ethnographic objects according to type) emerged. These new schemes came to be used as the basis for

new progressivist schemes of technological change, most famously in Augustus Lane Fox Pitt Rivers' account of 'the evolution of culture', which presented a gradualist, linear model of cultural change (Pitt Rivers 1875) in which, unlike Henry Lewis Morgan's (1877) similar contemporary scheme of social evolution, material things were central (Figure 2.1). The application of evolutionary thinking to human technologies such as that exemplified by Pitt Rivers' thinking was paralleled by Marx's slightly earlier suggestion about studying 'the history of human technology', highlighted by Tim Ingold, in *Capital*:

Darwin has aroused our interest in the history of natural technology, that is to say in the origin of the organs of plants and animals as productive instruments utilised for the life purposes of those creatures. Does not the history of the origin of the production of men in society, the organs which form the material basis of every kind of social organisation, deserve equal attention? Since, as Vico says, the essence of the distinction between human history and natural history is that the former is the work of man and the latter is not, would not the history of human technology be easier to write than the history of natural technology?

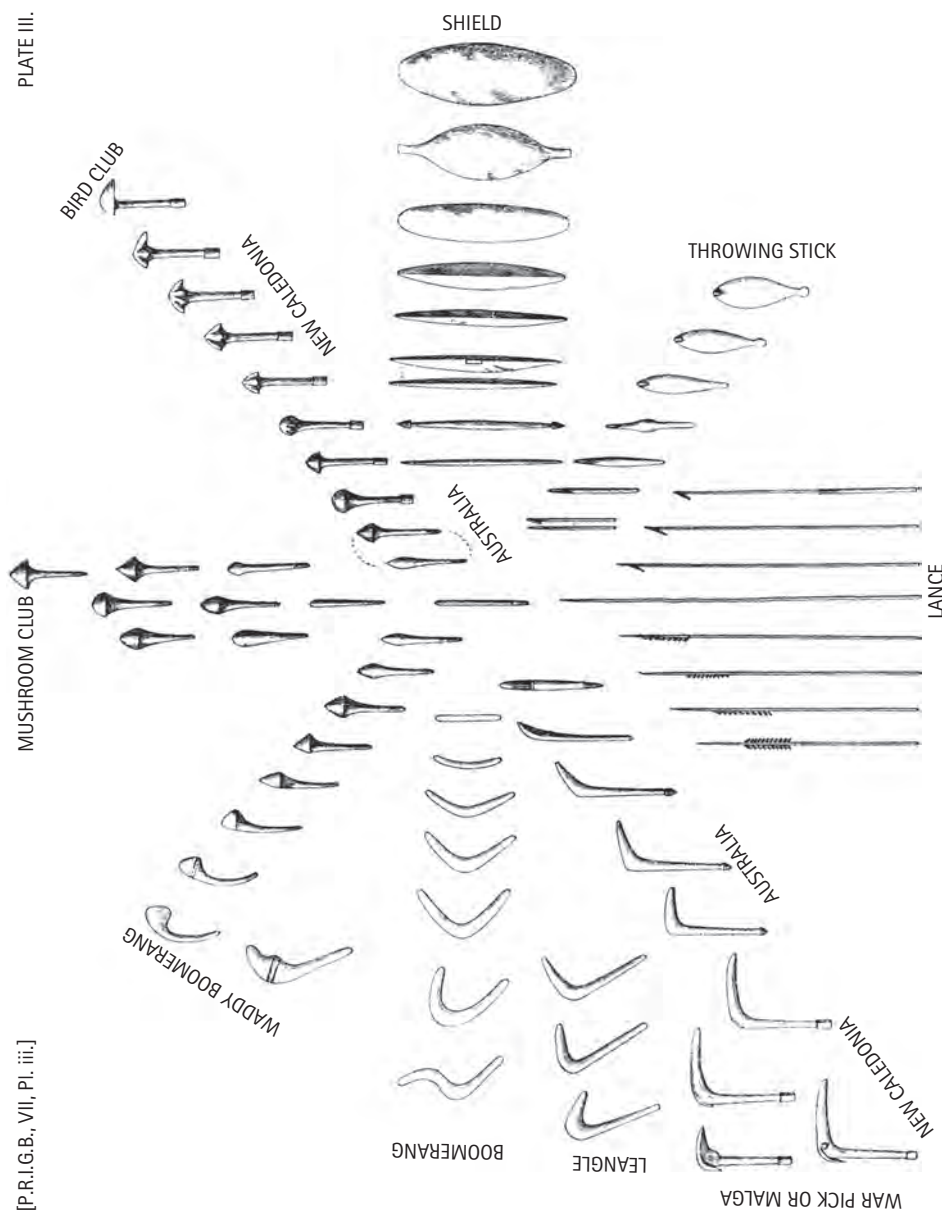
Marx (1930 [1867]: 392–393, footnote 2; quoted by Ingold 2000a: 362)

As a classificatory project, Pitt Rivers' scheme was tangibly realized in the organization of his first museum collection. Opened in 1884, the Pitt Rivers Museum at Oxford University was originally organized by both evolutionary and typological principles (Pitt Rivers 1891), and was constructed as an extension to the University's Museum of Natural History (Gosden and Larson 2007). The museum made a connection between human technology and Edward Tylor's notion of 'culture', as set out in his book *Primitive Culture* (1871). Such thinking was expanded in Oxford by Henry Balfour in his study of *The Evolution of Decorative Art* (Balfour 1893) and in Cambridge by Alfred Cort Haddon in his *Evolution in Art* (1895), for both of whom the idea of the development of artefact sequences or 'series' over time, rather than a rigid theory of evolutionary change as we might understand it today, was important (Morphy and Perkins 2006a: 5).

The publication in 1896 of the English translation of Friedrich Ratzel's *The History of Mankind* (the German edition of which had been published in 1885–1888) was an important milestone in the use of ethnographic and archaeological collections to study human cultures. Echoing earlier developments in geology, and then evolutionary natural history, Ratzel argued that such studies could go beyond written histories:

We can conceive a universal history of civilization, which should assume a point of view commanding the whole earth, in the sense of surveying the history of the extension of civilization throughout mankind . . . At no distant future, no one will write a history of the world without touching upon those peoples which have not hitherto been regarded as possessing a history because they have left no records written or graven in stone. History consists of action; and how unimportant beside this is the question of writing or not writing, how wholly immaterial, beside the facts of doing and making, is the word that describes them.

Ratzel (1896: 5)



[P.R.I.G.B., VII, Pl. iii.]

Fig. 2.1 'Clubs, Boomerangs, Shields and Lances': Pitt Rivers' scheme for Australian weapons showing forms emerging in series from the centre outwards, from a hypothetical single form (from Pitt Rivers 1875).



Fig. 2.2 'Zulu wooden vessels from the Museum of the Berlin Mission', from Ratzel 1897 (vol. 2), p. 413.

The introduction by Tylor to Ratzel's very richly illustrated volume—containing some 1,160 illustrations—captured the confidence of this late nineteenth-century conception of the study of artefacts (Figure 2.2). Describing the richness of these illustrations, Tylor argued that they

are no mere book-decorations, but a most important part of the apparatus for realising civilisation in its successive stages. They offer, in a way which no verbal description can attain to, an introduction and guide to the use of museum collections on which the Science of Man comes more and more to depend in working out the theory of human development. Works which combine the material presentation of culture with the best descriptions by observant travellers, promote the most great object of displaying mankind as related together in Nature through its very variation.

Tylor (1896: v)

Tylor contrasted biological and linguistic approaches to 'the classification of peoples' with the 'fuller though less technical treatment of the culture-side of human life': 'the material arts of war, subsistence, pleasure, the stages of knowledge, morals, religion, may be so brought to view that a compendium of them, as found among the ruder peoples, may serve not only as a lesson-book for the learner, but

as a reference-book for the learned' (Tylor 1896: vi). The centrality of the classification of technological objects (e.g. Haddon 1900), combined with the curator's sense of the distinctive knowledge that can emerge from the study of material things, was captured in Tylor's coining of his famous phrase 'object-lessons':

In our time there has come to the front a special study of human life through such *object-lessons* as are furnished by the specimens in museums. These things used to be little more than curiosities belonging to the life of barbarous tribes, itself beginning to be recognised as curious and never suspected as being instructive. Nowadays it is better understood that they are material for the student 'looking before and after'.

Tylor (1896: vi, my emphasis)

Tylor's *fin-de-siècle* argument about 'looking before and after' represented a remarkably confident statement of the potential of the curation and study of objects: as not only documenting the past or understanding the present, but also envisioning the future: 'not only as interpreting the past history of mankind, but as even laying down the first stages of curves of movement which will describe and affect the courses of future opinions and institutions' (Tylor 1896: xi).

In the study of European prehistory, the idea of 'seriation' (the identification of a series or sequence through typological analysis) was during the 1880s and 1890s combined with a diffusionist approach to cultural change by Oscar Montelius, based at the Museum of National Antiquities in Stockholm (Montelius 1903). Such work inspired what came to be known as 'culture-historical archaeology', providing very different accounts from earlier evolutionary studies of technological change that now led to the first overall accounts of the sequence of Old World prehistory by archaeologists such as John Myres (1911) and Gordon Childe (1925). These new culture-historical accounts of the prehistoric past were, however, associated especially with the identification of particular artefactual types with particular normative ethnic or cultural groups, in order to trace their migration or diffusion through detailed typological study (Figure 2.3). They also focused upon the socially determining role of technology: for example, in Childe's combination of Marxist notions of technology and production with a distinctive use of the idea of 'revolution' to underline the significance of the emergence of metallurgy in the long-term developments of European prehistory (Sherratt 1989: 179).

However, such confidence in the study of technology did not continue in British anthropology. The early twentieth century saw the emergence of radical new forms of integrative, book-length writing in British archaeology and anthropology. These were both associated with the professionalization of the disciplines as academic subjects, new models of fieldwork, and new distinctions between ethnographic and archaeological knowledge. These distinctions were centred to a large extent on the place of the study of technology. The changing conceptions of 'technology' and 'material culture' are considered in the next section.

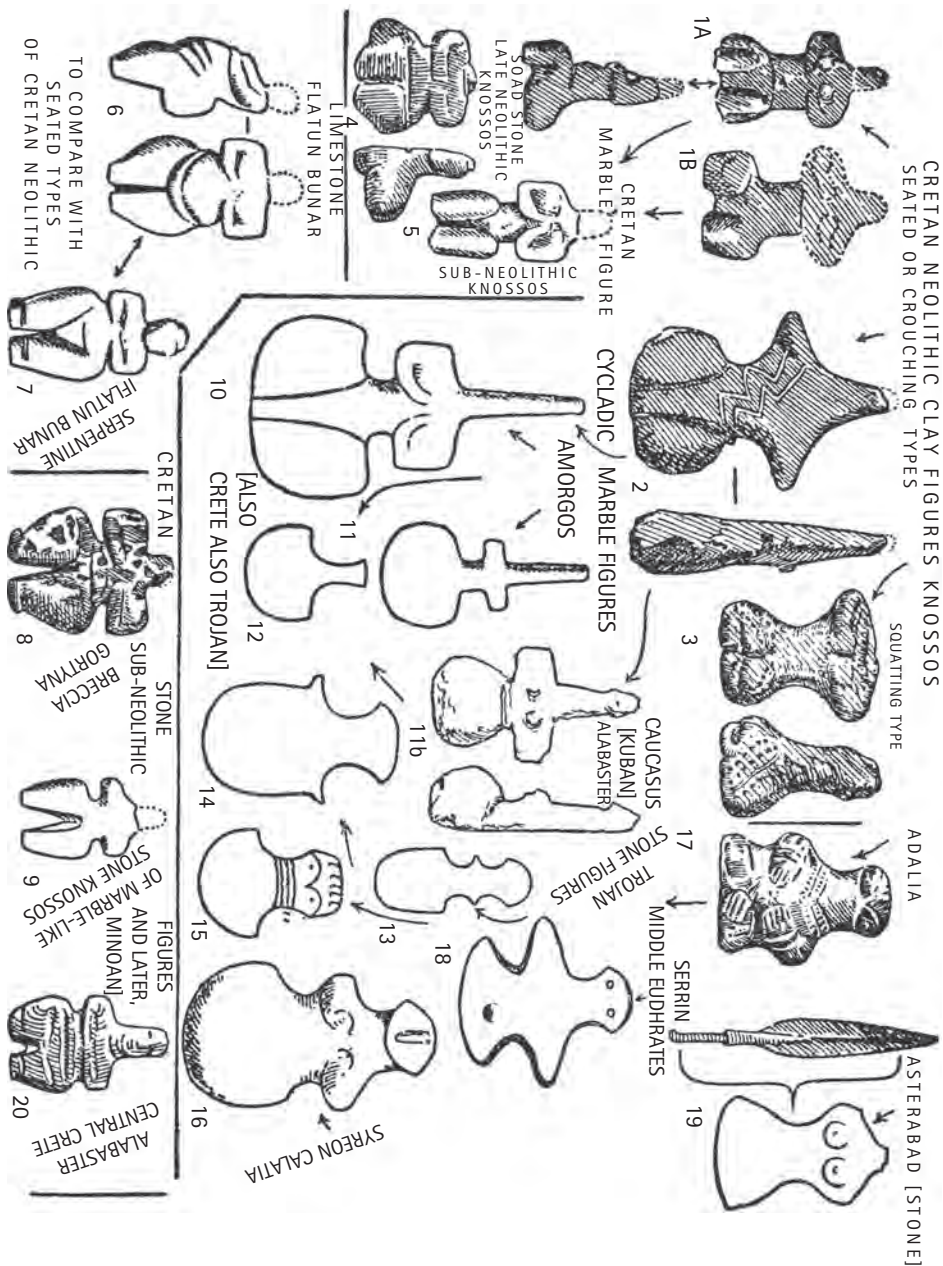


Fig. 2.3 Illustration of Neolithic figurines from Crete and their relatives, after [Arthur] Evans' from Gordon Childe's *The Dawn of European Civilization* (Childe 1925: 18, figure 8).

Social anthropology or material culture

In the early twentieth century a fundamental change in ethnographic field practices, which had over the previous two centuries shifted through ‘the voyage [to] the collection of curios [to] the field trip’ (Defert 1982: 12), formed a new horizon in the anthropological study of artefacts. Mainstream British anthropological interests shifted from museums and objects (especially technology and ‘primitive’ art) to extended, direct contact through fieldwork with living societies, unmediated by collections (Miller 1987: 111). This change is generally described as a shift to ‘functionalist’ and gradually, from the 1940s, ‘structural-functionalist’ approaches. The focus of field activity by anthropologists such as Bronislaw Malinowski and Alfred Radcliffe-Brown became the generation of field notes, based on participant observation, rather than collections of objects for museum curation. Fieldwork was undertaken for longer periods of time, and led to the production of a new written form: the ethnographic monograph. Evolutionary schemes for studying material culture were rejected as part of what developed into a broader critique of the writing of ‘conjectural history’ of social institutions (Radcliffe-Brown 1941: 1).

Thus in Radcliffe-Brown’s 1922 monograph on *The Andaman Islanders*, ‘technology’ was simply listed in the appendix (Tilley 2006a: 2). Radcliffe-Brown did study and collect objects, but he wrote about them only as evidence of ‘racial’ and cultural history, rather than of the contemporary society encountered by the ethnographer. The presence of such appendices is instructive: since the functionalism as set out by Malinowski understood each element of culture, such as institutions or practices, to be understood as performing a function, the study of objects could still be accommodated. Increasingly, however, structural-functionalism sought to relate the functions of the phenomena encountered by the ethnographer purely to social structure. Structural-functionalist anthropology developed as a comparative sociology, on a Durkheimian model. It was integrative like the new culture-historical archaeologies, but was distinct in its frustration with the technological focus of a previous generation of museums—rather than field-based researchers. Thus, Malinowski famously complained that:

As a sociologist, I have always had a certain amount of impatience with the purely technological enthusiasms of the museum ethnologist. In a way I do not want to move one inch from my intransigent position that the study of technology alone is . . . scientifically sterile. At the same time, I have come to realise that technology is indispensable as a means of approach to economic and sociological activities and to what might be called native science.

Malinowski (1935: 460)

The accommodation of objects within such writing was by understanding their role in social institutions: most influentially in the study of exchange in Malinowski’s *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922). This engendered a gradual dematerialization of social anthropology, which was closely bound up with a move away from

concerns with historical process, towards the study of ‘social facts’. In Britain, this gradual rise of a Durkheimian model for social anthropology witnessed a change in terminology, from ‘technology’ to a new compound term: ‘material culture’. This change in the vocabulary of British anthropology between the 1920s and 1940s was very little discussed at the time.

In many ways, the shift from ‘technology’ to ‘material culture’ was a desirable one for both museum- and fieldwork-focused anthropologists. On the one hand, for social anthropologists working in a structural-functionalist model the idea of museum-based anthropology as studying ‘material culture’ allowed a separation off of collections, as a legacy of earlier times, from the emerging modern field of British social anthropology. In this respect, the terminological shift from ‘technology’ to ‘material culture’ was comparable with a broader shift in modes of ‘objectivity’ identified by Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison (1992, 2007), from the ‘mechanical objectivity’ of the late nineteenth century to the ‘trained judgement’ of the twentieth century. Such a move distinguished a modernist social anthropology from earlier technological determinism, such as that found in one of the earliest volumes to use the term ‘material culture’: Leonard Hobhouse, Gerald Wheeler, and Morris Ginsburg’s combination of evolutionary and early functionalist approaches with statistical analysis to examine *The Material Culture and Social Institutions of the Simpler Peoples*, which focused on how ‘material culture, the control of man over nature in the arts of life’ might ‘roughly, but no more than roughly, reflect the general level of intellectual attainment’ in the society in question (Hobhouse *et al.* 1915: 6; Penniman 1965: 133n1).

On the other hand, the new term ‘material culture’ was equally attractive to museum-based anthropologists wishing to underline that their collections were more than simply assemblages of objects—the legacy of a previous intellectual tradition—and to revive Tylor’s conception of culture in order to do so. In this view, it provided a curatorial refuge from that other compound term of the period, ‘structural-functionalism’. Thus, J. H. Hutton writing in 1944 on the theme of ‘The Place of Material Culture in the Study of Anthropology’ expressed his ‘dissent most emphatically from the functionalist point of view that the study of “material culture” is of value only, or even primarily, as an approach to the study of economic and social activity’ (Hutton 1944: 3). As Mike Rowlands has put it, the idea of material culture represented a place of retreat for museum anthropology during the mid-twentieth century:

Material culture in an anthropological context is scarcely ever about artefacts *per se*. The term connotes instead the ambivalent feelings that anthropologists have had towards their evolutionist and diffusionist origins and towards museum studies, reflecting also their concern that the subject, in an age of specialization, should still aspire to be a totalizing and integrative approach to the study of man. The term is therefore metaphorical rather than sub-disciplinary and survived as a conceptual category to allow certain kinds of study

to be practised that would not fit any of the canons established during the hegemony of British social anthropology in the inter-war years.

Rowlands (1983: 15)

The creation of the new category of ‘material culture’ was thus closely bound up with the emergence of British social anthropology, which increasingly comprehended object-based research as ‘clearly subordinated to sociology’, and defined itself as fundamentally distinct from archaeology (Stocking 2001: 187, 192–193). British anthropology was concerned with difference in the contemporary world across space (between Western and non-Western situations), rather than with change over time (Rowlands 2004: 474). In a shift often lamented by the increasingly peripheral voices of museum anthropologists (Sturtevant 1969; Reynolds 1983; see Stocking 1985: 9), British social anthropology sought to move its subject matter past objects, to people.

New archaeology and material culture

The implications for archaeology of this shift away from objects in structural-functional social anthropology were at first felt less sharply in Britain than in North America. But in the United States similar ideas of lifting the archaeology out of purely descriptive and antiquarian accounts of the past came to be developed by two key thinkers: Walter Taylor (in the 1940s) and Lewis Binford (from the 1960s). Both Taylor and Binford presented critiques of culture-historical archaeology as privileging the study of typology above that of human behaviour in the past, in which new approaches to the study of archaeological material culture were set out. The work of these two archaeologists formed an important context for the reception of structural-functionalism, especially in relation to its implications for the study of ‘material culture’, in British archaeology during the 1950s and 1960s.

Walter Taylor’s *A Study of Archaeology* (1948), was based on a Ph.D. written at Harvard between 1938 and 1942. It was strongly influenced by the emerging cultural-ecological models of Clyde Kluckhohn and Julian Steward, and especially by Talcott Parsons’ (1937) vision of structural-functional sociology as a science of human action. Taylor presented a ‘conjunctive approach’, which foregrounded archaeological methods to argue that archaeological research leads not to ‘reconstructions’ but active, scientific ‘constructions’ of the past (Taylor 1948: 35–36): it had

as its primary goal the elucidation of cultural conjunctives, the associations and relationships, the ‘affinities’, *within* the manifestation under investigation. It aims at drawing the completest possible picture of past human life in terms of human and geographic environment. It is chiefly interested in the relation of item to item, trait to trait, complex to

complex... *within* the culture-unit represented and only subsequently in the taxonomic relation of these phenomena to similar ones outside of it.

