

HPAR7004

The image features a dark silhouette of a human head in profile, facing right. Inside the head, several interlocking gears of various colors (yellow, blue, pink, green, and orange) are visible. The background is a light beige color with a network of dark grey lines and nodes, resembling a neural network or a complex web. The text 'Theoretised Practice' is written in white, bold, sans-serif font across the lower part of the head silhouette.

**Theoretised
Practice**

Knowledge Production

- [Why] is archaeological theory important?
- Archaeology: a “cultural practice within late capitalism in the west” (Shanks & Tilley 1992:1)
- Knowledge production:
 - Who is producing & articulating knowledge?
 - For whom?
- How are archaeological narratives created & disseminated?
- Need to **reflect** upon our research practices & how we reach interpretation



Archaeological Theory

- Intellectual toolkit for making sense of what we find
 - How useful is this for your own practices in contract archaeology?
 - Is it an elite preserve of academia?
 - How can we challenge this & make it meaningful?
- Essential building blocks are empirical
- What other approaches might be useful: how & why?



Approaches for the 2020s

- Making archaeology matter...
- Where are we in the world?
 - Anthropocene
 - Globalisation & the pandemic
 - BLM
 - Gender
- Theories which attend to the current zeitgeist:
 - New Materialisms
 - Postcolonialism
 - Gender studies



Postcolonialism

- An academic response to colonialism, initially on the part of the colonized
 - Now appropriated by the global north!
- Interrogates how ‘the “west”’ attempts systematically to cancel or negate the cultural difference & value of the “non-West”’ (Ghandi 1998: 15)
- A reaction to dominant narratives
- Challenges predominantly western, male, upper class voice that dominated knowledge production until late 20th century



Othering

- How western ontologies **exclude** those they want to **subordinate**
- Defines some social groups as different, not fitting within social norms
- Creates & highlights the differences between “us” & the other
- Attributes negative characteristics to “other” peoples or groups
 - Production of narratives & representations of peoples which demonise & dehumanise
 - Justification for treating the “other” as inferior



Creating the “Other”

- Does not recognise alternative knowledges or traditions
- Animalisation:
 - Represents the Other as wild (animals)
- Naturalisation:
 - Less western/European & less “cultured”
 - Closer to nature
- Infantilisation:
 - At an early stage of human development
 - Uncivilized & child-like
 - Cannot be educated





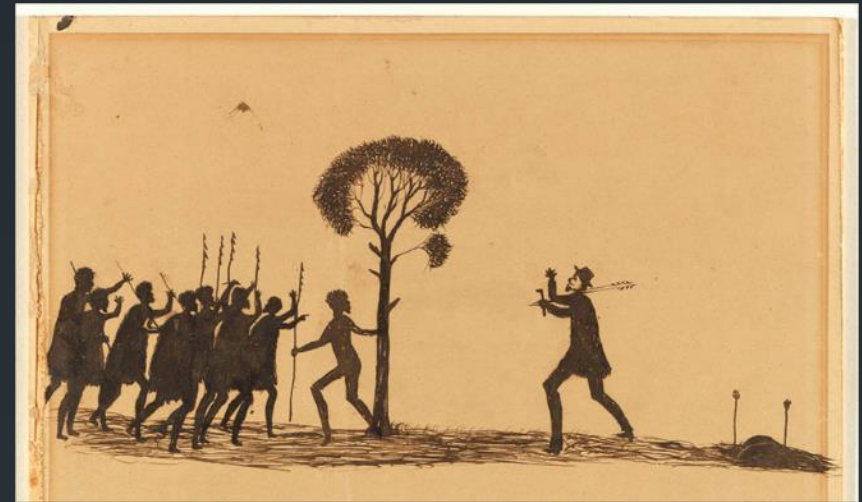
Postcolonialism

- “a salutary reminder of the persistent ‘neo-colonial’ relations within the ‘new’ world order” (Bhabha 1994: 9)
- Demonstrates the “crucial importance for subordinated peoples of asserting their indigenous cultural traditions & retrieving their repressed histories” (Bhabha 1994: 13)



Aims of Postcolonialism

- Assesses effects of empire, exploitation, subordination & looks at the relationship between the coloniser & colonised
- Gives the colonised a voice:
 - Recognises their agency, their history, traditions & values
- Relevance for us as archaeologists?
 - Culture wars, “wokeness”, BLM
 - Decolonising the curriculum



Postcolonialism

- Recognises multiple ways of being & knowing the world
- Importance of indigenous knowledges, different voices, different experiences
 - No hierarchy of knowledge or experience
 - Recognises the possibility of different narratives & histories that need to be expressed
 - Challenges the accepted (western/white) version of history
- Stresses the importance of the third space:
 - “the interstices of passage between the fixed identification opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy” (Bhabha 1994: 5)
 - A marginal & ambiguous place
 - Cultural hybridity

Archaeological Implications

- What are the implications of this approach for **you** as practising archaeologists?
- Do you need to take this into consideration in your daily practice...
- ...your dissemination of activities & results to the public...
- ...your publication (even in grey literature) of your results?
- What difference (if any) is there between the Colston statue & other acts of destruction in the Middle East?