Taylor (1948: 95–96; original emphasis)

The distinctive identity of archaeology as a discipline was a crucial element of Taylor's argument: 'Archaeology is neither history or anthropology. As an autonomous discipline it consists of a method and a set of specialized techniques for the gathering or "production" of cultural information' (Taylor 1948: 44). Thus, Taylor criticized Alfred Kidder's study of archaeological objects in his study of *The Artifacts of Pecos* (1932):

there is neither any provenience given for the vast majority of artifacts, nor any consistent correlation of these specimens with the ceramic periods. The description of the artefacts seems to be for its own sake and for the sake of comparative study on a purely descriptive level with similar artefacts from other sites. It may well be asked whether the meaning of the artefacts for the culture of Pecos is thought to lie in their form and classification of form, or whether it lies in their relations to one another and to the broad cultural and natural environment of Pecos.

Taylor (1948: 48)

While Taylor's study concluded with a lengthy 'Outline of Procedures for the Conjunctive Approach', which argued that 'an archaeological find is only as good as the notes upon it' (Taylor 1948: 154), the outspoken attacks in *A Study of Archaeology* upon many of the most senior figures in American archaeology at the time severely limited its impact for a generation (Leone 1972): a fact later of considerable regret to Taylor himself (Taylor 1972; Maca *et al.* 2009).

During the 1960s Lewis Binford developed the line of thought begun by Taylor into a more direct critique of culture-historical archaeology. Binford's work inspired the development of 'processual' or 'New' archaeology during the 1970s. But where Taylor had argued for a strong archaeological disciplinarity, Binford's commitment (which he shared with Taylor) to a focus on behaviour rather than typology led him instead to define 'Archaeology as Anthropology': repeating Gordon Willey and Philip Phillips' contention that 'archaeology is anthropology or it is nothing' (Willey and Phillips 1958: 2; Binford 1962: 217), and extending Leslie White's neo-cultural evolutionary argument that 'culture is the extra-somatic means of adaptation for the human organism' to 'material culture' as an 'extra-somatic means of adaptation' (White 1959: 8; Binford 1962: 217–218).

Binford distinguished between 'three major functional sub-classes of material culture': *technomic* ('those artifacts having their primary functional context in coping directly with the physical environment', *socio-technic* ('the extra-somatic means of articulating individuals one with another into cohesive groups capable of efficiently maintaining themselves and of manipulating the technology', such as 'a king's crown'), and *ideo-technic* ('items which signify and symbolize the ideological rationalizations for the social system and further provide the symbolic milieu in which

individuals are enculturated', such as 'figures of deities') (Binford 1962: 217, 219–220). He argued that such distinctions would allow archaeologists to develop distinctive theoretical perspectives on the significance of certain material items in social life, and to distinguish alternative methods for the study of past environmental adaptation, social relations, and ideas or beliefs through material culture:

We should not equate 'material culture' with technology. Similarly we should not seek explanations for observed differences and similarities in 'material culture' within a single interpretative frame of reference. It has often been suggested that we cannot dig up a social system or ideology. Granted we cannot excavate a kinship terminology or a philosophy, but we can and do excavate the material items which functioned together with these more behavioral elements within the appropriate cultural sub-systems. The formal structure of artifact assemblages together with the between element contextual relationships should and do present a systematic and understandable picture of the *total extinct* cultural system.

Binford (1962: 218–219)

Thus, Binford argued that archaeological material culture should be understood as evidence of human behaviour and adaptation, operating in different cultural registers from the practical to the social to the ideational, rather than more general reflections of particular culture-historical traits (Figure 2.4). He developed this positivist view through the use of ethnographic analogy and a method of making general statements about the systematic relationships between human behaviour and material culture, which he termed 'middle range theory' (Binford 1983). In his classic critique of culture-historical archaeology, Binford argued that an analysis of the stone tools associated with the Middle-Upper Palaeolithic in Europe, in which François Bordes suggested that difference in tools represented could be understood as different traditions that he labelled 'Mousterian', 'Acheulian', etc., should instead be understood as the evidence of different behavioural adaptations rather than different cultural groups (Binford 1973; Bordes 1973). The materialism of the New Archaeology drew from the contrasting ecological perspectives of Julian Steward and the technological focus of Leslie White: both of which tended, under the banner of neo-evolutionism, towards a materialist determinism for social structure (Trigger 1984: 279).

In Britain, a similar direction to that of the Americanist New Archaeology had begun to be explored by Graham Clark at Cambridge. Clark's transitional approach, which has been described as 'functional-processual' (Trigger 2006), made use of 'systems' approaches and an emphasis upon ecological adaptation in the reconstruction of past societies, as set out in his *Archaeology and Society* (1939). However, the reception of structural-functionalist social anthropology among British archaeologists did not lead in the same way to the development of the positivist scientific models that came to characterize the Americanist processual archaeology. This was for two principal reasons: contemporary debates in British social anthropology about historical change, and the early response to Walter Taylor's arguments from the perspectives of British culture-historical archaeology.

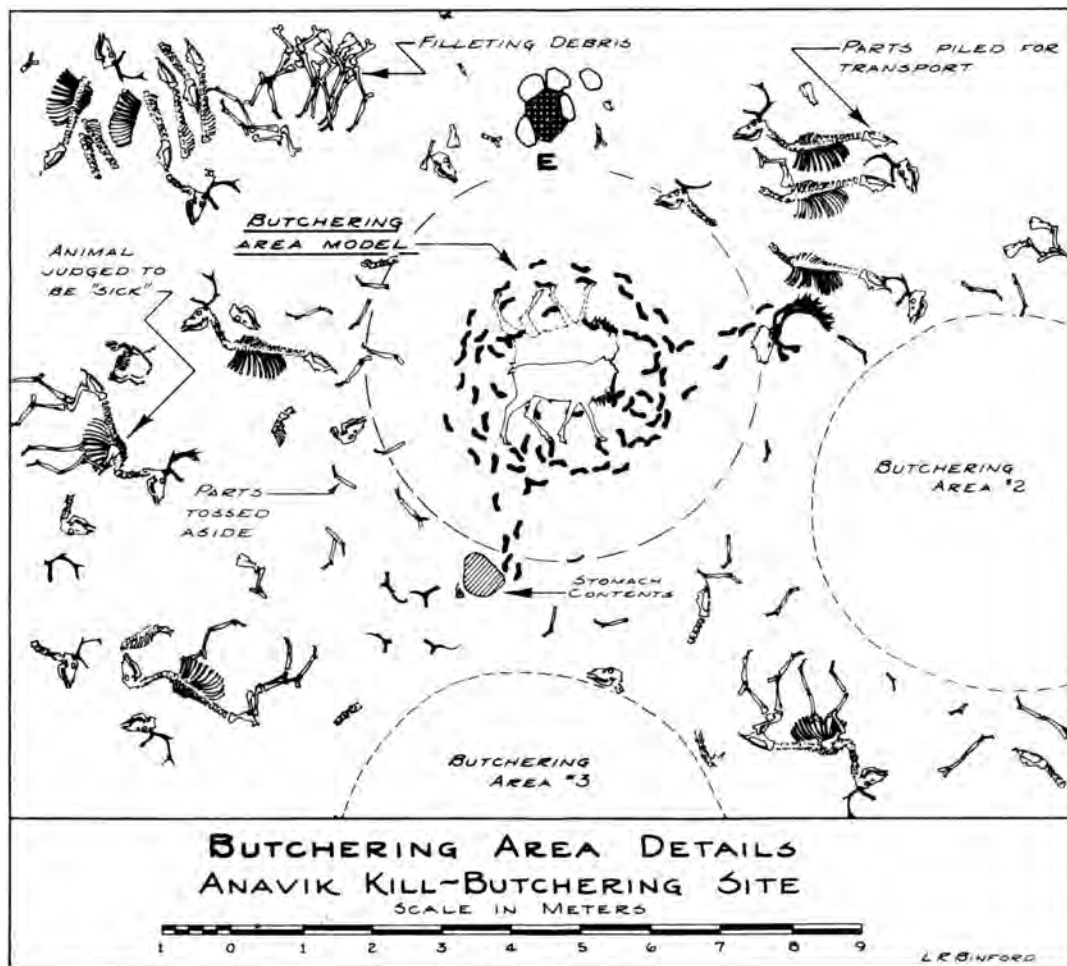


Fig. 2.4 'Close up of the butchering area at the Anavik Springs site [Alaska] showing the circular areas in which the caribou were dismembered and the location of the waste by-products', from Lewis Binford's *In Pursuit of the Past* (Binford 1983: 123, figure 61).

In British social anthropology, the shift in the structural-functionalist anthropology away from interests in change over time, which had accompanied its shift from earlier evolutionary and diffusionist approaches, came to be critiqued. A seminal contribution to this critique was Evans-Pritchard's Marrett Lecture of 1950, which described the anthropology of Malinowski and (by implication) Radcliffe-Brown as characterized by an 'insistence that a society can be understood satisfactorily without reference to its past' (Evans-Pritchard 1950: 120). Evans-Pritchard suggested that social anthropologists write 'cross-sections of history, integrative descriptive accounts of primitive peoples at a moment of time', arguing that anthropology should be located within the humanities rather than the sciences (Evans-Pritchard 1950: 122, 123–124).

Meanwhile, in archaeology the transatlantic reception of Walter Taylor's arguments was framed by Christopher Hawkes' paper 'Archaeological method and theory: a view from the Old World', written during a stay in the United States in 1953–4. Hawkes addressed 'Taylor's claim that if archeology limits itself to a mere external chronicling of material culture traits, it will be stopping short of its proper anthropological objective, and will be simply compiling statistics when it ought to be revealing culture' (Hawkes 1954: 156). Focusing upon the study of a period for which documentary sources are not available (later European prehistory), Hawkes described the archaeological process of inductive reasoning, 'from comparison and analysis of observed phenomena to the human activity that once produced them'. Such reasoning, Hawkes argued, involved four levels of increasingly difficult 'inferences': from understanding the 'techniques' producing such phenomena (the most straightforward) to information about 'subsistence-economics', 'social/political institutions', and finally 'religious institutions and spiritual life'. Moving from inference to narrative, Hawkes echoed Evans-Pritchard in his criticism of the ahistorical approach of structural-functionalism as 'scientifically indefensible', but also argued for the importance of acknowledging human movements and diffusion in the past (Hawkes *ibid*). These last themes had been important for the culture-historical archaeology of Childe and others (Hawkes 1954: 161–165), but shaped Graham Clark's later use of scientific dating techniques to generate new accounts of *World Prehistory* (Clark 1961).

Hawkes' model of archaeological inference from material remains to technological, economic, political and then ideational dimensions of past societies was rightly critiqued by the 'contextual archaeology' of the 1980s as grounded on an *a priori* distinction between technological and symbolic objects (see below). But for our present purposes it is sufficient to note that Hawkes' reception of Taylor's arguments led him to two positions. First, he foregrounded archaeological methodology, and especially its engagement with the material remains of the past, as a central problem: a position quite possibly inspired by his early professional experiences as Assistant, and then Assistant Keeper, at the British Museum (1928–1946). At the same time, Hawkes retained earlier geographical and historical interests that contrasted with synchronic structural-functionalist approaches: echoing Evans-Pritchard in his criticism of the ahistorical approach of structural-functionalism as 'scientifically indefensible' (Hawkes 1954: 163).

While at Oxford the arguments of Hawkes (from archaeology) and Evans-Pritchard (from social anthropology) both resisted the model of social structure presented by structural-functionalism, at Cambridge from the late 1960s the Binfordian model of the New Archaeology was taken up and reworked by David Clarke. In contrast with Binford's approach, Clarke's *Analytical Archaeology* (1968) strongly restated Taylor's commitment to archaeology as a discipline distinct from both history and social anthropology. Clarke developed an account of how archaeological knowledge develops from archaeological methods as applied to

archaeological materials. Central to his model was a concern about a division of disciplinary labour between the material practices of fieldwork or lab-based research and the scholarly writing of integrative accounts of the past:

There is currently a tendency to take the term prehistorian as meaning ‘a writer of history covering periods without written records’, with the implication that the ‘prehistorian’ is an armchair synthesiser of the analytical work of the ‘archaeologist’. Here the term archaeologist is warped to mean the unintelligent ‘excavator’ or the narrow-minded ‘specialist’—the term prehistorian thus acquiring a rosy flush of dilettante value at the expense of the devalued archaeologist. The danger of historical narrative as a vehicle for archaeological results is that it pleases by virtue of its smooth coverage and apparent finality, whilst the data on which it is based are never comprehensive . . . Archaeological data are not historical data and consequently archaeology is not history. The view taken in this work is that archaeology is archaeology is archaeology (with apologies to Gertrude Stein).

Clarke (1968: 11)

In presenting a vision of archaeology as ‘a discipline in its own right’—‘concerned with the recovery, systematic description and study of material culture in the past’ (1968: 12)—Clarke sought to move forward the line of enquiry begun by Taylor by calling not only for a shift from the ‘common sense’ description of material culture to a disciplinary ‘self-consciousness’, but further to the development of a distinctive body of archaeological theory that would shift the field from a ‘self-consciousness’ of materials and methods to ‘critical self-consciousness’. Clarke (1973) described this process as archaeology’s ‘loss of innocence’. With reference to the radical revisions of prehistoric chronologies that resulted from the scientific use of radiocarbon dating (Renfrew 1973a), Clarke argued for the contingency of archaeological knowledge upon materially-situated scientific practice, suggesting that ‘a new environment develops new materials and new methods with new consequences, which demand new philosophies, new solutions and new perspectives’ (Clarke 1973: 8–9). The continuing significance of these arguments for archaeological conceptions of material culture and fieldwork will be seen towards the end of this chapter.

This section has traced the layered sequence through which the sociological model of British anthropology that emerged during the early twentieth century led to a shift in terminology from ‘technology’ through the invention of the idea of ‘material culture’. This change was a central part of a division of disciplinary labour (and disciplinary influence) between museum and the collection on one hand, and the field site and the ethnographic monograph on the other. Thus, the idea of ‘material culture’ emerged at precisely the moment in anthropology’s history in which a particular focus upon social structure as the object of ethnographic enquiry ‘effectively banned artifact study to the comparative isolation of the anthropological museum and relegated its practitioners to a peripheral position within the discipline’ (van Beek 1989: 91). However, the influence of these sociological approaches upon archaeology

was mitigated by a continued focus upon the engagement with both artefacts and sites or landscapes in the study of the past. Unlike the positivist models that developed in the work of Binford and his students in the United States, the reception of the New Archaeology and the development of ‘systems’ approaches in the UK built, especially through the work of David Clarke, on Taylor’s focus upon the development of archaeological knowledge from the rigorous application of archaeological methods: methods that involved ‘inference’ as well as excavation.

The sociological and humanistic critique of the excessively descriptive focus of previous materially-focused approaches was thus mediated in Clarke’s work by an awareness of the active role of the archaeologist and the contingent nature of our knowledge of the past. In this sense, the New Archaeology in Britain held much in common not only with the historical focus of Evans-Pritchard, but also with the Manchester School’s call for social anthropology to be grounded in detailed case studies (e.g. Gluckman 1961). This sense of importance of fieldwork in which contingent, material conditions were implicated did not, however, characterize the manner in which the new ideas of structuralism, semiotics, and practice theory were received during the 1970s and early 1980s in British archaeology and anthropology. This Material-Cultural Turn is considered in Section II of this chapter.

II: THE MATERIAL-CULTURAL TURN: FROM ‘OBJECT-LESSONS’ TO ‘OBJECT DOMAINS’

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In the discussion of excavated sequences, archaeologists commonly group series of layers, cuts, and fills into a broader chronological sequence of ‘phases’. The second phase that we can identify in this excavation of ‘material culture studies’ begins with the strong influence upon social anthropology, from the 1960s, of two new, inter-related bodies of thought. The first of these was the application of structuralist analysis, developed especially by Claude Lévi-Strauss from Saussurean linguistics (de Saussure 1959 [1916]), to the study of social structure (Leach 1961; Lévi-Strauss 1963). The second was a focus upon interpretation and the study of meaning and social practice, developed especially by Clifford Geertz (1973), which represented the development of a Parsonian, and ultimately Weberian, hermeneutic model for social science, but that was also paralleled by new Durkheimian accounts of the anthropology of ritual performance and ‘symbolic action’ (Turner 1975: 159; see Turner 1967). The focus in both the structuralist and interpretive anthropologies on themes such as ritual practice, symbolism, and myth provided space for a gradual refocusing of anthropological research interests upon objects. As will become clear, however, this focus on objects was concerned

quite specifically with the identification and comparative study of abstract schemes of form, style, and design, and with the relationships of such phenomena with meaning and use in practice.

The publication in 1963 of the English translation of the first volume of Lévi-Strauss' *Structural Anthropology* was a watershed for anthropologists studying material culture. Here, Lévi-Strauss presented analyses of the underlying 'grammars' of artefact designs, as part of a more general account of the structures that he understood as lying behind all manifestations of culture: from ritual masks to kinship proscriptions (cf. Lévi-Strauss 1982). For example, in his study of 'Split Representation in the Art of Asia and America', Lévi-Strauss applied approaches from structuralist linguistics to ethnographic objects in order to develop new kinds of comparative studies of 'primitive art' (Lévi-Strauss 1963: 245). In doing so, he built upon the sociological study of *Primitive Classification* that had been established by Emile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss at the start of the twentieth century (Durkheim and Mauss 1963 [1903]). The reception of this French structuralist work alongside American interpretive anthropology in British anthropology inspired a range of structuralist and semiotic anthropological studies of style and form in artworks and the built environment (e.g. Munn 1973; Humphrey 1974), and the beginnings of studies of material culture as a kind of communicative system, analogous to, but not reducible to, language (Rowlands 2004: 475–476). This was also developed in New Archaeology through Martin Wobst's idea of 'stylistic behaviour' concerned with 'information exchange' (Wobst 1977).

It was in this context that British archaeology and anthropology witnessed a second major shift in the study of material things, which culminated during the 1980s as what I want to call the 'Material-Cultural Turn'. Where the various responses to the sociological model of structural-functionalism had been united in a terminological shift from 'technology' to 'material culture', the responses to structuralist and interpretive approaches led to the emergence of the idea of 'material culture studies'. The idea of material culture studies emerged from the desire to bring the structural and the meaningful together in a single analysis in archaeology and anthropology. For this reason, it can be understood to be closely associated with the reception of the 'practice theories' of Pierre Bourdieu and Anthony Giddens in archaeology and anthropology. However, French structural Marxism, American historical archaeology and 'modern material culture studies', and the 'ethnoarchaeology' that developed in American New Archaeology also represented important influences.

Structural Marxist anthropology: beyond 'vulgar materialist' approaches

The first attempts to reconcile grand narratives of structuralism with the more fine-grained account of interpretive and symbolic anthropology developed through the

reception of French structural Marxist anthropology (Meillassoux 1972; Terray 1972, 1975; Godelier 1977) by British anthropologists, and especially those such as Jonathan Friedman and Mike Rowlands who were associated with UCL (Bloch 1975; Friedman 1974, 1975; Rowlands and Gledhill 1976). As Sherry Ortner (1984: 140) has argued, the British structural Marxist anthropology of the 1970s represented ‘an explicit mediation between the “materialist” and “idealist” camps of sixties anthropology’: a mediation captured by Maurice Godelier’s study *The Mental and the Material* (1986).

Structural Marxists such as Friedman and Rowlands critiqued ‘functional ecology’ and the ‘cultural materialism’ of American neo-evolutionist anthropology (Harris 1968; see Patterson 2003: 102–112) as a ‘simple programmatic materialism’: a ‘vulgar materialism’ that represented an ‘empiricist ideology’ based on ‘the *a priori* reduction of relatively autonomous phenomena . . . to a single phenomenon’. Instead, Friedman sought to offer a more ethnographic account of materialism, using Marx but grounded in the anthropological study of social relations: beginning ‘with the assumption of disjunction between structures in order to establish the true relationships that unite them’ (Friedman 1974: 466; Rowlands and Gledhill 1976: 31). British structural Marxist anthropology argued that, especially through its sense of historical process, distinctions between the material and the ideational could be overcome through a focus on social relations, rather than the static conception of ‘social structure’ that had characterized both structural-functionalism and structuralism. Similar arguments developed in American Marxist anthropology, especially the final chapter of Marshall Sahlins’ book *Culture and Practical Reason* (1976), which moved radically beyond the historical materialism of his earlier *Stone Age Economics* (1972). In Sahlins’ new argument,

One evident matter—for bourgeois society as much as for the so-called primitive—is that material aspects are not usefully separated from the social, as if the first were referable to the satisfaction of needs by the exploitation of nature, and the second to problems of the relations between men . . . [M]aterial effects depend on their cultural encompassment. The very form of social existence of material force is determined by its integration in the cultural system. The force may be significant—but significance, precisely, is a symbolic quality.

Sahlins (1976: 205–206)

British structural Marxist anthropology led to a distinctive way of envisaging the relationship between archaeology and social anthropology:

The material culture record in archaeology has been interpreted as a hierarchical set of entities to be ordered taxonomically. In the last analysis, archaeologists have not so much neglected the socio-historical meaning of material culture assemblages (since, in general, it has always been assumed that the ordering of material would lead to inferences about people) as displayed a timidity towards it which has much in common with that displayed by the Boasian school in ethnography. Implicit is the faith that ‘understanding’ will arise out of its own motion from the accumulation of fact upon fact with increasing refinement of detail . . . [But] even the development of ways of making truly ‘objective’ statements about

the intrinsic properties of artefacts, through for instance the use of geophysical techniques, has simply underlined the need for systematic social interpretation. The more patterns archaeologists discern in their data, the more questions will be forced upon their attention.

Rowlands and Gledhill (1976: 25)

Here, the idea of a ‘relation between archaeology and anthropology’ mapped directly on to a conviction in ‘the linkage of the material culture record to the socio-cultural system’ (Rowlands and Gledhill 1976: 23, 26). In this view, just as archaeology and anthropology were complementary rather than distinct disciplines, so the relationships between artefacts and social structure were a crucial area of study (Rowlands and Gledhill 1976: 37).

Historical archaeology and ‘modern material culture studies’

As with the development of the New Archaeology in the 1960s, in the 1970s the significance of transatlantic exchanges was critical in the development of archaeological material culture studies. The reception of structuralism in American historical archaeology, especially in James Deetz’s discussion in his *Invitation to Archaeology* (1967) of the ‘analysis of form’, was based on the idea of the ‘mental template’:

Artefacts are man-made objects; they are also fossilized ideas . . . [T]he making of a proper form of an object exists in the mind of the maker, and when this idea is expressed in tangible form in raw material, an artifact results . . . [T]he form of an artifact is a close approximation of this template.

Deetz (1967: 45)

Deetz sought, for example in his discussion of the making of a Chumash basket, to combine the structuralist analysis of artefacts with the study of long-term change: a focus on the making of artefact forms as influenced by tradition, but also other factors such as ‘technology, function, innovation’, and the importance of the idea of context in the study of material culture (Deetz 1967: 47, 67–74).

The new term ‘material culture studies’ came to be used to define a set of research practices rather than just the object of enquiry defined by the term ‘material culture’. During the late 1970s, this new term emerged from American historical archaeology through the idea of ‘modern material culture studies’ (but see Fenton 1974), and a more general interest in ‘the importance of material things’ in historical archaeology (Ferguson 1977). This American literature was significant for British archaeology and anthropology because of how two of its characteristics were refracted into debates over the relationships between archaeology and anthropology at Cambridge during the 1970s.

First, the term ‘modern material culture studies’ was used to describe the archaeological study of the contemporary Western world, whether as part of

ethnoarchaeology (South 1979: 213), or more commonly to describe projects such as William Rathje's 'garbology', which undertook an archaeology of the contemporary world—the archaeology of us' (Gould and Schiffer 1981), which in Rathje's case involved the excavation of contemporary landfills in order to learn about the environmental dimensions of modern life (Rathje 1979). While such approaches were often characterized by the scientific field approaches of the New Archaeology, they also included a range of alternative interpretive or 'behavioural' views (Ascher 1974a, 1974b; Schiffer 1976).

Secondly, work such as Rathje's and Gould's extended perspectives from a new wave of interpretive Americanist historical archaeology, in particular, as developed by James Deetz (1977) in the study of early modern America, which had during the previous decade developed anthropological approaches to material culture studies that contrasted with the use of the term 'material culture' in folklife studies, decorative arts traditions, and historical archaeology in the United States (Quimby 1978). Defining 'archaeology as a social science', Deetz (1972) crucially used the study of material culture as a way of reconciling structuralist and semiotic approaches in anthropology. Deetz's definition of material culture, set out in his studies *Invitation to Archaeology* (1967) and *In Small Things Forgotten: an archaeology of early American life* (1977), was famously very broad:

Material culture is usually considered to be roughly synonymous with artifacts, the vast universe of objects used by mankind to cope with the physical world, to facilitate social intercourse, and to benefit our state of mind. A somewhat broader definition of material culture is useful in emphasising how profoundly our world is the product of our thoughts, as that sector of our physical environment that we modify through culturally determined behavior. This definition includes all artifacts, from the simplest, such as a common pin, to the most complex, such as an interplanetary space vehicle. But the physical environment includes more than what most definitions of material culture recognise. We can also consider cuts of meat as material culture, since there are many ways to dress an animal; likewise plowed fields and even the horse that pulls the plow, since scientific breeding of livestock involves the conscious modification of an animal's form according to culturally derived ideals. Our body itself is part of our physical environment, so that such things as parades, dancing, and all aspects of kinesics—human motion—fit within our definition. Nor is the definition limited only to matter in the solid state. Fountains are liquid examples, as are lily ponds, and material that is partly gas includes hot air balloons and neon signs. I have suggested in *Invitation to Archaeology* that even language is part of material culture, a prime example of it in its gaseous state. Words, after all, are air masses shaped by the speech apparatus according to culturally acquired rules.

Deetz (1977: 24–25)

Deetz's work combined structuralist and semiotic analyses of this very wide range of 'material culture' in order to gain a sense of the 'world views' of people in the past through the apparently inconsequential modern fragments studied by historical archaeology. It sought to introduce a historical dimension into structuralist analyses by studying changing world views over time. This interpretive approach bore

some resemblance to the *Annales* historians' study of French material culture in relation to *mentalité*, and was directly inspired by Deetz's colleague Henry Glassie's (1975) structuralist study of vernacular buildings in Virginia in relation to the emergence of the 'Georgian Order' as a historically situated structuring principle for late eighteenth-century material culture. But Deetz also used part-fictional interpretive tableaux to evoke a kind of Geertzian 'thick description' of the material dimensions of human life in relation to significance and meaning (Geertz 1973). This similarity possibly derived from the common training received by Deetz and Geertz at Harvard during the mid-1950s, where the influence of Talcott Parsons was still strongly felt, along with more recent influences, such as Dell Hymes' nascent socio-linguistics (Hymes 1964). In the influence upon British archaeology and anthropology of Geertz's approach to interpretive anthropology, and of Deetz's combination of structuralism with a focus on historical change, their shared commitment to understanding 'human behavior [as] . . . symbolic *action*' (Geertz 1973: 10; my emphasis) laid the foundations for the later reception of practice theory (discussed below).

The emergence of material culture studies: Cambridge and UCL

It was in this intellectual context that the Material-Cultural Turn in British archaeology and anthropology emerged during the late 1970s and early 1980s at the two centres for the development of British material culture studies in the 1980s: Department of Archaeology at Cambridge and the Department of Anthropology at University College London (UCL). The arguments of both structural Marxism and Deetzian historical archaeology/modern material culture studies, which were united by a desire to reintegrate in a single analysis of structuralist and interpretive anthropology, the material and meaningful aspects of social life—to connect people and things' (Deetz 1967: 138)—were received in different ways in these two departments.

In London they dovetailed with an emergent body of thinking about 'material culture studies' that developed at UCL through the work and teaching of Peter Ucko and Daryll Forde (e.g. Ucko 1969; see Rowlands 1983: 16; Buchli 2002a: 11). Especially important here was the development of teaching on material culture and 'primitive art' by Peter Ucko after his appointment in 1962 (Layton *et al.* 2006: 1–3), the influence of British symbolic-structuralist anthropologist Mary Douglas (1966; Douglas and Isherwood 1979), and the influence of Anthony Forge at the London School of Economics. The desire among this group to combine structuralist and semiotic approaches was exemplified by Forge's discussion of the study of 'Primitive Art and Society' (Forge 1973a, 1973b). Forge drew upon approaches in American archaeology to the study of 'iconics' and the 'grammar' of 'classes of objects or

graphic signs’, ‘the analogy being with rules for sentence production in a language’ (citing the work of Dell Hymes), arguing that such ‘descriptive models’ should be combined with the study of meaning and aesthetics (Forge 1973a: xvi–xvii): ‘to concentrate on the aspect of style as a system, a visual system, but also a system of meaning’ (Forge 1973b: 191). Such work provided the basis for Robert Layton’s semiotic approach to *The Anthropology of Art* (1981).

At Cambridge, the idea of ‘material culture studies’ provided one way of answering two strong challenges: from Edmund Leach’s structuralist anthropology (discussed further below) and from archaeologist Colin Renfrew’s (1973b) conception of ‘social archaeology’, to a new generation of Cambridge archaeologists, in particular Ian Hodder and Daniel Miller, to build an archaeology that could account for the place of the meaning of objects in social life.

In the early 1980s two responses to these challenges to accommodate both structuralist and interpretive approaches in British archaeology and anthropology made particular use of a new body of sociological thinking about the relationships between ‘agency’ and ‘structure’: the practice theories of Pierre Bourdieu (1977) and Anthony Giddens (1979). First, at Cambridge, Ian Hodder and his students developed a new ‘contextual archaeology’, informed especially by Bourdieu’s notion of *habitus* (Hodder 1982a, 1982b, 1986). Secondly, leaving Cambridge for UCL, and gradually framing their work as anthropological rather than archaeological, Daniel Miller and his students developed a model of ‘material culture studies’ as the anthropology of consumption, which drew strongly from Giddens’ notion of ‘structuration’. Giddens’ (1979, 1981, 1984) arguments presented a model of the ‘duality of structure’ involving a mutually constitutive relationship between ‘agency’ and ‘structure’. In new studies in anthropological archaeology, Hodder and Miller sought to use what Giddens had described as ‘object domains’ (Miller 1987: 158) and what Bourdieu had termed *habitus* to explore the idea of relationships between cultural and material worlds.

Archaeological excavation often encounters horizons, caused for example through the ploughing of a field, in which earlier features are truncated, mixed, and redeposited. Such processes bring a levelling-out of surfaces. They draw a line in the sequence of formation, but walking across them the archaeologist will always encounter the abraded residual materials from earlier periods. In our excavation of material culture studies, it is this kind of reordering and persistence that characterizes the second phase of our stratigraphic sequence. Together, two bodies of thinking—Hodder’s contextual archaeology and Miller’s archaeological anthropology of mass consumption—constituted the Material-Cultural Turn in British archaeology and anthropology. Its emergence through works that combined ethnoarchaeological with structuralist and semiotic perspectives are considered below.

The Material-Cultural Turn: Ethnoarchaeology

The idea of ‘ethnoarchaeology’—the comparative archaeological study of contemporary human societies to inform the archaeological explanation of the past—emerged during the 1970s from the desire in Binfordian New Archaeology to develop testable correlations between material remains and human behaviour (Binford 1978; Gould 1978; Kramer 1979; but see the earlier arguments of Ascher 1961, 1962). Developing the idea of ‘the archaeology of a contemporary community’ (Ascher 1968) as a kind of ‘living archaeology’ (Gould 1980), ethnoarchaeology contributed to the development of a principal theme of New Archaeology: the challenges of relating patterns in the material record to patterns of human behaviour in the past, read through the alternative ‘cultural’ and ‘natural’ processes that lead to the formation of the archaeological record (Schiffer 1972). Such ‘archaeologically oriented ethnographic work’, therefore, focused on the material dimensions of human actions, from the manufacture and use of objects to their being discarded, in the present, such as the production of ceramics (Kramer 1985: 77), and was used to contribute to the New Archaeology’s aim of generating universal models for ‘material correlates’ of human behaviour (Lane 2006: 404).

In the early 1980s, two contributions to the Cambridge University Press series ‘New Studies in Archaeology’, by Ian Hodder (1982a) and Daniel Miller (1985), laid the foundations for the Material-Cultural Turn in British archaeology and anthropology. These works combined the idea of ethnoarchaeology from New Archaeology in the United States with structuralist approaches to the interpretation of symbols and categories. The choice of ethnoarchaeology—‘a processual subdiscipline *par excellence*’—as a place from which to develop a critique of the New Archaeology, was as David van Reybrouck has observed, at first glance a strange one (van Reybrouck 2000: 40). However, the field provided an opportunity for archaeologists to seek to link structuralist studies of material culture with interpretive ethnographic accounts of living populations: developing case studies that explored further Hodder’s early critiques, in his reorientation of David Clarke’s model of ‘spatial archaeology’, of ‘simple correlations between material culture and society’ (Hodder 1978a, 1978b). In this sense, the British ethnoarchaeology of the early 1980s was closer to the sociological idea of ‘ethnomethodology’ (Garfinkel 1967) than it was to processual ethnoarchaeology.

In *Symbols in Action: ethnoarchaeological studies of material culture* Ian Hodder (1982a) described the results of fieldwork that focused on the relationships between ethnic identity and stylistic variations in the design of items of material culture. His fieldwork was conducted among a range of groups in various locations in eastern Africa: in Kenya (among Tugen, Pokot, and Njemps groups in the Baringo district, and among Samburu agriculturalists and Dorobo hunter-gatherers on the Leroghi Plateau); western Zambia (in the Lozi kingdom); and in two Nuba communities in central Sudan. Discussing decorative symbolism in a wide range of objects from carved calabash milk containers to stools, spears, and cooking pots



Fig. 2.5 'Artefacts from the Lozi Area [western Zambia]. Wooden bowls (*muoke wa kota*), spatula (foreground) and spoon (centre), knife, "A" basket and "B" pot', from Ian Hodder's *Symbols in Action* (Hodder 1982: 112, figure 50).

(Figure 2.5), and inspired in particular by the social anthropology of Mary Douglas (1966), Hodder argued that rather than *reflecting* cultures (as a passive by-product of social life), variability in the symbolic aspects of material culture should be interpreted from the perspective that objects are actively and meaningfully used in social life. He was particularly interested here in the role of material culture in the establishment and maintenance of ethnic boundaries. Hodder argued, in contrast with the processual archaeology of Binford, that 'culture is not man's extrasomatic means of adaptation but that it is meaningfully constituted' (1982a: 13), and that 'material culture transforms, rather than reflects, social organization according to the strategies of groups, their beliefs, concepts and ideologies' (1982a: 212):

'Material culture is meaningfully constituted. Material culture patterning transforms structurally rather than reflects behaviourally social relations. Interpretation must integrate the different categories of evidence from different subsystems into the 'whole'... Each particular historical context must be studied as a unique combination of general principles of meaning and symbolism, negotiated and manipulated in specific ways.

Hodder (1982a: 218)

In keeping with its ethnoarchaeological aims, *Symbols in Action* concluded with an attempt to apply Hodder's perspective to late Neolithic material from Orkney (Hodder 1982a: 218–228): a direction that was more fully explored in his development

of ‘symbolic and structural archaeology’ into the ‘contextual archaeology’ that was to radicalize British archaeological engagements with material culture (discussed below).

In contrast, Daniel Miller’s ethnoarchaeological study of ceramics in a rural village in the Malwa region of central India, *Artefacts as categories*, was focused not on the identification of meaning and human identity in material culture, but on the more cognitive idea of ‘categorization’, and how it related to social practice. But like Hodder, Miller (1985: 5) sought to work between structuralist and semiotic approaches, moving beyond their tendency towards an ‘extreme reduction’ of ‘social structure and cultural forms’ to abstract classificatory schemes. For this reason, Miller’s use of ethnoarchaeology was based on the argument that ‘material culture sets reflect the organizational principles of human categorization processes, and that it is through the understanding of such processes that we may best be able to interpret changes in material culture sets over time’ (Miller 1982a: 17).

In his account of fieldwork in a rural village, Miller (1985: 197) argued that the study of ‘artefact variability’ across technological and cultural categories could reveal how social competition between castes was expressed through ceramics. By treating ‘material objects [as] a concrete lasting form of human categorisation’, he sought to connect structure with material practice, to ‘link *langue* with *parole* and provide explanations in a “realist” mould’, since ‘categorisation processes mediate and organise the social construction of reality’ (Miller 1982a: 17, 23). In doing so, *Artefacts as Categories* was a transitional work that started to move beyond the normative behavioural studies of artefact style that had characterized the New Archaeology (e.g. Wiessner 1984; see Boast 1996). By undertaking ‘the micro-analysis of the material world . . . in conjunction with archaeology’, Miller (1985: 205) focused not on meaning and symbols, but instead began to use social theory to extend the scope of what Colin Renfrew (1973b) had, a decade earlier, termed ‘social archaeology’.

However, a certain frustration not only with the aims of processual ethnoarchaeology, but also with archaeology’s methods for studying material culture more generally, emerged in Miller’s study. The focus was not on artefacts *per se*, but on ‘artefacts as categories’, and on the identification of ‘a pottery code’ the structure of which could be related to ‘the various structural positions held by individuals in society’ (Miller 1985: 201–202). In an editorial decision that recalled Radcliffe-Brown’s treatment of technology in his study of the *Andaman Islanders*, a ‘Detailed Description of Pottery Manufacture’ was provided as an appendix (Miller 1985: 207–232; Figure 2.6). In a reversal of Hawkes’ hierarchical metaphor, the attraction of ethnoarchaeology had been that ‘it was usually impossible to ignore the *social basis* of material culture’ (Miller 1987: 112; my emphasis). Accordingly, Miller’s subsequent contributions to archaeological theory related to the uses of social theory, and especially the potential of critical theory to reveal ideology and power (Miller and Tilley 1984; Miller 1989), rather than further studies of ceramic manufacture.

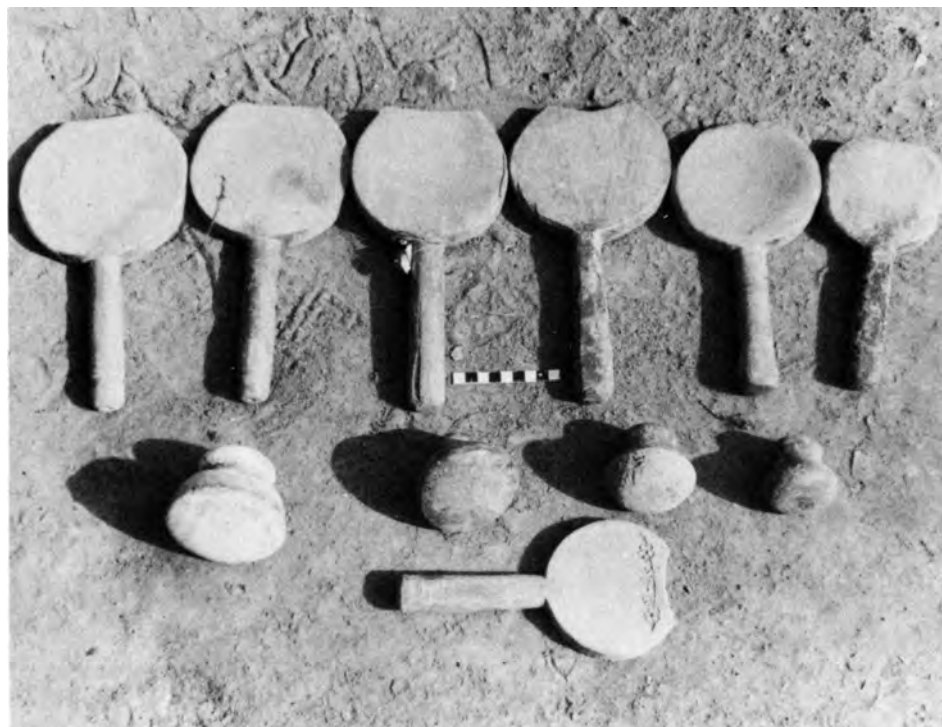


Fig. 2.6 'A complete set of paddles and anvils': from the 'Detailed description of pottery manufacture' in the Malwa region of central India in the Appendix to Daniel Miller's *Artefacts as Categories* (Miller 1985, figure 55).

The suggestion by Hodder and Miller that ethnoarchaeology was particularly well-positioned to combine structuralist and symbolic approaches through a 'materialist' focus was shared elsewhere in the field, especially in African archaeology (Schmidt 1983). But British archaeology and social anthropology both shifted away from ethnoarchaeology from the mid-1980s (van Reybrouck 2000). Ian Hodder came to suggest that ethnoarchaeology should 'disappear, to be replaced by or integrated with the anthropology of material culture and social change' (1986: 108). Nevertheless, the influence of ethnoarchaeology was fundamental to the emergence of contextual archaeology, offering a field (both human and material) from which to critique the focus in processual archaeology upon methodology. This led to a long-standing debate over theory and practice in British archaeology (Hodder 1992), and to an active turning away from archaeological methods in the anthropological material culture studies conducted by those trained in archaeology (but see Hodder 1999). Distancing himself explicitly from the perspectives of David Clarke, Miller expressed discomfort with what he saw as the fetishizing of the archaeological object:

Stone tools and ceramic sequences were increasingly studied in themselves. This resulted in a kind of fetishism that archaeology is always prone to. Objects start by standing for prehistoric peoples, who are the intended subject of study, but the symbolic process is easily inverted, and peoples under terms such as ‘cultures’ become viewed principally as labels for groups of artefacts, which are the immediate subjects of analysis. The focus is then on the relationship between the objects themselves, which in the 1960’s became the centre of interest (e.g. Clarke 1968).

Miller (1983: 5–6)

The long-term influence of this early 1980s British ethnoarchaeological work relates also, however, to the different directions in which contextual archaeology and anthropological material culture studies developed thereafter. One factor here is the significance of area studies. Richard Fardon has highlighted the dependence of the shift from structural-functionalism to structuralism in British social anthropology upon the hegemonic shift from regional schools of ethnography in eastern Africa, to India and South-east Asia (Fardon 1990; see discussions in Dresch 1992; Hicks 2003: 325). It is notable that this geographical distinction was precisely reproduced between the ethnoarchaeological studies of Hodder and Miller. As Hodder developed contextual and interpretive archaeology and Miller combined structuralism and practice theory in anthropological material culture studies from the late 1980s, a parallel distinction emerged in their alternative approaches to the relationships between the social and the material. Although, as will become clear, both fields moved strongly away from the idea of ethnoarchaeology, the replacement of the field of enquiry with prehistoric archaeology on the one hand and modern consumption on the other allowed the distinction between these two visions of material culture studies (one apparently archaeological, one avowedly anthropological) to persist.

The Material-Cultural Turn: Contextual archaeology

The development of a body of new thinking in British archaeology, which came to be known as ‘contextual archaeology’, and later ‘post-processual archaeology’ (due to its critique of the New or processual archaeology of Binford and others), took place from about 1978 in Cambridge, principally through the work of Ian Hodder and his students. The publication of the proceedings of a conference at Cambridge, held in April 1980, on the theme of ‘Symbolism and Structuralism in Archaeology’ (Hodder 1982b) was a landmark in the emergence of this critique (Hodder *et al.* 2007). The diverse contributions to the volume were united in aiming to move beyond what they identified as a persistent functionalist approach in the New Archaeology towards society and culture, including material culture (Hodder 1982c: 2). As David van Reybrouck has summarized, during the mid-1980s very much of the thinking that came to characterize British contextual archaeology



Fig. 2.7 Examples of 1980s British and Swedish beer cans, from Michael Shanks and Christopher Tilley's archaeological study of 'the design of contemporary beer cans' (Shanks and Tilley 1987a: 178, figure 8.4).

developed through applying 'an archaeological approach to the present', in Western (and, specifically, British) as well as non-Western field locations (Figure 2.7):

[Henrietta] Moore worked on settlement layout and refuse disposal with the Marakwet in Kenya (Moore 1986). Furthermore, [Ian] Hodder [1982a, 215–216] drew attention to the material culture items appropriated by punks, [Mike] Parker Pearson (1982) researched contemporary mortuary behaviour in Britain, [Michael] Shanks and [Chris] Tilley [1987a: 172–240] studied differences in design between Swedish and British beer cans, and [Daniel] Miller (1984) analysed contemporary suburban architecture in Britain. The industrialized world was considered an equally promising field for material culture studies. On top of that, the volumes edited by Hodder [1982b, 1987a and 1987b] and Miller and Tilley (1984) all contained parts devoted to studies in ethnoarchaeology, ethnohistory and modern material culture.

van Reybrouck (2000: 40)

Such 'contextual ethnoarchaeology' provided the impetus for a shift that Ian Hodder described as a more general disciplinary move beyond archaeology's 'loss of innocence' (Clarke 1973) 'towards a mature archaeology' (Hodder 1981), which he set out in his book *Reading the Past* (Hodder 1986). The definition of material culture as 'meaningfully constituted' (Hodder 1986: 4), rather than passively reflective of behaviour, was the central argument of contextual archaeology. This emergence of material culture studies at the core of archaeological debates can be understood as a response to an explicit challenge set for archaeology by structuralist anthropologist Edmund Leach in a series of papers during the 1970s (Leach 1973,

1977, 1978). In 1973, Leach's concluding remarks for *The Explanation of Culture Change: Models in Archaeology* (Renfrew 1973c) had called for archaeology to embrace structuralism, and thus to move beyond what Leach had defined as a residual functionalism in the New Archaeology:

Do not misunderstand me. Functionalism is 'old hat' in social anthropology; it is 'new hat' in archaeology... [T]he paradigm which is currently in high fashion among the social anthropologists, namely that of structuralism, has not yet caught up with the archaeologists at all. Don't worry, it will! But meanwhile interdisciplinary communication is rather difficult.

(Leach 1973: 762)

In Leach's view, a shift to structuralism in archaeology would involve a new set of approaches to material culture, since 'functionalist proto-man is a tool-maker whereas structuralist proto-man is a user of language' (Leach 1973: 762):

Am I making my point? Ideas are more important than things;... archaeologists need to appreciate that the material objects revealed by their excavations are not 'things in themselves', nor are they just artifacts—things made by man—they are representations of ideas.

(Leach 1977: 167)

Leach's challenge for archaeology was for the field to reconcile structuralist and symbolic approaches to material culture. In undertaking the task set by Leach—critiquing the New Archaeology as retaining many of the characteristics of functionalism (Leach 1973), and seeking to accommodate both structuralist and symbolic approaches (Leach 1977)—contextual archaeology came to use a wide range of theoretical arguments. It aimed to 'superced[e], while simultaneously integrating, structuralism', in studies undertaken by archaeologists that were 'not concerned with the abstract principles of mind, as they would be if literal structuralists', but were 'concerned with context, meaning and particular historical circumstances, as well as with the generative principles which unify particular cultures': with 'particular structures but within their historical, i.e. material, context' (Leone 1982: 179). Thus, Ian Hodder's key statement of the aims and approaches of a contextual archaeology, *Reading the Past*, identified 'four general issues of post-processual archaeology' which were expressed in terms of bilateral relationships (Hodder 1986: 188). These relationships were between 'norm and individual' (and an interest in individual agency rather than behaviour); 'process and structure' (a focus on historical change rather than static models); 'ideal and material' (and a critique of Hawkes' model of inference as a 'ladder of inference' that distinguished between the ideational and technological dimensions of the material remains of the past); and 'subject and object' (a focus on the cultural meaning rather than the social function of objects, and the idea that 'both material items and their deposition are actively involved in social relations') (Hodder 1982a: 6).

Hodder addressed these relationships through an archaeological process that was defined as 'interpretation'—an idea read through R. G. Collingwood (1946)—rather than 'explanation' (Renfrew 1973a) or a positivist philosophy of science (which

Hodder associated with Binford 1983). Hodder argued that interpreting material culture was analogous to reading texts, and distinct from straightforwardly ‘reading off’ from evidence through middle range theory. The contextual focus on material culture as text was, Hodder argued, distinct from a conventional structuralist focus on language (Hodder 1989). Thus, while contextual archaeology moved strongly away from the idea of ethnoarchaeology, it retained a strong sense of the contemporary nature of archaeological practice: interpreting what remains of the past in the present, working in a different sense from ethnoarchaeology on ‘the present past’ (Hodder 1982a).

Contextual archaeology’s critique of the ahistorical character of the New Archaeology (Hodder 1991a: 12) did not extend to its own reception of structuralism, despite the static nature of structuralist models (Ucko 1995: 14). Instead, contextual archaeology sought to accommodate historical change—clearly so necessary for any meaningful study of the past—through the use of the work of Pierre Bourdieu. The English translation of Bourdieu’s *Outline of a Theory of Practice* had been published in 1977, and called for ‘a debate in archaeology concerning structuralism . . . and its various critiques’ (1982a: 229). Bourdieu’s theory of practice attempted to reconcile structuralist and phenomenological perspectives, and was grounded in the idea of the *habitus*. Bourdieu’s term *habitus* referred to human dispositions gained through living in the material environment, which he understood as central to the reproduction of social structures. This work led Hodder to his definition of the inadequacy of structuralism as a failure to accommodate agency and meaning—‘to develop an adequate theory of practice’ (Hodder 1982a: 8)—rather than a failure to accommodate historical change. Hodder’s use of Bourdieu provided one solution to a perceived inability ‘of both functionalism and structuralism . . . to explain particular historical contexts and the meaningful actions of individuals constructing social change within those contexts’ (Hodder 1982a: 8–9). Historical process was thus accommodated, and ‘long-term change’ read through *Annales* historians’ ideas of ‘the structures of everyday life’ (Braudel 1981), in terms of a changing of contexts, which both shaped and resulted from practice itself (Hodder 1987b).

Accordingly, the first book-length study that applied the principles of contextual archaeology, Ian Hodder’s examination of *The Domestication of Europe* (1990), set out a series of changing structures in Neolithic Europe, which he termed *domus*, *agrios*, and *foris*. This approach directly echoed (but did not cite) Bourdieu’s conceptions *habitus* and unconscious *doxa* (Bourdieu 1977), and explored relationships between cultural and natural material environments. This focus on practice (as generating changing social contexts and new material culture), theories of long-term change, and the analogy of archaeological interpretation with the reading of texts, allowed the contextual archaeology to work with both symbolic and structuralist approaches—but also allowed the persistence of the structuralist analysis of particular artefacts and sites within an overarching chronological narrative, most vividly through the dualistic model of *domus* and *agrios* (Figure 2.8).

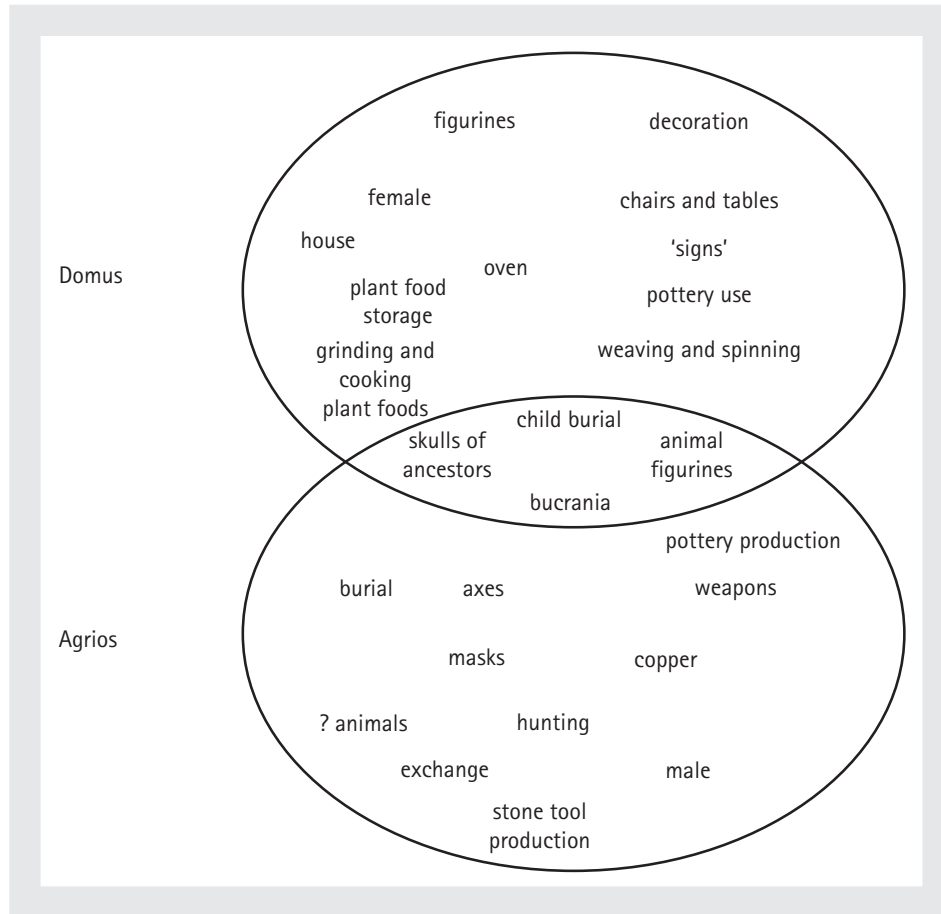


Fig. 2.8 Ian Hodder's model of 'Associations of the domus and agrios in [Neolithic] SE Europe' (from Hodder 1990: 68, figure 3.5).

The Material-Cultural Turn: the anthropology of mass consumption

A third trajectory of thought within the Material-Cultural Turn, which emerged from ethnoarchaeology and the 'symbolic and structural archaeology' of early 1980s Cambridge, was Daniel Miller's conception of 'material culture studies' as a social anthropology of consumption. This focus on consumption was an active inversion of the focus upon production in structural Marxist anthropology, and a complement to the focus on exchange in economic anthropology. It was centred on a Hegelian notion of self-creation. Miller's work in contextual archaeology (1982a, 1982b, 1982c, 1984) and ethnoarchaeology (1985) was now extended into the study of material things in the contemporary West, which was characterized by a gradual,

but active, turning away from archaeology. In his early statement of the potential of an anthropology of material culture, the title of which—‘Things Ain’t What They Used To Be’—indicated how the study of the contemporary world might move away from archaeological studies of past material culture, Miller suggested that studying things might complement the structuralist study of language: ‘Even in anthropology, which prides itself on the subtlety of its enquiry, the basic construction of self and social relations as they are mediated by images in clothes, household furnishings and such like, may be relatively neglected because they are relatively coarsely articulated in language’ (Miller 1983: 6–7).

Anthropological material culture studies was defined from the outset by Miller as an ‘integrative’ field, drawing across disciplines to examine ‘a core relationship between objects and people’ (Miller 1983: 7). The study of material culture was defined as ‘simply the study of human social and environmental relationships through the evidence of people’s construction of their material world’ (Miller 1983: 5). With his 1987 study *Material Culture and Mass Consumption*, Miller used ideas ‘adapted from social archaeology’, which he ‘redefined and theorised to apply to modern society’ (Attfield 2000: 35). The book was read by many as a kind of ‘archaeology of modern life’ (Weatherill 1989: 439). It was published in the Blackwell series ‘Social Archaeology’, just as *Artefacts as Categories* had been published in the Cambridge University Press series ‘New Studies in Archaeology’. But archaeological methods and practice played no role in *Material Culture and Mass Consumption*, due to a dissatisfaction with the continued influence of processual archaeology that had characterized Americanist ‘modern material culture studies’: exemplifying ‘the kind of fetishism to which material culture studies is always prone, when people are superseded as the subject of investigation by objects’ (Miller 1987: 143).

Presenting an alternative vision from such materially focused ‘fetishism’, *Material Culture and Mass Consumption* was instead a highly abstract and theoretical study that responded to the growing literature on the consumption of everyday objects in the modern world, which had developed through the structuralist and semiotic treatment by Roland Barthes (1972 [1957], 1977) and Jean Baudrillard (1983), and especially the anthropological consumption studies developed in Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood’s *The World of Goods* (1979). The study of objects and commodities had, during the 1970s, represented a central theme for the new discipline of ‘cultural studies’: later inspiring studies such as *Doing Cultural Studies*, which focused on the study of the Sony Walkman (Du Gay *et al.* 1997). In such work, the conventional sociological (especially Marxist) focus upon objects only in relation to production and exchange was reversed through the active reception of mass-produced items by consumers. Regardless of the intention or purpose of material goods as manufactured, the world was filled with ongoing, local, and vernacular processes of reinterpretation and appropriation. Miller’s idea was that the archaeological sense of the significance of objects in social life could be developed through a social anthropology that concentrated on ‘the social symbolism of the material world’ (Miller 1987: viii).

The argument of *Material Culture and Mass Consumption* fell across three sections, which related to theories of ‘objectification’, the idea of ‘material culture’, and the anthropological study of ‘mass consumption’.

Miller’s conception of objectification adapted a Hegelian model of the dialectical relationships between subjects and objects. Working through elements of Hegel, Marx, and Simmel, along with anthropologist Nancy Munn’s structuralist study of *Walbiri Iconography* (1973), Miller defined his own concept of objectification as referring to ‘a process of externalization and sublation essential to the development of a given subject’, in which ‘the concrete material object’ was ‘one particular potential medium or vehicle’ (Miller 1987: 85). Through what he described as a ‘violent abstraction’ of the Hegelian theory of the subject, Miller theory of objectification was used to make a more general contribution to anthropological theory, based on the idea that ‘the human subject cannot be considered outside of the material world within which and through which it is constructed’ (Millers 1987: 86, 214).

Miller’s discussion of material culture, which formed the central section of the book, considered ‘the social implications of things’ (1987: 85). It did so through discussion of the communicative dimensions of objects, rather than simply of language (drawing from Piaget’s and Melanie Klein’s stucturalist–psychological and psychoanalytical theories of child development; Miller 1987: 85–98) and through a call for the study of ‘artefacts in their contexts’ (drawing from Gombrich’s studies of design, Erving Goffman’s idea of ‘frame analysis’, and the practice theories of Giddens and Bourdieu; Miller 1987: 98–127) and the structuralist analysis of form and style (Miller 1987: 127–129). Such material culture studies would be distinct from linguistic models, since ‘the physicality of objects makes them much harder than language to extricate from the particular social context in which they operate, and for that reason they pose a particular problem for academic study’ (Miller 1987: 109).

The concluding section of the book was a programmatic statement for the anthropological study of mass consumption, combining ideas drawn from Baudrillard, Hebdige, and especially Bourdieu and Giddens to aim to achieve a ‘balance between objectivist approaches, such as those found in archaeology, and subjectivist approaches, the most extreme of which would be design history’ (Miller 1987: 157). In developing this anthropological ‘theory of seek to consumption’ (Miller 1987: 178), Miller used practice theory to seek to achieve ‘a balance between objectivism and subjectivism’ (1987: 167). He introduced the ideas of ‘object domains’ and the idea of the ‘object world’ (Miller 1987: 158, 166), both of which were terms drawn from Giddens (1984) and which echoed Bourdieu’s description of ‘domains of practice’ created through the *habitus* (Bourdieu 1977: 20).

While the uses of psychology and a dialectical model of objectification drawn from Hegel were idiosyncratic and their implications for understanding the world

were sometimes hard to grasp (Mukerji 1989), *Material Culture and Mass Consumption* made three arguments that were central to British social anthropology's Material-Cultural Turn.

First was Miller's idea of 'the humility of things': the recognition of the influence of apparently banal everyday items, those things 'usually regarded as trivial', upon social life (Miller 1987: 5). Directly echoing James Deetz's evocation of 'small things forgotten' a decade earlier, Miller argued that such objects mediate social relations silently, in a kind of 'ordering of the unconscious world' (Deetz 1977; Miller 1987: 99). The reception of *Artefacts as Categories* in social anthropology had seen the criticism of a lack of ethnographic detail, and concerns over the idea of an archaeological focus on the modern world as simply obsessed with irrelevant detail (Moeran 1987). But Miller's earlier discussions of the 'trivial nature of pottery' (Miller 1985: 204) led him to use an archaeological metaphor—to excavate certain areas of investigation formerly branded as "trivial" or "inauthentic" (Miller 1987: viii)—to explain the distinct challenges and potentials of the study of 'objects in everyday interaction', especially when compared with the study of language (Miller 1987: 98).

Secondly, there was the idea of context in the study of material culture. Here Miller's arguments were developed directly from contextual archaeology, but unlike the cultural focus upon 'text' in the work of Ian Hodder, Miller's perspectives here were closer to Giddens than Bourdieu. Miller used Gombrich's (1979) evocation of the 'anonymous and modest presence' of a picture frame (Miller 1987: 101) and Goffman's (1974) 'frame analysis' to argue that processes of objectification constituted contexts: so the 'pervasive presence' of 'artefacts as objects' could be understood 'as the context for modern life' (Miller 1987: 85). This change in Miller's focus from that of the contextual ethnoarchaeology might be compared with a longer-term shift in anthropological thinking about museum objects: 'from categorical thinking to relational thinking' (Gosden and Larson 2007: 242). In this respect, Miller's approach was much closer to the long-standing focus since structural-functionalism upon the analysis of social relations, rather than types and categories in their own right.

Thirdly, there was the extension of anthropological studies of objects from pre-industrial and non-Western situations into the world of modern industrial capitalism. During the 1960s and 1970s, debates in economic anthropology had been dominated by discussion of the differences between Western and non-Western economies. Arguments over the applicability of Western conceptions of economics to non-Western or precapitalist societies had raised distinction between 'formalist' and 'substantivist' economies, in which material goods were understood to be 'disembedded' from, or 'embedded' in, social structure respectively (Polanyi *et al.* 1957; see Wilk and Cliggett 2007: 3–15). These debates used a long-standing distinction in economic anthropology between 'gifts' and 'commodities', which had underpinned Marcel Mauss' comparative study of *The Gift* (Mauss 1990 [1922]), and

which was grounded in an account of the modern world as engendering a schism between society and economy, *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*. In contrast, Miller's (1987: 17) use of anthropological perspectives to study the modern world was based on the idea that consumption could 'produce an inalienable culture': in other words modern consumers were constantly transforming commodities into things that they used in their own social lives, and thus breaking down any a priori distinction between gifts and commodities.

Here, in contrast with conventional Leftist accounts of the rise of capitalism as alienating, and their focus on production, Daniel Miller's decision 'to investigate, and to assess the consequences of the enormous increase in industrial production over the last century' (1987: 1) led him to highlight the productive nature of consumption, as it were. Critiques of capitalism, he argued, should not lead to 'a critique of mass industrial culture *per se*, which has had the effect of stifling any positive advocacy of a potential popular alternative which remains within the context of industrial culture' (Miller 1987: 176). Thus, *Material Culture and Mass Consumption* made an important contribution to conceptions of the modern that did not use grand narratives of disenchantment (via Weber) or alienation (via Marx).

Material Culture and Mass Consumption's call for a new social anthropology of consumption contributed to a general rise in consumption studies in sociology, geography, history, and cultural studies during the 1980s and early 1990s (McKendrick *et al.* 1983; Mintz 1985; Campbell 1987; Brewer and Porter 1993). In his edited volume *Acknowledging Consumption* (Miller 1995a), Daniel Miller presented his perspectives as shifting away from the study of 'the category of "material culture"', which links anthropology 'with archaeological concerns', towards a new 'category of consumption studies'. Miller argued that this development represented a 'transformation of anthropology' because it extended anthropological ideas into the modern world, as an 'authentic' object of study (1995b: 263, 268).

Miller's suggestion that the extension of anthropological perspectives into the modern world was radically new was overstated. The ethnoarchaeology of early 1980s Britain had represented the extension of two long-standing traditions of 'auto-anthropology'. One was the folklife studies that developed, especially in museums, during the 1880s (Jackson 1985), at precisely the same time as the emergence of new studies of technology described at the start of this chapter, which continued throughout the first half of the twentieth century. The other was a subsequent post-war 'sociological rediscovery of British society from the 1950s', much of which 'was made by people trained in social anthropology' (Hawthorn 1972), and which built to some degree upon the establishment in 1937 of 'Mass Observation' as a kind of anthropology of modern life undertaken by amateur researchers, combining surrealism with popular anthropology (MacClancy 1995; cf. Miller 1988: 356). UCL-based anthropologists had played a significant role in these post-war developments (e.g. Firth *et al.* 1970), which related especially to a conception of 'applied' anthropology as a relevant part of the discipline (Goody 1995: 74).

In the structural Marxist anthropology of the 1970s, Maurice Godelier's (1975) critique of empiricism was grounded in a commitment to a historical perspective that used a common set of ethnographic approaches to non-Western and to Western situations, and the different forms that 'production' might take. Meanwhile, despite the continuing use of the gift/commodity distinction in some Marxist anthropology (Gregory 1982), anthropological studies of exchange increasingly questioned the firm distinction between gifts and commodities (Strathern 1988; Gell 1992a). As will be seen below, this latter work led to the questioning of the a priori differences between subjects and objects in social anthropological research.

However, the focus of anthropological material culture studies as it developed after *Material Culture and Mass Consumption*, especially through the radical shift away from archaeological approaches, came to be upon 'ideas about what people do with objects, essentially as a theory of culture rather than material culture' (Rowlands 2004: 477). This focus on the meaningful use of material things in social relationships, rather than upon their detailed empirical examination, was characterized by a latent structuralism that anthropological material culture studies shared with the contextual archaeology. This framed the development of the 'high period' of British material culture studies during the 1990s.

III: THE 'HIGH PERIOD' OF MATERIAL CULTURE STUDIES

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The third phase of the archaeological sequence identified here is one of rapid and self-confident construction, built on foundations laid in earlier periods: the 'high period' of 'material culture studies' in British archaeology and anthropology. With the publication of *Interpreting Archaeology: finding meaning in the past* in 1995 (based on a conference held at Cambridge in 1991) and the launch of the *Journal of Material Culture*, edited from UCL, in 1996, the ideas that had emerged in the Material-Cultural Turn were put into practice (Hodder *et al.* 1995a; Miller and Tilley 1996). Both interpretive archaeology and material culture studies witnessed the emergence of book-length studies: especially works by Ian Hodder (1990), Julian Thomas (1991a) and John Barrett (1994) in archaeology; and in anthropology Daniel Miller's (1994, 1997, 1998a) studies in Trinidad and North London and a growing number of contributions to the 'Materializing Culture' series published by Berg since 1998. By understanding objects as 'cultural forms' (Miller 1987: 110), this work built upon the identification of the different contextual uses of material culture in social life that had been highlighted by the contributions to Arjun Appadurai's seminal collection *The Social Life of Things* (Appadurai 1986a; Kopytoff 1986).

The use of detailed case studies in these works, based on ethnographic and archaeological fieldwork, contrasted with older concerns with style and design that derived from the study of objects in isolation from their social uses (Conkey 2006: 356–359). However, the exchanges between archaeology and anthropology in ethnoarchaeology that led to a common adoption of elements of practice theory and the bringing together of structuralist and interpretive approaches, gave way during the early 1990s to a radical difference between anthropological and archaeological material culture studies in Britain.

Having shifted away from the New Archaeology's concerns with method, and disillusioned with the results of ethnoarchaeology, British archaeologists and anthropologists who identified themselves as working on 'material culture studies' came to define their field by its object of enquiry: 'material culture'. However, their fieldwork was conducted in different spheres: the material dimensions of the contemporary world on the one side, and the remains of the prehistoric past on the other. A model of radical alterity emerged in archaeological discussions of 'theory and practice' (Hodder 1992) in the definition of archaeology as a kind of distanced *interpretation*. For example, the extension of interpretive archaeology into the modern period was understood as requiring the making of the familiar unfamiliar, to allow interpretation to take place (Tarlow and West 1999). Meanwhile anthropological material culture studies worked in the opposite direction: bringing ethnographic methods developed for the study of non-Western societies to bear upon the modern Western world: problematizing any general distinction between the modern and the premodern/non-Western, but dispensing with earlier discussions of method.

During the 1990s, British post-processual archaeology developed a series of new studies informed by the idea that 'material culture is actively involved in the social world' (Shanks and Tilley 1987b: 116–117). Michael Shanks and Chris Tilley sought to shift back and forth between 'cultural' and 'social' approaches. In their 1987 study *Social Theory and Archaeology*, the chapter about 'material culture' asked 'two basic questions' about objects: 'First, how do we interpret material culture; what meaning, if any, does it possess? Secondly, how does material culture patterning relate to the social?' (Shanks and Tilley 1987b: 79).

The idea of interpretation was used to define archaeology as a process of revealing the implication of material culture in human meaning and social relations. Thus, the title of the introduction to *Interpreting Archaeology* was 'Archaeology and the interpretation of material culture: a report on the state of the discipline' (Hodder *et al.* 1995b: 1). The empirical focus was, however, almost exclusively upon the study of prehistory, especially Neolithic and Bronze Age Europe (and especially Britain). The rural locations of the sites and landscapes studied were just like the periods of time that were focused upon: as far away as possible from the modern world, and thus from the material studied by anthropological material culture studies. The purpose of interpretive archaeology was thus to 'attend to difference' (Shanks and Hodder 1995: 9). On those occasions on which

the modern period was studied by post-processual archaeologists (e.g. Johnson 1996), no connections with socio-cultural anthropology were made.

In British anthropology, the effect of associating the movement of anthropological perspectives into the modern western world with a simultaneous movement away from archaeological perspectives was an isolation of the study of modern material culture from the potential archaeological contribution to the study of the modern period and the contemporary world (Hicks and Beaudry 2006b): despite the influence of James Deetz's historical archaeology upon the development of British anthropological material culture studies (Miller 1982c: 96; 1987: 140–142). The concerns with the empiricism or fetishism of archaeology were, however, concerns quite specifically with the New Archaeology, which had dominated both ethnoarchaeology and Americanist modern material culture studies in the early 1980s. Despite the archaeological training of those who developed anthropological material culture studies (Miller 1980; Tilley 1981), the twin directions of the Material-Cultural Turn—post-processual/interpretive archaeology and the anthropology of consumption—were parallel, rather than overlapping. This meant that the potential for exchanges between archaeological and anthropological perspectives in the study of the material dimensions of the modern world were not explored (Cochran and Beaudry 2006).

The significance of practice theory for both fields was considerable. However the anthropological material culture studies played Giddens to interpretive archaeology's Bourdieu: echoing Giddens' critique of the 'concern with "meaning" to the exclusion of the practical involvements of human life in material activity' in interpretive sociology and ethnomethodology (Giddens 1976a: 155; see Giddens 1976b). This distinction between 'cultural' and 'social' models of practice theory formed the basis of John Barrett's critique of Ian Hodder's conception of contextual archaeology from a structuration perspective:

Archaeologists do not enter into a dialogue with the people they study, but our obligations to those people do remain. Can we really claim to be able to understand how they saw their world? This seems both dubious and unnecessary. Instead we can learn something, through the surviving evidence, of how their knowledge was gained in the routine practices by which they lived their lives.

Barrett (1987a: 472)

Barrett (1987b) called for a shift from a focus on archaeological material culture as text to the idea of 'fields of discourse'. He argued for a distinctive archaeological reorientation of the nature of 'structure' in Giddens' model of agency and structure, which more adequately accounted for 'material conditions':

Giddens has stated that 'structure exists only as memory traces' meaning, I take it, that action draws initially upon, and is guided in anticipation by, the subject's memory of previous experience. Important although this point is, an equal, if not greater, emphasis must be placed upon the particular material conditions within which social practices are situated.

Barrett (1987b: 8)

Meanwhile Bourdieu's focus on the lived domestic environment, most famously explored in his 1970 structuralist study of the Algerian Kabyle house, which described the lived environment as structured by a series of binary oppositions experienced through domestic life (Bourdieu 1990), was significant in the particular range of field sites or 'artefactual domains' (Miller 1998b: 10) chosen for the new anthropological material culture studies. The domestic home was pre-eminent among these (Miller 1988, 2001b, 2006a: 348–349, 2008), as 'the context in which most other material culture is used, placed and understood' (Buchli 2002b: 207; cf. Humphrey 1988). Alongside the home, anthropological material culture studies in this period focused especially upon supermarkets (Miller 1998c; Miller *et al.* 1998), domestic gardens, catalogue shopping (Clarke 1998), party selling, car boot sales, private cars, and clothing as well as the consumption of heritage at museums and historic sites (Rowlands 1998). In a related body of work, the anthropological study of artworks was increasingly understood as focusing on 'visual culture' (Pinney 2006: 131), building on studies such as Howard Morphy's engagement with Yolngu (Australian aboriginal) art, which used ethnography to examine the social contexts in which artworks were created, used, and understood: an approach that he argued could highlight the ambiguity consciously brought about through non-representational art forms (Morphy 1991; cf. Layton 1991: 1).

The attraction of material culture studies to such themes has been criticized as providing uncritical accounts of '[Western] teenagers, home-makers and shoppers', in which anthropologists operate 'like flâneurs or tourists . . . not in the world, [but] only gazing out at it', while readers find themselves 'drifting through a symbolic forest or watching an exhibition of signs and messages' (Löfgren 1997: 102–103). Tim Ingold (2007b: 316) has argued that these choices of field sites, and especially the 'twin obsession with museums and department stores', limited material culture studies to places in which things are ordered in quite specific ways: where 'we confront things as objects'. This, however, was precisely the point that these works were making: that anthropology can examine contemporary processes of objectification, the social processes through which people come to define and understand things as objects. The narrative here usually concerned the enrolment of commodities into social relationships: most clearly stated in Miller's (1998c) 'theory of shopping' in which the idea of 'sacrifice' was seen as a creative rather than a destructive process. Here, Miller followed Alfred Gell's observation that

Very recognizable forms of consumption . . . may mislead us into making the false equation 'consumption equals destruction' because on these occasions meat, liquor and other valued substances are made to vanish. But consumption as a general phenomenon really has nothing to do with the destruction of goods and wealth but their reincorporation into the social system that produced them in some other guise.

Gell (1986: 112)

Miller's work on shopping also involved a collaboration between anthropology and cultural geography in a study of the Brent Cross shopping centre in North London

to identify ‘the investment in social relationships that takes place during the apparently mundane work of shopping’ (Miller *et al.* 1998: 23). In such views, the consumer’s decision to purchase one item of grocery rather than another could represent evidence of quite intimate social relationships: ‘making love in supermarkets’ by transforming the can of soup, purchased to be shared at home, into part of a loving relationship (Miller 1998b, 1998c), viewing consumption as a ‘technology of love’ (Miller 2006a: 350), and studying the anthropology of ‘thrift’ in which ‘the desire to save money arise principally out of the moral imperative which dominates ordinary shopping, where the shopper stands for the interests of family and household’ (Miller 2003: 362).

Similarly, global processes involving apparently homogenized cultures of commodities were shown to involve quite distinctive local enactments: as with Daniel Miller’s identification of Coca-Cola as ‘a black sweet drink made in Trinidad’ (Miller 1998a). This focus on the place that mass-produced commodities can play in particular social relations facilitated, Miller argued, a ‘transformation of anthropology’ in that it broke down ‘an explicit, or even implicit, culture concept as a definitional premise of anthropology’ (Miller 1995b: 264) through an awareness of the active role of material culture in social life (cf. Lucas 2001a: 121–122). These were powerful and important arguments that moved away from an anthropological conception of society as purified of everyday things. However, as is explored in the next section, more recently this breaking down of the culture concept has spilled over into the material culture concept itself.

IV: THE UNFOLDING OF MATERIAL CULTURE STUDIES

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The process of excavation often identifies moments of recurrence and similarity in the ways in which particular landscapes have been inhabited and reconfigured in different periods. In this sequence of disciplinary thinking and practice from the 1970s to the 1990s, we might suggest that the *fin-de-siècle* optimism over the study of ‘object domains’ during the ‘high period’ of material culture studies echoed the confidence of Tylor’s arguments about ‘object lessons’ a century before. This time, however, it sought to fulfil the long-standing modernist ambition of British anthropology to become a comparative sociology. This was precisely the ambition that had replaced the museum collection with ethnographic participant observation as the subject of enquiry 80 years previously. Material culture studies’ model of objectivism—for example, in the aspiration for ‘a theory of consumption’ (Miller 1987: 178–217)—involved a critique of the culture concept ‘as a definitional premise

of anthropology' (Miller 1995b: 265): focusing instead upon vernacular practices in which people enrolled objects in social relations. Gradually, however, the responses to calls for a focus upon material culture as 'the least understood of all the central phenomena of the modern age' (Miller 1987: 217) started to reveal the programme of material culture studies as itself an artefact of modernist thought (*sensu* Ardener 1985). Central here has been the emergence of the strangely abstract, dematerialized quality of many material culture studies, in which things appear to disappear into spectral fields of social relations or meanings, and the complexities of materials and their change over time are not accounted for. While material culture studies had turned away from archaeology, and had been isolated from historical anthropology, it was in these fields that the narratives told by material culture studies started to unfold.

Humanism and positionality

The lasting successes of the 'high period' of material culture studies lay for anthropology in the acknowledgement of the potential significance of objects in human social relations, especially those objects that appear banal or inconsequential: providing a sense of the unspoken things that constitute the everyday dimensions of social life that have become especially important in sociology through the work of writers such as Michel de Certeau (1984; cf. Highmore 2002). Such an approach placed the everyday—or 'the blindingly obvious'—at the centre of the analysis (Miller and Woodward 2007: 337–339). For archaeology, these successes involved new contributions to a long-standing humanistic perspective in archaeology: the desire to get past things to people that had been expressed throughout the second half of the twentieth century, even, for example, in the words of Mortimer Wheeler (1954: v): 'The archaeologist is digging up not *things* but people... In a simple direct sense, archaeology is a science that must be lived, must be "seasoned with humanity". Dead archaeology is the driest stuff that blows.'

The Material-Cultural Turn problematized the study of the socio-cultural and the material in isolation from each other. Its solution was to document how they were 'related', so as 'to transcend subject–object dualities' (Miller and Tilley 1996: 7) created by the modern world. Material culture studies documented, to use the standard parlance, 'relational' processes (Miller 2007: 25): that is, it was concerned with the relationships between objects and people. The physical form of things was thus reduced to a distinctive kind of conduit for social relations, which were the proper object of enquiry:

An analysis of an artefact must begin with its most obvious characteristic, which is that it exists as a physically concrete form independent of any individual's mental image of it. This factor may provide the key to understanding its power and significance in cultural construction. The importance of this physicality of the artefact derives from its ability thereby

to act as a bridge, not only between the mental and physical worlds, but also, more unexpectedly, between consciousness and the unconscious.

Miller (1987: 99)

The heuristic distinction between materials and culture implied by the use of the term ‘material culture’ was justified through the idea of objectification (Miller 1987): the argument that under the conditions of capitalism and/or modernity, distinctions between objects and people are made. In this view, ‘capitalism splits culture and person apart into commodities separated from their intrinsic person-making capacities, and the illusion of pure humanism outside of materiality’ (Miller 2005a: 17). Similarly, Julian Thomas argued that archaeology needed actively to reconnect across a Newtonian ‘separation between the human and non-human worlds, culture and nature [which has] provided the principal basis for ordering collections of material things’ (Thomas 2004: 26). In practice, a focus on relatedness or ‘relationality’ sought to avoid what was understood as a long-standing tendency, identified especially in archaeology and museum studies, to become ‘obsessed with objects as such, . . . treating them as having an independent behaviour in a manner which separated them from any social context and which amounted to a genuine fetishism of the artefact’ (Miller 1987: 111–112; cf. Miller 1990).

But a further problem—that of the distinctions between the researcher as subject and the object of enquiry—has called into question the sure-footedness of material culture studies as a modernist, representational project, working with the remnants of comparative sociology, and applied structuralism. A gradual unfolding of the idea of ‘material culture studies’ took place. The humanism of the Material-Cultural Turn—anthropology’s ‘translating objects into people’ (Miller 1985: ix) or archaeology’s ‘fleshing out in cultural terms of the basic data’ (Deetz 1967: 138)—came to form the basis for critiques of normative conceptions of human identity, especially in relation to gender (Gilchrist 1994), sexuality (Voss 2008a), ethnicity (Jones 1997), and life-course (Gilchrist 2004), and the slow development of third-wave feminist perspectives in archaeology (Gilchrist 1999). The political engagement of feminist and gender archaeology, and of movements such as the World Archaeological Congress (Ucko 1987) and developments in indigenous archaeology, African-American historical archaeology and museum anthropology, meant that in interpretive archaeology issues of the *positionality* of the researcher studying material culture were interrogated. At first this was worked out through the ideas of ‘critical reflexivity’ or ‘self-reflexive archaeology’ (Shanks and Tilley 1992: 62; Hodder 1997), but increasingly it has developed into critiques of the way in which the Material-Cultural Turn in both archaeology and anthropology sought to stand upon that non-existent hyphen in ‘material culture studies’, so as to document traffic between two different domains, the material and the socio-cultural, while remaining detached from them both.

The risk was ever-present that detailed ethnographies of consumption (e.g. Miller 1994) or large-scale studies of the use of material culture over the long

term (Hodder 1990) would give way to the uncritical presentation of appropriate case studies in what Max Gluckman would have called the ‘apt illustration’ of particular models of social relations (Gluckman 1961: 7). This is what George Marcus has identified as a tendency to allow social theory to ‘stand in for the macro-social’, with which ‘micro-cultural analysis’ might then be related (Marcus 2000: 17), as if these two scales of analysis operated in different worlds. Material culture studies narrated objects in particular ways. In social anthropology, the emplotment was often the appropriation of modern, apparently ‘alienable’ goods through consumption to transform them into ‘inalienable’ items, for instance through household DIY (Miller 1988). In archaeology, the story usually involved the identification of artefact patterning as evidence of human social relations and ‘traditions of practice’ in which, it was asserted, a meaningful material world played a significant role, through ‘ritual practice’ for example (Thomas 1991a: 80–84, 187). Clearly in both cases, the focus upon human practices in relation to the material world was a long way from the identification of normative cultures or cultural behaviours reflected in artefacts. But what was at stake here was the uses to which social theory and linguistic analogy are put in archaeology and anthropology. Through a residual structuralism, the richness and complexity of the knowledge that derives from fieldwork was often reduced to the illustration of particular models of ‘the material constitution of social relations’ (Miller and Tilley 1996: 5; see Pinney 2005): looking from an impossible vantage-point between materials and culture, erasing any trace of standpoint (which includes not only the researcher, but the complex human and material practices that all fieldwork involves). Knowledge of material culture appeared to emerge from somewhere outside of the ethnographic situation.

Hermeneutic phenomenology

One solution to this problem of standpoint and positionality has been the distinctive kind of hermeneutic phenomenology developed in archaeological and anthropological material culture studies. Such approaches have sought to locate the lived, bodily experience of the world at the centre of the interpretation of the material world, and to relocate the focus of material culture studies upon concrete human experience. Chris Tilley and Julian Thomas have, since the early 1990s, led the way in this field, through studies of the monumental landscapes of British and Scandinavian Neolithic and Bronze Age. Using ideas from Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Lefebvre, Thomas (1993, 1996, 2000a, 2000b, 2006) and Tilley (1994, 1996, 2006b) have tried to account for the bodily, meaningful, thoughtful, and reflective encounters between humans and the non-human world.

Tilley has sought to build upon the literary and linguistic analogy of material culture studies that lay at the heart of the contextual archaeology, and which he explored through studies such as *Reading Material Culture* (1990a), *Material Culture and Text* (1991), and *Material Culture and Metaphor* (1999), and his definition of interpretive archaeology as a kind of ‘poetics of the past’ (1993). He has continued to explore the idea that emerged in the 1970s of material culture studies as analogous, but not reducible, to the study of language: the idea that ‘artefacts perform active metaphorical work in the world in a manner that words cannot’ (Tilley 2002: 25). In contrast to the use of abstract models that New Archaeology’s conception of ‘spatial archaeology’ had borrowed from 1960s New Geography (Clarke 1977), Tilley has developed ‘a phenomenological perspective linked to a concept of materiality’ (Tilley 2007a: 19) that seeks to account for the embodied experience of landscapes as material culture:

From a phenomenological perspective landscape is ‘platial’ rather than ‘spatial’. It is not something defined by space as an abstract container but by the places that constitute it and make it what it is. Landscape thus sits in places, is a reflexive ‘gathering’ and set of relations between those places, background and foreground, figure and frame, here and there, near and far. Landscape is thus always both objective physical place and a subjective cognized image of that place.

Tilley (2006b: 20)

For Thomas, the significance of phenomenological approaches lies in their ability to move beyond modern distinctions between nature and culture in archaeology (Thomas 1996: 3). By studying barrows, cairns, megalithic tombs, and other sites and monuments from British prehistory, this branch of material culture studies has been ‘concerned with the human encounter, experience and understanding of worldly things, and with how these happenings come to be possible’ (Thomas 2006: 43).

In practice, however, it is very difficult to comprehend what these accounts have added to our understanding of the prehistoric past or contemporary heritage landscapes. The two-way encounter between the human body and the landscape, focused on interpretation and the representation of meaning, has retained much of what Tilley (1982: 26) described as the ‘dialectical structuralism’ of contextual archaeology. Too often, hermeneutic phenomenology has descended into a hyper-interpretive romanticism, most vividly in the study of the Bronze Age landscape of Leskernick in Cornwall, which combined photo-essays with fragments of diary entries, snatches of conversation, poetry writing, and forms of ‘archaeological artworks’ (Bender *et al.* 2007; see Hicks 2009).

In their privileging of human experience and cognition these texts have produced strangely dematerialized, reflective accounts of the world, resorting to the human body as a stable point of reference in precisely the same way as the idea of ‘material culture’ has been used: to stand impossibly between alternative domains

in order to represent the world. Human bodies, of course, are just as diverse as material things: and the principal critiques of phenomenological perspectives have come from feminist studies of embodiment (see Crossland this volume, Chapter 16). The positionality and perspective of the researcher remains an unresolved problem because the purpose of archaeology and anthropology remains defined in hermeneutic phenomenology as *interpreting and representing* the socio-cultural dimensions of the material world. In the politics of archaeology and of museum anthropology, objects are not straightforwardly involved in social relations or contested meanings: the actions of the researcher or curator, working within particular disciplinary, institutional, or historical circumstances or accidents, are always involved (Hodder 2004). The same, of course, is true for vernacular practice as for academic practice. Here two broader problems with British archaeological and anthropological material culture studies are made clear: a disregard for the significance of method, and a strong presentism, even in relation to the prehistoric past.

Meanwhile, the definition of the purpose of material culture studies as representing meaning or social relations has seen more successful critiques, which have been central to the process of unfolding, especially in relation to discussions of materiality and material agency, as the next section shows.

Meaning, materiality, and material agency

The shift beyond contextual and interpretive archaeology has increasingly led to a reconsideration of the limitations of the analogy of things with texts, which had allowed for the persistence of the structuralist definition of material culture studies as a complementary field of enquiry to the study of language. The textual metaphor in contextual archaeology, and the focus on human meaning as the ultimate object of enquiry in interpretive archaeology, built on a long-standing sense that the material evidence of the past was for British prehistory an equivalent of a historical text (Lucas 2001a: 111), which could be used to generate accounts of the human past. The idea of the landscape as a text had in the mid-twentieth century been associated especially with the explicitly counter-modern model of 'local history' developed by writers, such as W. G. Hoskins (1955) in his idea of the English landscape as a vulnerable 'palimpsest' wrought through centuries of human life (Hicks 2008a). The romanticism of these approaches, grounded in a counter-modern sensibility of the past as radically different from the present, informed many of the British models of 'interpretive archaeology': that of especially hermeneutic phenomenology (Hodder 2004).

The textual analogy, and the explicit idea of archaeology following a broader interdisciplinary 'linguistic turn' (Thomas 1991b: 9), led to an increasing

dematerialization as contextual archaeology developed into interpretive archaeology. Such approaches were informed by particular bodies of literary theory (Tilley 1990a), the logic of which was that ‘there is nothing outside the text’ (Thomas 1990: 19), since ‘space is like a page on which human action writes’ (Thomas 1991b: 9) and the study of material culture involved the same critical awareness as any kind of reading (Hodder 1986). In such work, material culture studies became, as Evans-Pritchard wrote of functionalist anthropology, ‘little more than a literary device’ (1950: 120). But a number of archaeologists have argued that the physical form of things, and in particular their durability, presents particular problems for the textual analogy: paralleling the observation from cultural geography that ‘objects do far more than represent’ (Thrift 2007: 239). These arguments have often been developed in terms of a shift from the study of ‘material culture’ to that of ‘materiality’—a word that attempts to move away from the idea of a separation between different material and cultural domains, and to accommodate the material form of things.

As Ian Hodder argued two decades ago, ‘perhaps because material culture is often more practical and less immediately concerned with abstract meaning, the meanings it does have are often non-discursive’ (1991b: 73). Victor Buchli took this argument forward in his suggestion that ‘the trouble with text’ in contextual archaeology lay in the ‘constituted and evocative physicality’ of material culture (1995: 191). Buchli’s argument was paralleled by Webb Keane’s (1997) discussion of semiotics, representation, and material culture in relation to Indonesian ethnography, which demonstrated how any account of meaning and materials must account for the refraction that occurs through material things. This growing awareness of the importance of ‘the very physicality of objects’ (Rowlands 2004: 478), has led to an increased interest in the physical properties and effects of materials.

For some, this has inspired the use of Peircean semiotics to highlight the contingency of how certain objects come to hold certain meanings (see discussion by Jones 2009: 95–96), an idea that develops earlier recognitions of the ‘resistance’ of material culture to being freighted with meaning (Shanks and Tilley 1989: 5). This moves beyond the observation that the passing of an object between different ‘regimes of value’ means that meanings are contingent on social contexts (Appadurai 1986b), by suggesting that certain physical or functional properties of objects also define how they are understood, and how they operate in social life (see Gell 1996b). Equally, however, such arguments highlight how such properties of things might be understood as non-discursive: falling outside of a focus upon ‘reading’ material culture, and beyond the limits of a purely ‘interpretive’ archaeology, concerned *only* with ‘finding meaning in the past’ (Hodder *et al.* 1995a) or the idea that material culture represents a form of metaphor (Tilley 1999).

More radically, others have pointed to the many materials in the world that require archaeological and anthropological attention, but which are not just those

things that ‘matter’ to humans that are highlighted by mainstream material culture studies (e.g. Miller 2001a) or a reflexive interpretive archaeology (e.g. Hodder 1999). Things can matter, we might suggest, even when people do not say that they matter. The human significance of meaningful ‘material culture’ is, of course, a crucial element of accounting for the material world: but the physicality of things calls into question the idea of ‘material culture’ as an excessively anthropocentric definition of the field of enquiry: delimited by those moments in which things are meaningful or filled with cultural significance. At the same time, the idea of materiality risks slipping into the idea of kind of universal quality of material-ness that is even more abstract than the idea of material culture (Ingold 2007a).

Approaches to what material things ‘do’, rather than just what they mean or how they are ‘entangled’ in social relationships (Thomas 1991) require a more adequate account of the role of the material dimensions of the world in social life than, for example, a Foucauldian notion of the ‘material constraint’ of architecture would provide (Foucault 1977b: 67; Foucault and Rabinow 1984). But the consequences or effects of things clearly require us to move beyond imagining social life as worked out in an isomorphic world of stuff. The efficacy of things relates to material durability, as explored above, but also to the effects of residuality (Lucas 2008; Miller 2001a: 109–111; Olivier 2001), decay (Kühler 2002b; DeSilvey 2006), destruction (Colorado-Mansfeld 2003), rarity (Pels 1998), fragmentation (Chapman 2000a), and the situations in which the enchantment or dazzling effects of the material world lead to ‘stoppages’ (Gosden 2006: 430; Gell 1992b; cf. Coote 1992; Saunders 1999) or particular engagements of the human senses (Jones and MacGregor 2002; Edwards *et al.* 2006) and the affective charge of things. Daniel Miller (2001a: 119–120) has expressed similar effects through the term ‘possession’—how ownership of objects can also lead to the ‘possession’ of humans by objects in social situations that exist within ‘networks of agents that include both animate and inanimate forms’. Following Miller we could term such effects ‘the consequences of materiality’ (Miller 2005a: 3): foregrounding ‘a concern with how the material world is manifest’ and ‘the transformative processes that shape the material world’ (Buchli 2004: 183).

The awareness of the limitations of the textual analogy that developed from a new attention to the physicality of things might at first glance appear to be in keeping with Giddens’ critique of hermeneutics, as expressed in archaeology by the papers by John Barrett (1987a, 1987b) discussed above. This would lead us back to a consideration of the relationships between ‘structure’ and ‘agency’, which has stood for so long in the background of the dialectical model of ‘material culture studies’. But more radical critique of the idea of material culture has emerged from a loose body of thought that has sought to combine elements of the hermeneutic phenomenology described above with perspectives from Bruno Latour’s conception of ANT, as it has emerged since the early 1990s after social constructivism (Latour 2005a; see Law this volume, Chapter 6).

These arguments have typically begun with the assertion that material culture studies have somehow ‘forgotten’ about things: ‘moved away from things’ materiality and subsumed themselves to hegemonic antimaterial and social constructivist theories’ (Olsen 2003: 88). Several writers, especially from an archaeological perspective, have called for a new focusing upon things, asserting that the discipline of archaeology represents ‘the discipline of things *par excellence*’ (Olsen 2003: 89). Most recently such arguments have taken place under the banner of a ‘symmetrical archeology’, a term inspired by Bruno Latour’s early accounts of ANT (Olsen 2007; Witmore 2007; Webmoor and Witmore 2008; see Latour 1993a). They have also, however, led to Daniel Miller and others responding to the work of ANT by replacing the term ‘material culture’ with ‘materiality’ (Miller 2005a), and to Tim Ingold arguing for a focus upon ‘materials’ rather than some generalized essence of ‘materiality’ (Ingold 2007b).

The significance of ANT for material culture studies lies mainly in its theory of agency, which it suggests—in an extension of this concept beyond the human actors that we would encounter in structuration theory for example—is a property of ‘non-humans’ as well as humans. This is a more radical argument than the more light-touch ethnographic sense of the use of objects in human social relations, and it involves a questioning of conventional Durkheimian models of the social (as excessively anthropocentric). Latour has famously suggested that the most important part of the name ‘ANT’ is the hyphen between the ‘actor’ and the ‘network’ (Latour 1999a). In its reception of ANT, the unhyphenated field of material culture studies has been pressed, therefore, to examine quite what it might mean when it refers to the existence of ‘relations’ between the material and cultural worlds: since ANT seems to some to be effectively ‘reinventing the very subject [of anthropological material culture studies]’ (Miller 2005b: 3), through ‘an extension . . . of approaches to objectification that arise out of dialectical theory’ (Miller 2001a: 119, 2005a: 12). But for ANT, relations are not simply bilateral: they are much more far-ranging networks that emerge through the actions of both humans and non-humans.

The reception of ANT thinking was slow in anthropological material culture studies (Miller 2005a; but see Boast 1996; Miller 2002), but aspects of it were clearly directly developed (although never cited) in Alfred Gell’s (1998) study *Art and Agency: an anthropological theory*, perhaps read especially through the arguments of Marilyn Strathern (1996) and Robin Boast (1996). Gell (1992b) developed a line of thought about the social use, rather than the aesthetic content, of artworks as distinctive items of ‘technology’, the powers of which served to ‘enchant’. He likened his approach to the ‘methodological atheism’ adopted by anthropologists studying religion: in the same way, studying artworks required a ‘methodological philistinism’ (Gell 1992b), focused on the work that artworks do in social life, rather than what they mean. In an account of the use of artworks by social actors (‘art as a system of action’; Gell 1998: 6), Gell argued that artworks, and by extension

other items of material culture, could be used to extend or distribute human social agency: a model that also drew from Peircian ideas of ‘abduction’ and Strathernian ideas of ‘distributed personhood’ (Strathern 1988; Jones 2009: 95–97). This shift from what artworks mean to what they do wove a Latourian sense of the powers of things together with an anthropological account of social relations in a tradition that drew from Mauss’ study of the gift (Küchler 2002a: 59). Unlike ANT, Gell’s argument did not extend agency to non-humans, but instead suggested that objects could be deployed by social actors as secondary agents: ‘indexes’ of human agency.

While Gell’s argument has been critiqued from a number of perspectives (Layton 2003; Leach 2007; Morphy 2009), the influence of his book and of ANT has combined in archaeology with the extension of the discussion of the idea of ‘agency’ as it is theorized in practice theory (e.g. Dobres and Robb 2000a) away from ‘a human-centred view of agents and artefacts’ through the idea of ‘material agency’ (Knappett and Malafouris 2008a: ix). Using the more radical extension of agency beyond humans presented by Latour, and presenting a critique of archaeological uses of practice theory as failing to acknowledge the influence of material things, this work argues that ‘no distinctions between human and non-human entities can be sustained in terms of agency’ (Knappett and Malafouris 2008a: xii; cf. Knappett 2002). In a similar approach, Nicole Boivin (2008) has built on the discussions of the physicality of things outlined above to combine the shift away from the textual analogy of contextual archaeology towards a Gellian model of ‘material agency’.

The idea of material agency has been critiqued by anthropologist Tim Ingold, as part of his concerns about the ideas of material culture and ‘materiality’. In the ‘materiality debate’ between Ingold and Miller (Ingold 2007a, 2007b, 2007d; D. Miller 2007), Ingold has built on his earlier complaints that the very idea of material culture studies relied upon ‘the Cartesian ontology . . . that divorces the activity of the mind from that of the body in the world’ (2000a: 165):

In the extensive archaeological and anthropological literature on material culture . . . [t]he emphasis is almost entirely upon issues of meaning and form—that is, on culture as *opposed* to materiality. Understood as a realm of discourse, meaning and value inhabiting the collective consciousness, culture is conceived to hover above the material world but not to permeate it.

Ingold (2000a: 341)

Ingold has argued that the idea of ‘materiality’ (e.g. Miller 2005a) has tried to do in one word what material culture did in two—to express relationships between two different worlds or domains, the social world and the object world—while material agency simply reorients these anthropocentric relationships. Ingold’s alternative to models of material agency is to see ‘things in life’ rather than ‘life in things’, to avoid anthropological archaeology ‘turning to stone’ by understanding material culture in purely abstract, sociological, or literary terms (Ingold 2005:

122). Ingold (2007b, 2007d) argues that the ideas of ‘materiality’ and ‘objectness’ only emerge as a question or a problem from an academic practice that

in its isolation of the object, necessarily ruptures the flows of materials by which it came into being. It is as though the world came ready-made, already precipitated out of the currents, mixtures and transmutations of materials through which it was formed. To follow the materials, by contrast, is to enter a world-in-formation. In this work, things do not appear, in the first instance, as bounded objects, set over against their surroundings, but rather as specific confluences of materials that, for a moment at least, have mixed and melded together into recognisable forms.

Ingold (2007b: 314–315)

Ingold’s alternative, however, is simply another account of networks and relations, which he calls a ‘meshwork of interwoven substances’ (2007c: 35). Ingold’s approach, which we might call, for lack of a better term, ‘meshwork studies’, maintains the integrity of those elements that interact across this ‘meshwork’ is through his resistance of the idea of ‘hybridity’, because such a concept presupposes the existence of two distinct forms prior to mixing, or hybridization (2008: 211). Ingold’s critique of the uses of ANT in material culture studies is grounded in his concept of ‘meshwork’, which inspires an alternative and contrapuntal acronym—the web-weaving SPIDER (‘Skilled Practice Involves Developmentally Embodied Responsiveness’). Ingold’s focus is not upon social relations that constitute a network of humans and non-humans, but upon ‘the *lines* along which [humans, animals and others] live and conduct [their] perception and action in the world’ (Ingold 2008: 211; see Ingold 2007c). Ingold argues that a focus on ‘skill’ rather than ‘agency’ is required, since ‘to attribute agency to objects that do not grow or develop that consequently develop no skill and whose movement is not therefore coupled to their perception, is ludicrous’ (2008: 215).

However, the direction in which archaeologists such as Jones, Boivin, Knappett, and Fowler are travelling leads to doing more than (or, perhaps better, less than) argue that objects can count as subjects, or to illustrate how material things can be involved in the ‘distribution of personhood’. It leads towards doing more than simply continuing the impulse in modernist anthropology now to relate across, now to refuse distinctions between ‘the material’ and ‘the socio-cultural’. After all, why is ‘agency’ a problem at all? Because what is meant is social agency: the Giddensian counterpoint to structure. Agency must only be solved as a problem if we hold on to a particular model of society in which, in the terms of dialectical material culture studies, the question of locating the actions that generate, and are shaped by, social structure is significant. Like the textual analogy, the debates about agency remain too often solidly anthropocentric: Alfred Gell’s *Art and Agency* moved from the meaningful to the social, but retained humans as the proper object of enquiry for anthropology. Perhaps, indeed, the logic here is to turn completely away from the idea of material culture studies, since as Tim Ingold

asks, 'Are there contexts that are *not* social, or worlds that are *not* material?' (2007c: 32). Or from anthropology, which we could suggest should properly study only humans. Questions about 'meaning' and agency have persisted because of the assumption that the alternative is simply incoherence. Daniel Miller once gave the example of a gas cloud that emerges 'as an unpredicted by-product of a technological process'. For Miller, this was 'only marginally an artefact' and therefore of little concern to social anthropology or social archaeology, despite being a 'product of human labour' (1987: 112–113). The logic here is a belief that 'objects are *made of* social ties' (Latour 2005a: 248–249), rather than accounting for the much messier and fragmented materials with which archaeologists routinely work. But while 'anthropology' and 'material culture studies', like 'archaeology', are awkward terms, there is no need to dispense with them because of what they are called, since what they actually do is far more nuanced. We might suggest that both archaeology and anthropology accommodate the majority of the world, which is, as John Law puts it, neither coherent nor incoherent but 'indefinite or noncoherent' (2004: 14). The majority of archaeology's slow, descriptive techniques attend precisely to such otherwise unspoken fragments. Research practices in archaeology and anthropology routinely do more (or less) than focus upon accounting for human understanding: 'the understanding of the meaningful relationship between persons and things' (Tilley 2007a: 18–19). This is especially true when things are analysed over time, rather than in the ethnographic present. Theorizing agency and meaning provides solutions only to the sociological and literary problems of representing the world: documenting 'relations' between different domains. Two complementary approaches, which involve moving beyond the representational approaches that characterized the Material-Cultural Turn, its critique by Ingold, and conventional accounts of ANT, are explored in the next section. Central here is the observation that archaeology and anthropology *enact*, rather than purely *represent*, the world.

V: THINGS AS EVENTS, THINGS AS EFFECTS

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While writing this chapter, I shared a draft with a number of archaeologists and anthropologists involved in current debates over the idea of material culture. The comments of one colleague were especially informative:

This chapter portrays the history of material culture studies as an elaborate academic game in which renowned contestants play off their positions vis-à-vis one another. The reader, offered a spectator's seat in the back row, is afforded the dubious privilege of listening in on the contest, as words like structuralism, semiotics, practice theory and agency get battered around. The game is punctuated by 'Turns', after each of which the words get reshuffled (sometimes with prefixes such as 'neo' and 'post' attached) and play starts all over again.

From time to time, the players refer to a mysterious planet called ‘the material world’, which all claim to have visited at one time or another. But if they have any knowledge of this world they take care not to reveal it to uninitiated spectators, lest by doing so they would expose the game as the charade it really is.

Tim Ingold pers. comm. (23 March 2009)

The aim of this excavation has been to reimagine George Marcus’ vision of an itinerant ethnography of ‘complex objects of study’ in the practice of disciplinary historiography: to ‘follow the metaphor’ (Marcus 1995: 95, 108–109). As Tim Ingold rightly observes, the sequence that is revealed is one of a constant reshuffling and re-articulation of the boundaries or connections between the ‘material’ and the ‘cultural’ or the ‘social’ (cf. Ingold 2000a). This reshuffling began (with the invention of the term ‘material culture’) in precisely the period in which the Durkheimian idea of anthropology as comparative sociology emerged in the ‘structural-functionalist’ approaches of Radcliffe-Brown and others. ‘The material’, thus, became a problem because of a particular model of ‘the social’, and the term ‘material culture’, as opposed to the ‘social’ in social anthropology, represented a useful compromise. Then, since the mid-1980s the most recent layers of this sequence are characterized by another critique of the distinction between the ‘material’ and the ‘cultural’ that is implied by the idea of material culture, most commonly using practice theory to reconcile semiotic analysis with structuralism. While the idea of a distinction between the material and the human has often been critiqued as a modern Western imposition, beyond which anthropology must seek to move, the rhetoric of counter-modernism has in practice been a central characteristic of modernist thinking, especially in narratives of loss or erasure seen for example in the conservation movement, rather than an alternative to it (Hicks 2008a; *pace* Thomas 2004). In long-term perspective, modernist anthropology has traced and re-traced the idea of reconciling the material with the socio-cultural as its central question.

Ingold’s arguments raise serious concerns about the place of material culture in social anthropology. But, informed to a large extent by a hermeneutic phenomenology similar to that outlined above, meshwork theory itself too often simply repeats the familiar complaints about the segregation of the social/cultural from the natural/material. The practical distinction between ANT and SPIDER is obscure, especially since both distinguish between theory and practice, ethnography and anthropology, positionality, and knowledge (*pace* Ingold 2007e). This distancing effect, between scholar and object, is reinforced by the fact that without exception Ingold’s case studies remain as far away as possible from the contemporary world: leading to the strange situation where modern or non-modern objects, like cell phones or woven baskets, have gained a kind of rhetorical power in the ‘materiality debate’ between Ingold and Miller. Unlike the wide range of ethnographic fieldwork that has been carried out by those working in material culture

studies, Ingold's arguments have been developed theoretically, in isolation from fieldwork. In doing so, they reproduce precisely the tendency to seek to explain the world by holding it at a sufficient distance, despite the logic of his arguments to move away from such approaches.

In this section, I want to use two of Ingold's principal ideas—formation and skill—as ways of thinking about how archaeologists and anthropologists have started to focus upon objects (including objects of enquiry) as emergent through time, and as the effects of enactment, rather than bound up in webs of representation and meaningful social action. Through this discussion, I want to consider what the critique of material culture studies, from the perspective of meshwork studies but also from more general concerns about the reduction of things to meanings, or to the social, might mean in practice for archaeologists and anthropologists who continue to see value in the field that has come to be known as material culture studies (however flawed that term might be).

Formation and material histories: things as events

One central element of Ingold's contributions to debates about 'materiality' is his call for anthropologists to understand things *in formation* (Ingold 2007c). The sociological processes through which things are formed as objects were, of course, a central element of the Material-Cultural Turn (Miller 1987). A counterpoint to this discussion of objectification was provided a year after Miller's study by Marilyn Strathern's book *The Gender of the Gift* (1988), which was concerned with the *production of subjects*: specifically, upon ideas of 'personhood' in the classic 'gift societies' of Melanesia. Strathern argued that through exchange and the creation of analogies between different objects in 'inter-artefactual domains', human subjects and objects were not in this ethnographic situation understood as distinct. The exchange of objects led two simultaneous processes: the 'distribution' of personhood, and a change in the ontological status of humans as 'dividuals' rather than 'individuals'. This argument has more general implications not just for how we comprehend personhood but also, as Donna Haraway would have it, 'what counts as an object' (Haraway 1988: 588): and, of course, what counts as a subject. At stake here is much more than the social construction of identities, or the contextual construction of meaning, but the contingent permeabilities of boundaries between humans and non-humans: how subjects and objects are emergent. One way of expressing this is to consider things as events.

The representational impulse in material culture studies has resulted from efforts to fix the meaning or social use of objects in particular moments in time. This is an old complaint about ethnographic and archaeological museums, but is also one

that can be extended to mainstream material culture studies, which have been characterized by a deep-rooted ethnographic presentism, usually justified through a belief of the exceptionalism of the contemporary material world. It is also a characteristic of the strong tendency in interpretive archaeological thinking to ascribe particular social functions to objects, and to privilege moments at which social relations or particular meanings can be identified.

The idea of 'life histories' in archaeology and anthropology is significant here. Conventional interpretive archaeologies that focus on change over time (e.g. Hodder 1990) are better described as 'agency histories' or 'meaningful histories' rather than 'life histories': since life, as Tim Ingold (2000a) reminds us, involves much more than simply humans and their concerns. Life also, of course, involves constant change and flux. This includes not only social change, or the shift in the meaning of an object but the 'transformation of substance': through decay, fragmentation, residuality, etc. (Pollard 2004). It is conventional for material culture study to focus only on those moments when things (even banal, everyday things such as soup cans or sherds of pottery) become important for humans: involved in social relationships, or charged with meaning. Sometimes, it accounts for material restriction and restraint (e.g. Foucault 1977a). More recently, as we have seen, in some studies it suggests 'material agency' (Knappett and Malafouris 2008b). These ideas, however, do not allow for what we might call 'the humility of changes': the kind of apparently obscure and inconsequential changes in the fill of a pit, or the silting-up of a ditch, which archaeologists spend large periods of time documenting. Life histories of things at any scale, however, routinely accommodate what we might term material histories, rather than purely social histories.

This disciplinary excavation has reminded us how the rise of contextual archaeology coincided with a range of parallel interests in the 'social life of things' in social anthropology. In the 1980s the renewed study of exchange, and especially the publication of a new English translation of Marcel Mauss' comparative study of gift exchange in 1990, brought new life to debates in economic anthropology. This atmosphere was captured in Arjun Appadurai's influential edited collection *The Social Life of Things: commodities in cultural perspective*, which examined how anthropological perspectives could be used to study the ways in which objects move between social contexts, gaining new meanings through successive recontextualizations (Appadurai 1986a). Igor Kopytoff's idea of the 'cultural biography of objects' set out in that volume has been influential in both archaeology and anthropology (Hoskins 1998; Gosden and Marshall 1999). However, the idea of studying things through the idea of life histories has a much more complex life history of its own, which stretches back to Haddon's evolutionary idea of 'the life histories of designs' (Haddon 1895). One particularly influential use of the idea of the life histories of things was developed in the New Archaeology in Michael Schiffer's account of the idea of tracing an artefact's 'life history' from production,

through use, to deposition, in order to comprehend the formation of the archaeological record (Schiffer 1972). Like many other archaeological methods, from landscape survey to excavation recording, if you were to place your finger at any point on Schiffer's drawing (see Figure 23.1), it would be difficult uniformly to assign meaning or involvement in social agency: and yet the thing would be 'doing' something, such as passing from one form to another as it decayed, or simply lying below the ground or on the surface of a ploughed field. Tracing such life histories is always the product of the slow and painstaking putting of archaeological methods into practice, for apparently inconsequential materials. As Appadurai argued, the idea of 'the social lives of things' required a degree of 'methodological fetishism':

Even if our own approach to things is conditioned necessarily by the view that things have no meanings apart from those that human transactions, attributions and motivations endow them with, the anthropological problem is that this formal truth does not illuminate the concrete, historical circulation of things. For that we have to follow the things themselves, for their meanings are inscribed in their forms, their uses, their trajectories. It is only through the analysis of these trajectories that we can interpret the human transactions and calculations that enliven things. Thus, even though from a *theoretical* point of view human actors encode things with meaning, from a *methodological* point of view it is the things-in-motion that illuminate their human and social context. No social analysis of things (whether the analyst is an economist, an art historian, or an anthropologist) can avoid a minimum level of what might be called methodological fetishism. This methodological fetishism, returning our attention to the things themselves, is in part a corrective to the tendency to excessively socialize transactions in things, a tendency we owe to Mauss.

Appadurai (1986b: 5)

The discussion above might encourage us to extend Appadurai's argument to suggest that it is not only 'human and social contexts' that are visible by tracing things-in-motion. This argument about objects' life histories has implications for ethnographic, as well as archaeological, fieldwork. The reduction of objects' life histories to their enrolment in the lives of humans is clearly questioned by such work, such as that of Schiffer (cf. Gosden 2006). Equally, we might question the a priori distinction between human lives and objects' lives. Indeed, in many archaeological and ethnographic studies, the intertwined nature of human and material life—whether through the extension of life courses through mementoes (Hallam and Hockey 2001), the role of things in human memory (Jones 2007) the intimacy of ownership and 'possession' of things that persist over time (Miller 2001b)—have been a central contribution of archaeological and anthropological material culture studies.

In these cases, things themselves can come to constitute contexts, which are by no means purely human or social contexts. The work of museum ethnographers such as Nicholas Thomas and Amiria Henare in extending material culture studies

into historical anthropology has been particularly important here (N. Thomas 1999, 2000; Henare 2005a, 2005b; cf. Haas 1996; Colchester 2003). Such work builds on Marilyn Strathern's (1990) seminal study of 'artefacts of history', in which the material enactment of history was foregrounded. In practice, this means that historical anthropology cannot understand artefacts as the illustrations of social history, from which they are separated. Objectification or subjectification requires work; such processes must be made to happen and maintained. Thus, things are always events—more or less visible depending on the constant changes in the human and non-human world. Thomas' study of the changing uses of indigenous and introduced textiles in the history of the conversion to Christianity in nineteenth-century Polynesia is of significance here. Tracing the adoption of the Tahitian practice of wearing barkcloth ponchos (*tiputa*) more widely in Polynesia, he suggests that artefacts of this kind 'were much more than mere markers of identity'. Instead, he demonstrates 'how adapted and introduced types of cloth perhaps worked as a technology that made religious change, that is, conversion to Christianity, visible as a feature of people's behaviour and domestic life' (N. Thomas 1999: 16, 6). By focusing on the effects of the physical properties of *tiputa*—which allowed for parts of the body to be covered—Thomas suggests that in such situations, 'the interpretative strategy of regarding things essentially as expressions of cultural, subcultural, religious, or political identities, depends on too static and literal an approach to their meanings' (N. Thomas 1999: 16). Thus, the Polynesian ponchos to some extent 'made' contexts themselves, rather than simply being received within particular socio-cultural (human) contexts. The implications for the writing of colonial history are significant, since alternatives to conventional social or cultural histories of colonial histories are made possible through a kind of material history:

This way of seeing things perhaps also helps us move beyond the long-standing dilemma of historical anthropology in Oceania, which has lurched between emphasis on continuity and discontinuity, between affirmation of the enduring resilience of local cultures, and critique of the effects of colonial history. Artifacts such as *tiputa* are neither inventions of tradition nor wholly unprecedented forms. They are at once implicated in the material history of Polynesian societies and departures from that history . . . More often than we have acknowledged, the indigenous peoples of the region have been concerned not to 'contextualize' things, but to use things to change contexts.

N. Thomas (1999: 18–19)

Thus, Thomas shows that things contribute to the formation of contexts, as well as simply fitting into contexts in which they can be used or understood, that this formation is contingent, and that this contingency includes the physical affordances of things and even the materials they are made from. As Chris Pinney has argued, this leads a long way away from the understanding of things as infinitely malleable for human ends (Pinney 2005: 268), and away most strongly from the timelessness that

resulted from the dematerialization of material culture studies that reduced things to social relations, or reduced them to human meanings.

These developments in historical anthropology are taken a step further by new developments in British archaeology (see discussions by Pollard 2001, 2004). In historical archaeology, for example, ‘material histories’ involve not simply understanding the changing social uses or meanings of artefacts, but also those aspects of the life histories of things, buildings, or landscapes that are more accurately described as non-coherent, rather than socially significant or culturally meaningful (Hicks 2003, 2005, 2007a, 2007b; Hicks and Beaudry 2006a; Hicks and McAtackney 2007; cf. Shanks 1998; Holtorf 2002; Holtorf and Williams 2006). The very idea of historical archaeology becomes meaningless if it is not grounded in the sense that so much happens that is unspoken and undocumented, but that is far from insignificant and that leaves material traces. But more than that, ideas and discourses are revealed from an archaeological perspective to require material enactment: to be fitted, usually quite awkwardly, into the world.

The point can be made by returning to the idea of capitalist processes of objectification (Miller 1987). The justification for setting up research between the ‘material’ and the ‘cultural’ was that large-scale forces (modernity, capitalism, etc.) create subjects and objects, and so anthropology should study the processes through which this takes place. But the implication of Bruno Latour’s contention that *We Have Never Been Modern* (Labour 1993a) is that modernity was an idea that was never totally and coherently enacted. For the archaeologist, for instance studying the decaying concrete and steel of modernist architecture (Buchli 1999), theories of objectification serve to overdetermine the power of the modern, of capitalism, etc. (cf. Buchli and Lucas 2001a, 2001b; Hicks 2008a). Thus, one of the principal contributions of the archaeology of the modern period, as it has emerged since the early 1980s, has been to demonstrate that there was no sudden or fundamental transformation of the material world at any point in the emergence of the modern. Any model of radical difference between the premodern and the modern, and between anthropological and archaeological studies of material culture, is thus unhelpful (Hicks and Beaudry 2006b). Instead, a distinctive kind of historiography, which relates to material change, is involved (Hicks 2003, 2008b). Such material histories do not deny or critique social histories. They are perhaps best understood as ‘less-than-social’ histories. We could equally call them material culture studies.

Historical archaeology has often studied situations in which particular understandings of a distinction between persons and objects have been held, most clearly perhaps in the treatment of people as objects in the archaeology of slavery (cf. Kopytoff 1986). But at its best its contribution is considerably more nuanced: describing how such ideas are worked out in particular places and particular lives, rather than illustrating social history (Wilkie 2003). And it is from the intimate depictions of human and material situations in the archaeology of

the recent past that the most effective alternatives to sociological studies of material culture informed by practice theory have emerged (Buchli 1999, 2002c): undertaking, as the strongest contributions in material culture studies do, a kind of ‘archaeology of modern life’ (Weatherill 1989: 439).

Taken together, recent research in historical anthropology and historical and prehistoric archaeology suggests that the longstanding concern with overcoming overarching dualisms between subjects and objects has derived to a considerable extent from the synchronic nature of British material culture studies: both in the ethnographic present, and in the tendency in interpretive archaeology to privilege particular moments of social agency or meaning. Human and material lives are not ontologically different: they exist in the same world. They do, however, operate at a variety of paces. Imagine screwing a manual camera to a tripod in a dimly lit lecture theatre. The longer the exposure, the more will be visible in the photograph. But equally, the more blurred human actions will be, as walls and windows stand out, unmoving. It is not, of course, that buildings are not undergoing constant change. Rather, they are moving at a different pace: all buildings will fall down eventually. Moreover, the pace of change in materials is contingent upon not only their maintenance by humans—for a building, repointing a wall, or keeping a roof intact—but also upon the materials involved. Constructions out of timber decay faster than stone. As I have argued with Audrey Horning in relation to the archaeology of buildings, such perspectives require a distribution of analysis across time that parallels the distribution of intentionality, thought, or agency over time that appeared in study of the Maori meeting house in the final chapter of Alfred Gell’s study *Art and Agency* (Gell 1998: 221–258; Hicks and Horning 2006). Unravelling the arguments about artworks and social agency set out in the earlier chapters of his book, Gell considered how particular material forms emerge from traditions of practice. The logic of this argument is to suggest that a diachronic approach, which understands things as involved (as well as humans) in the making of time and of contexts, must allow that ‘material culture has a dangerous potentiality that it has never acquired in social theory’ (N. Thomas 1999: 7). But it also means that we must allow for the time spent in the camera exposure: which implicates the researcher within the event, rather than being distanced from it, as I shall explore in the next section.

Skill and disciplinarity: things as effects

Having made this argument about things as events in what would usually be understood as the object of enquiry—the archaeological site, or the Maori meeting hut studied by the ethnographer—I now want to use Tim Ingold’s arguments about skilled practice to extend precisely the same argument to theories. Theories, we might suggest, emerge in precisely the same manner as things. Things and theories are not simply

events, however; they are also effects. This requires us to move anthropological interests in practice beyond human and material practices as an object of enquiry, to incorporate our own material practices as researchers. It requires more than a purely reflexive awareness of fixed and timeless positionality, since positions emerge as events in precisely the same manner as things. The conceptual and practical tools for going beyond reflexivity already exist within material culture studies, and might be freed up by the unfolding of the idea of material culture studies to include the academic subject, as well as the academic object (and thus to move beyond the 'science wars' of the 1980s between subject-ivity and object-ivity, relativism and realism). In this section, I want to suggest that an understanding of things (and theories) as events can be complemented by an understanding of things (and theories) as the effects of material practice. This line of enquiry is inspired especially by current thinking in historical archaeology. Here, the extension of archaeological research into the recent past and the contemporary world means that archaeology can no longer be defined by its object. Where archaeology used to be a discipline that examined particular key sites or objects, the 'canon' of archaeological material is broken down by the extension of the field into the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries: there is simply too much for any such definition to have coherence (Hicks 2003). Either archaeology is no longer a useful idea, or we must look at archaeological practices—how archaeology enacts things—to understand what archaeology is. This raises much broader issues of the aspiration of material culture studies to be a post-disciplinary field. Before discussing interdisciplinarity, however, I want to make the case for understanding things and theories as effects, as well as events.

There is a strong line of enquiry in material culture studies that relates to the skilled use of things. This runs from Marcel Mauss' (1973) account of 'techniques of the body', through Leroi-Gourhan's (1993) account of *chaînes opératoires* (operational sequences) and his classification of techniques and gestures 'derived from the kinds of action on materials which they employ' (Lemonnier 1986: 150), to Pierre Lemonnier's vision of an anthropology of technology, moving away from 'the study of lifeless objects' (1986: 147). Attention to 'the peeling of sweet potatoes, the washing of children, or the sharpening of stone axes', to 'the observation and the transcription of operational sequences, in particular, is an indispensable part of any fieldwork. Not to do so is to treat objects as hardly less isolated and lifeless as those in a museum' (Lemonnier 1986: 181). We might locate aspects of Bruno Latour's thinking in this tradition (e.g. Latour 2000b), and certainly Tim Ingold's focus on the idea of 'skill', which is so central to his ideas of meshwork and weaving (Ingold 2000a: 289–293) and his distinction between 'building' and 'dwelling'. By extending such ideas to field practice, as Ingold (1993) did to some degree in his examination of 'the temporality of the landscape', we might underline the performative and situated dimensions of our understanding of the contemporary world, and of how we enact the past in the present (cf. Strathern 1990).

One of the distinctive characteristics of interpretive archaeology, especially as it was developed by Ian Hodder, was a self-awareness of archaeology as a contemporary practice, in which field methods should be thought through (Shanks and McGuire 1996; Hodder 1999). For the archaeologist, however, the contemporary must be an event, emergent, and contingent (Buchli and Lucas 2001b). In American cultural anthropology, the reflexive awareness of ethnographic monographs as written texts (Marcus and Cushman 1982) was summarized in the influential collection *Writing Culture* (Clifford and Marcus 1986). In contrast, the publication in the same year of *Reading the Past* described the reverse process: a passive reading from the material record, rather than the practices of writing from fieldwork (Hodder 1986). However, in the 1990s, an increasing desire to think through the processes of uniting ‘theory’ and ‘practice’ (Hodder 1999) came to generate a distinctive alternative from the turning away from method and fieldwork that characterized some other approaches in interpretive archaeology, such as Julian Thomas’ argument that discussions of methods were of limited significance because ‘New Archaeology was methodology’ and a scepticism that knowledge might emerge quite precisely from method rather than the abstractions of interpretation (Thomas 2000c: 3). While much of this discussion related to the idea of ‘reflexivity’, which often simply reinforced the interpretive concept of a distance between scholar and object (Hicks 2005), a new body of writing about archaeological practice emerged (Edgeworth 1990, 2003, 2006a; Lucas 2001a; Yarrow 2006, 2008), especially in relation to the situated and iterative processes through which archaeological knowledge comes about (Hicks 2005). The distinction here with conventional models of social science is clear: where structuration theory suggested that ‘all social actors . . . are social theorists’, a focus on *field* practice involves awareness of ‘the specificity of techniques, as far as “knowledge” is concerned’ is crucial (Giddens 1984: 335; Strathern 1987: 30).

Such perspectives have not been applied to anthropological material culture studies, despite the important acknowledgement that ‘anthropology, which grew up in cousinhood with archaeology, takes to the analysis of the minutiae of practice in a manner akin to that of an excavation’ (Miller and Woodward 2007: 337), and the call from archaeologists working on the ‘contemporary past’ for a kind of ‘critical empiricism’ (Buchli and Lucas 2001a: 14; Buchli 2002b: 16). Indeed the Manchester School’s arguments about the particular perspectives provided by extended case method and situational analysis were not important to anthropology’s Material-Cultural Turn. But just as in archaeology, the potential in the anthropology of things for a foregrounding of the empirical work of fieldwork to bring about, in practice rather than in theory, a collapsing of object and subject, is directly related to avoiding the choice between ‘objectivity’ and ‘subjectivity’, which the Material-Cultural Turn was trying to do from the outset. As Tom Yarrow has recently argued, ‘whilst archaeologists frequently assert and demonstrate the objectivity of the artefacts and contexts they unearth as distinct from

their own subjective interpretations, the work required to achieve this distinction is not reducible to the distinction itself' (Yarrow 2008: 135–136).

In this conception, fieldwork is not usefully understood as purely 'relational', but as constituted by moments of permeability between fieldworker, place, things, and people. Field sciences, such as archaeology, anthropology, geography, and science and technology studies (STS), *enact* knowledge. We cannot, therefore, fail to theorize methodology (Henare *et al.* 2007a: 27). That is why it is these four particular disciplines that are gathered in the present volume about studying things. This implication of the fieldworker in the emergence of the material studied, and the definition of material culture studies as a series of practices for enacting knowledge about things, requires an extension of that argument, from material culture studies, about the humility of things to the potential of the apparently banal to the apparently tedious work of post-excavation or museum ethnography. After all, 'knowing' as Chris Gosden and Frances Larson have recently argued, 'takes time and effort and people and things' (2007: 239). Rather than reflexivity, an awareness of the emergent situatedness of knowledge can achieve what Marilyn Strathern has described as 'a certain brand of empiricism, making the data so presented apparently outrun the theoretical effort to comprehend it' (1999: 199).

The difference from previous conceptions of material culture studies is critical: a foregrounding of disciplinarity, rather than undertaking 'an anthropology of' this object or that. Such a move is close to what Annemarie Mol has termed a shift from 'ethnography' to 'praxiography'—in which the practices of the fieldworker are implicated too, since 'praxiographic stories have composite objects' (2002: 156). Where the cultural turn across the social sciences is in so many places 'still dominated by tired constructivist themes' (Thrift 2000: 2), and since the Material-Cultural Turn in British archaeology and anthropology too often used objects to argue that its research was not, to borrow Judith Butler's phrase, 'merely cultural' (Butler 1998), the challenge lies in collapsing the gap between anthropological archaeology's acknowledgement of 'the humility of objects' and Donna Haraway's conception of knowledge practices as acts of 'modest witnessing' (Miller 1987: 85–86; Haraway 1997: 24–25).

If we understand things as events and effects, rather than fixed and solid, then 'material culture' has unfolded to the point that material culture studies can no longer be defined *by its object*. The 'materiality debate' sketched above demonstrates that the idea that material culture might represent 'the concrete counterpoint to the abstractions of culture' (Yarrow 2008: 122) is long behind us. Along with it, however, any unifying model of networks and relations between bounded entities is also lost. The material effects highlighted above demonstrate how permeabilities, as well as just relations, constitute the emergence of the world as assemblage. And they indicate that the Durkheimian conception of social agency, revived in material culture studies through

practice theory in order to reconcile the structural and the semiotic, is no longer adequate: simply extending it to objects will not do (*pace* Gell 1998). Life, both human and non-human, as it is encountered in archaeology and anthropology involves not relations between fixed entities, but life as the ongoing flow of permeabilities, and the emergence of worlds. These issues have begun to be addressed in material culture studies in examinations of immateriality (Buchli 2004: 187–191), in the consumption of apparently intangible media such as the internet (Miller and Slater 2000) or radio (Tacchi 1998) and to some extent in Miller's account of 'virtualism' (Carrier and Miller 1998; D. Miller 2000). But there are ontological, rather than purely epistemological, ramifications of the unfolding of material culture as a coherent object of enquiry: as researchers we do not mediate between two ontological domains, but find ourselves quickly in the complexities of fieldwork.

The implications for material culture studies' ambitions to create a kind of post-disciplinary field are profound. Since the 1970s, many observed that the study of material culture might unite 'archaeologists with certain kinds of cultural anthropologists' (Appadurai 1986b: 5). However, despite the regular inclusion of literature surveys in the relatively high number of many closely argued, programmatic statements of what 'material culture studies' might represent or aspire to (e.g. Miller 1983, 1987, 1998b, 2005a; Miller and Tilley 1996), the 1990s was rarely characterized by genuine collaboration and exchange between British anthropology and archaeology. Where collaboration did occur, as in Chris Tilley's idea of *An Ethnography of the Neolithic*, they were restricted to a particular vision of archaeology: as distant as possible from the present, and as method-less phenomenology rather than employing archaeological techniques. Similarly, in North America the development by Mike Schiffer of a 'behavioural archaeology', using the techniques of New Archaeology to study modern material culture such as radios and cars, has had little impact on socio-cultural anthropology. The diversity of methods involved in what Appadurai termed, as we saw above, the 'methodological fetishism' required to write life histories of things has rarely been considered. Instead, the vision of material culture studies as it developed in Britain was from the outset a self-consciously hybrid field, underlining its potential as a kind of post-disciplinary field. Unlike in interpretive archaeology, there has been virtually no interest in discussions of field practice, apart from in the eclecticism of hermeneutic phenomenology sketched above. Thus, in the first editorial for the *Journal of Material Culture* Daniel Miller and Chris Tilley argued that:

The study of material culture may be most broadly defined as the investigation of the relationship between people and things irrespective of time and space. The perspective adopted may be global or local, concerned with the past or the present, or the mediation between the two... [T]he potential range of contemporary disciplines involved in some way or other in studying material culture is effectively as wide as the human and cultural sciences themselves.

Miller and Tilley (1996: 5)

Material culture studies in this period witnessed regular expressions of ‘the advantages of being undisciplined’ and celebrations of an ‘eclecticism [which would in the past] have been frowned upon as diluting and undisciplined’ (Miller and Tilley 1996: 12; Attfield 2000: 1). At the same time, the potential of the field becoming a discipline in its own right became a concern: there was a sense of the ‘many disadvantages and constraints imposed by trying to claim disciplinary status’ led to calls for ‘remaining undisciplined and pursuing a field of study without respect to prior claims of disciplinary antecedents’ (Miller 1998b: 4; Tilley 2006b: 12–13). As Peter Van Dommelen observed in study of contributions to the *Journal of Material Culture*, ‘the lack of a “home base” for material culture studies’ was also ‘a point repeatedly made and frequently emphasised’ (2000: 409).

With a division of disciplinary labour between the prehistoric and the modern world, a *relational* conception of the potential connections between archaeology and anthropology, and between materials and culture, which had characterized the debates in structural Marxist anthropology two decades earlier, was effectively reinforced. This relational model of interdisciplinary exchanges had been part of a call for collaboration between archaeology and anthropology:

Although disciplinary specialization is a necessary response to the complexity of knowledge, the institutionalization of disciplines in a pedagogic context naturally leads their members to be over-conscious of the uniqueness of their subject-matter and the rigour of their techniques to elucidate and critically examine their objects of analysis, which become too often badges of corporate identity. This tends to obscure the fact that at a higher and more abstract level it may be more pertinent to be involved in a unifying dialogue so as to share equally in the resolution of theoretical problems and to avoid a reaction to what is perceived to be a one-sided theoretical indebtedness to other disciplines.

Rowlands and Gledhill (1976: 37)

This position was in contrast with the continued strength in contextual archaeology of David Clarke’s vision of the distinctiveness of archaeological perspectives:

Archaeology is neither ‘historical’ nor ‘anthropological’. It is not even science or art. Archaeology’s increasing maturity allows it to claim an independent personality with distinctive qualities to contribute.

Hodder (1986: x)

In this context, the suggestion in 1998 by Chris Tilley, one of the few archaeologists working in both traditions of interpretive archaeology and anthropological material culture studies, that a loss of ‘disciplinary isolation’ had led to the end of archaeology as a coherent discipline at all, is informative (cf. Hicks 2003):

there could be nothing distinctive about archaeological theory when it went beyond a concern with appropriate methodologies for excavation, fieldwork and conceptualization of factors affecting the physical survival of archaeological evidence . . . The irony [in Clarke’s work] is that the death of archaeology could only result from the conceit of distinctiveness . . . How could an archaeological theory of society or human action be produced that would

not simultaneously be a social and anthropological theory?... A loss of innocence is dependent on the end of disciplinary isolation and, in this sense, archaeology no longer continues to exist.

Tilley (1998: 691–692)

This is the editorial direction of the recent sage *Handbook of Material Culture* (Tilley et al. 2006). It builds within social anthropology on his complaint about the idea of disciplinarity in archaeology:

Why is teaching so much bound up with promoting disciplinary allegiance and asserting distinctiveness? Why are courses in archaeological institutions labelled as being archaeological theory, rather than social theory? Why should archaeologists think they can learn more from each other in their conferences, seminars, workshops, lectures and publications rather than by talking with outsiders (so-called inter-disciplinary interactions being the exception rather than the norm)? Is this anything much more than a kind of ancestor- and hero-worship... and part of a struggle for resources between competing disciplines in universities with artificial boundaries? Leaving to one side the politics and pragmatism inevitably required for the disciplinary survival of archaeology, is it any longer intellectually necessary, or sufficient, for us to be *disciplined*?

Tilley (1998: 692, original emphasis)

This post-disciplinary conception of material culture studies led to very little consideration of disciplinary histories, allegiances, and intellectual debts, creating

the impression that material culture studies is now, as it were, independently re-invented by the same theoretical discussions that earlier have tended to regard them as irrelevant. The picture created in this way is essentially a-historical, in that it reconstitutes the study of the artifact in its new domain as apparently separated from its historical roots.

van Beek (1989: 95)

It is this gap in self-awareness of disciplinary historiography that this chapter has been working to plug. If research is an event, and the objects of enquiry are effects rather than prior entities, then the contingencies of the event must be accounted for. These contingencies include disciplinary traditions: the questions that we ask of things, from which things emerge. An awareness of these histories allows the nature of the emergence of material culture studies—as the distinctive cultural turn of British archaeology and anthropology—to be situated and reflected upon. As we have seen, material culture studies were the principal element of ‘postmodern anthropology’ (Rowlands 2004: 474) and archaeology in Britain, but they retained very many of the elements of structuralism. The few attempts to build post-structuralist archaeologies in Britain (Baker and Thomas 1990; Bapty and Yates 1990) comprised second-hand reviews of the literature of other fields rather than genuine contributions to archaeological thinking (Shanks 1990), while the anthropology of consumption actively distanced itself from the perceived ‘nihilism’ of post-structuralist thinking (Miller 1987: 165, 176). The Material-Cultural Turn thus operated by ‘placing the object squarely in the centre of culture theory’ (van Beek 1989: 94), forming part of a broader

process in which post-processual archaeology sought a kind of ‘compression’ of structuralist and post-structuralist approaches (Olsen 2006: 86).

While material culture studies was forged in British archaeology and anthropology as a kind of post-disciplinary field, in the ‘materiality debate’ this approach to disciplinarity has become more complex. For example, in his response to Tim Ingold’s critique of the idea of ‘materiality’, Daniel Miller has underlined diversity by suggesting that the idea of ‘a fixed object like a genre called “material-culture studies” is unsustainable’ (Miller 2007: 24), but has at the same time suggested that a distinctive contribution of material culture studies is ethnographic:

[W]e are not philosophers . . . Instead we are anthropologists constantly engaged in ethnography . . . Most of those working in material-culture studies, including almost everyone I work with at UCL, come from a tradition more aligned with the ethnographic study of practice—that is, the actual use of materials by people—but above all study of the way the specific character of people emerges from their interaction with the material world through practice . . . [O]ur profession demands an encounter with the world as we find it. My heart is in contemporary ethnography, and I do not feel the need to apologize for a material culture that has changed in recent decades largely because today it is, while a few decades ago it manifestly was not, central to this contemporary ethnography.

Miller (2007: 24–27)

This perspective contrasted markedly with earlier contentions that ‘material culture studies is not constituted by ethnography, but remains eclectic in its methods’ (Miller 1998b: 19).

Miller’s new argument inspires two responses. The first is that when material culture studies was defined by its object, a false division between past and present, formed especially after the abandonment of ethnoarchaeology, bounded off archaeology from anthropology. British archaeology has throughout the majority of literature in British material culture studies been understood in relation to prehistory rather than the archaeology of historical periods or the contemporary world (e.g. Miller 1987: 124–125). Taken together, these current debates seek to respond to what is perceived as a current interdisciplinary ‘return to things’ in social scientific research (Witmore 2007: 559), and are characterized by a pressing desire to make a contribution from the perspective of material culture studies, or from archaeology, to broader debates.

However, secondly, the particular ways in which interdisciplinarity was envisaged in material culture studies might be reoriented. As Andrew Barry, Georgiana Born, and Gisa Weszkalnys have argued, working across disciplines need not lead to a loss of coherence, but can allow a form of ‘interdisciplinary autonomy’ to emerge (Barry *et al.* 2008), which can ‘attend to the specificity of interdisciplinary fields, their genealogies and multiplicity’ (Barry *et al.* 2008: 42). The Material-Cultural Turn associated ‘disciplines’ with constraint (perhaps even, subconsciously, with punishment, since Foucault 1977a). But as Marilyn Strathern has argued, ‘disciplinary awareness—that is, a sense of the regional and

intellectual histories within which our research is conducted, and upon the putting of particular methods into practice—is a crucial element in achieving a clarity in the contingency of the knowledge that we create upon materially-situated practices’ (Strathearn 2004b: 5).

The tendency to define archaeology and anthropological material culture studies by its object led to a particular conception of post-disciplinarity (e.g. Fahlander and Oestigaard 2004). Rather than the distinctions between archaeology and anthropology as defined by their objects of enquiry—the science of things or the science of people—a sensitivity to field practice (rather than just the use of practice theory) could allow new kinds of cross-disciplinary work in ‘material culture studies’ to emerge. In this sense, the field of material culture studies holds in its hands the toolkits required to move beyond not only the representational impulse in the Material-Cultural Turn, but that in ANT as well, which too often in its interdisciplinary reception operates as an abstract theory distanced from the world just like the Durkheimian model of the social, and like structuralism. Insofar as ANT represents a third major interdisciplinary contribution from anthropology, this time involving the accommodation of ‘non-humans’, its transdisciplinary reception as a new representational model could be reoriented from the perspective of material culture studies.

CONCLUSIONS: FROM THE HUMILITY OF THINGS TO MODEST WITNESSING

.....

The social sciences become devoted to the study of all phenomena that stand for what we now call society, social relations, or indeed simply the subject. By whichever name, these are the terms that describe the contents of the coffin we are about to bury. Miller (2005a: 36)

It is conventional in British field archaeology, after the layers are drawn and recorded, recording sheets completed, artefacts gathered, bagged, and labelled, and the stratigraphic sequence constructed, to sit on the side of the evaluation trench with a cup of tea, to light a cigarette and, staring at the spoil heap, think the foregoing process through for a final time before filling the hole back in. A similar process seems appropriate after this exercise in disciplinary excavation: a counterpoint to Daniel Miller’s ‘rites of burial’ for ‘the twin terms *society* and *social relations*’ (Miller 2005a: 37). The excavation has, after all, encountered only fragments of ‘culture’, of ‘materials’, and of any clear set of relationships between them. But archaeology is different from grave digging, and this evaluative trench is not a grave for material culture studies, but a glimpse of its stratigraphy.

The archaeological process yields not just fragments of abraded and residual ceramic sherds, but mud on the boots and dirt under the fingernails. It is generally conducted outside, and so involves experience of the wind, rain, or heat. It is itinerant, in that the site must be chosen, arrived at, and time spent there, and iterative in that it involves the repeated application of a particular bundle of methods and, in Britain at least, a distinctive range of tools (pointing trowels, coal shovels, marker pens, manual cameras, biros, ring-binders, permatrace, hazard tape, hard hats, masking tape, zip lock bags, large plywood boards, 4H pencils, line levels, high visibility jackets, string, etc.). In other words, the practice of archaeology reminds us of something that is more generally true of field sciences such as anthropology, geography, STS, and archaeology: that *we enact* knowledge of the world, rather than straightforwardly *represent* it. These enactments are always messy. At their best, these fields collapse any division between this enactment—the status of the knowledge that emerges from them as event and effect—and the humans and materials studied. But this requires a leaving behind of the representational impulses that continue to characterize the diverse work of Miller, Ingold, and Latour. No new grand theory of material culture is required: instead, a more modest acknowledgement of how our knowledge is formed through material practices, which are always historically situated.

It is not the purpose of this chapter to critique the assertion that ‘material culture studies may be claimed to be in the vanguard of creative theory and debate in the social sciences today’ (Tilley 2006c: 5). But the coherence of the field defined according to its object is hard to perceive today: given the questioning of ideas of cultures, materials, and especially of the relationships between the two, which have emerged from material culture studies itself (cf. D. Miller 2007: 24). This, I believe, is the point that Amiria Henare, Martin Holbraad, and Sari Wastell are trying to make in their rather abstract and confusing answer to the pressing contemporary question: ‘What would an artefact-oriented anthropology look like if it were not about material culture?’ (Henare *et al.* 2007a: 1).

In his discussion of Pierre Bourdieu’s (1984) study *Distinction*, Daniel Miller once argued that while it represented ‘surely the most significant contribution to the study of consumption made by any anthropologist’ to date, its principal weaknesses related to the methodology employed (which involved the sociological use of a questionnaire rather than ethnographic participant observation) and the failure to situate mass consumption ‘as an historical phenomenon’ (Miller 1987: 154–155). Re-reading these lines, it is difficult, especially from the vantage point offered by the side of this trench on which I am sitting, to comprehend the discomfort in anthropology’s Material-Cultural Turn with issues of historical contingency and research practice since that time:

the possibility of material culture studies lies not in method, but rather in an acknowledgement of the nature of culture . . . We as academics can strive for understanding and empathy

through the study of what people do with objects, because that is the way that the people that we study create a world of practice.

Miller (1998b: 19)

At the same time, the very idea of ‘interpretive archaeology’ presented the material and the past as distant: in different worlds from the contemporary researcher. The ‘soft focus’ that such imagined distance creates has led to the false impression that the dirt on my hands is somehow ontologically different from my hands themselves. We do not need to return to Mary Douglas (1966) to realize that such perspectives are the legacies of structuralism (and are concerned with a kind of epistemological purity).

Such views limit practice to those whom we observe. They distance the researcher as subject from the object of enquiry (even when that object is defined as processes of objectification). They conceive of the fieldworker as a ‘participant observer’, on the model of structural-functionalism and its particular Durkheimian view of the social, rather than as what folklorist John Messenger (1989) once called an ‘observant participator’. This holds back the potential, which I take to be the central contribution of archaeology and anthropology to the social scientific study of material things, of the description and discussion of how alternative ontologies emerge, in a contingent manner, as particular sites and situations are enacted (Hicks and McAtackney 2007): whether in everyday life, or in academic research. The implications of such a view is to allow the metaphysics to emerge from the material as it is studied: a position that demands a theoretical eclecticism, but also a clarity about the nature of disciplinary and material positionality.

In 1985 geographer Nigel Thrift concluded his assessment of Giddens’ model of practice theory, after the publication of *The Constitution of Society* (Giddens 1984), by imagining the next book that he would have liked to see Giddens write:

one for which *The Constitution of Society* would serve as a prolegomenon. It would consist of the development of structuration ‘theory’ in the arena of a particular place in a particular historical period of time, showing structuration in process, contextualising in context. The book would have to show how structuration ‘theory’ can act as a basis for challenging existing interpretations of historical events. It would therefore show whether structuration ‘theory’ was viable. Of course, this may sound like a plea for Giddens to do some ‘empirical work’. But it seems to me that, more than most other social theories, that is the import of structuration theory. After all, it is not possible to expose the importance of context and then ignore it. At some point conceptual salvoes must hit particular places or disappear back into the thin air of high theory.

Thrift (1985: 621)

Giddens never wrote that book. However, this precise task was, we might suggest, taken up with considerable energy in the ‘high period’ of British material culture studies. Material culture studies, as an interdisciplinary project defined by a common object of enquiry, emerged from particular efforts to solve a series of

quite specific disciplinary problems in anthropology and archaeology. It came to be an effect of those problems: which led to fieldwork both in modern shopping centres and in Neolithic monumental landscapes. With the unfolding of that object, as both event and effect, we can no longer continue simply to resort to using practice theory to reconcile structuralism and semiotics, through case study after anthropological case study. By understanding itself as theory rather than effect, the Material-Cultural Turn has simply made the transition, as Edwin Ardener (1985) explained all modernist theories must do, from ‘life’ to ‘genre’.

What the development of practice theory in material culture studies has shown, however, is that the dialectical model of agency and structure, and the literary model of *langue* and *parole*, have allowed a further distinction between subjects and objects to be reinforced: the difference between researchers and their materials. I must underline that I understand this to be the central contribution of the ‘field sciences’ of archaeology, anthropology, geography, and STS. We are united in having distinctive ways of putting methods into practice in order to enact the world. That is how we make knowledge: things emerge from our practices in precisely the same way they do through the vernacular practices of humans, or lives of things, that we study. As Daniel Miller has recently argued in his account of material culture on a south London street, material culture studies lead away from a Durkheimian model of social anthropology (Miller 2008: 282–297). But they also lead away from the latent structuralism in mainstream dialectical and ‘relational’ models of our strangely unhyphenated term, ‘material culture’, and more generally from modernist definition of academic practice as distanced representation. This shift, which we could describe as from epistemology to ontology (Henare *et al.* 2007a), is a reminder that an archaeologist gets dirt under the fingernails. That dirt and my fingers exist, after all, in the same world; the traces of practice until the fingers are scrubbed.

So just like any thing, the Material-Cultural Turn was both an event and an effect. As all archaeological material culture studies reveal, we build the future with the remains of the past, often the very recent past. Where, then, is the idea of ‘material culture studies’ left? I have tried to offer some provisional answers. The argument takes unfolding of the idea of ‘material culture’ in precisely the opposite direction from the phenomenological critique, which seeks to avoid ‘a tendency to ontologise the status of material evidence’ by comprehending ‘culture as a practice’ (J. S. Thomas 2007: 11), towards acknowledging the contingency of our knowledge of the world upon situated material practices that derive from distinctive disciplinary methods and traditions, rather than representing a particular brand of social theory. As an anthropological archaeologist, I know that I have distinctive ways of talking, listening, photographing, drawing, excavating, curating, etc. I put these into practice in certain landscapes, with certain artefacts, in particular museum and other institutional contexts, in particular human and political situations. That is how, as an archaeologist, with colleagues and

collaborators I make knowledge of the world: in precisely the same manner in which any thing is formed. Archaeology is ‘a way of *doing*’ rather than just ‘a way of *thinking*’ (Edgeworth 2006b: xii). The same can be said of anthropology. In this sense, methodology and disciplinarity can be emancipatory, rather than restricting: allowing a kind of shifting, always messy positionality to emerge around which the idea of material culture studies can cohere. Aware that, while we are stuck with an awkward phrase, the idea of ‘material culture studies’ can highlight how both things and theories are always both events and effects: collapsing the idea of the ‘humility of things’ to encompass our own practices of witnessing, which must always be modest and provisional as they work from particular situations (both human and non-human): since that emergent positionality is precisely the contribution that studying things, whether small or large, in the first place can make.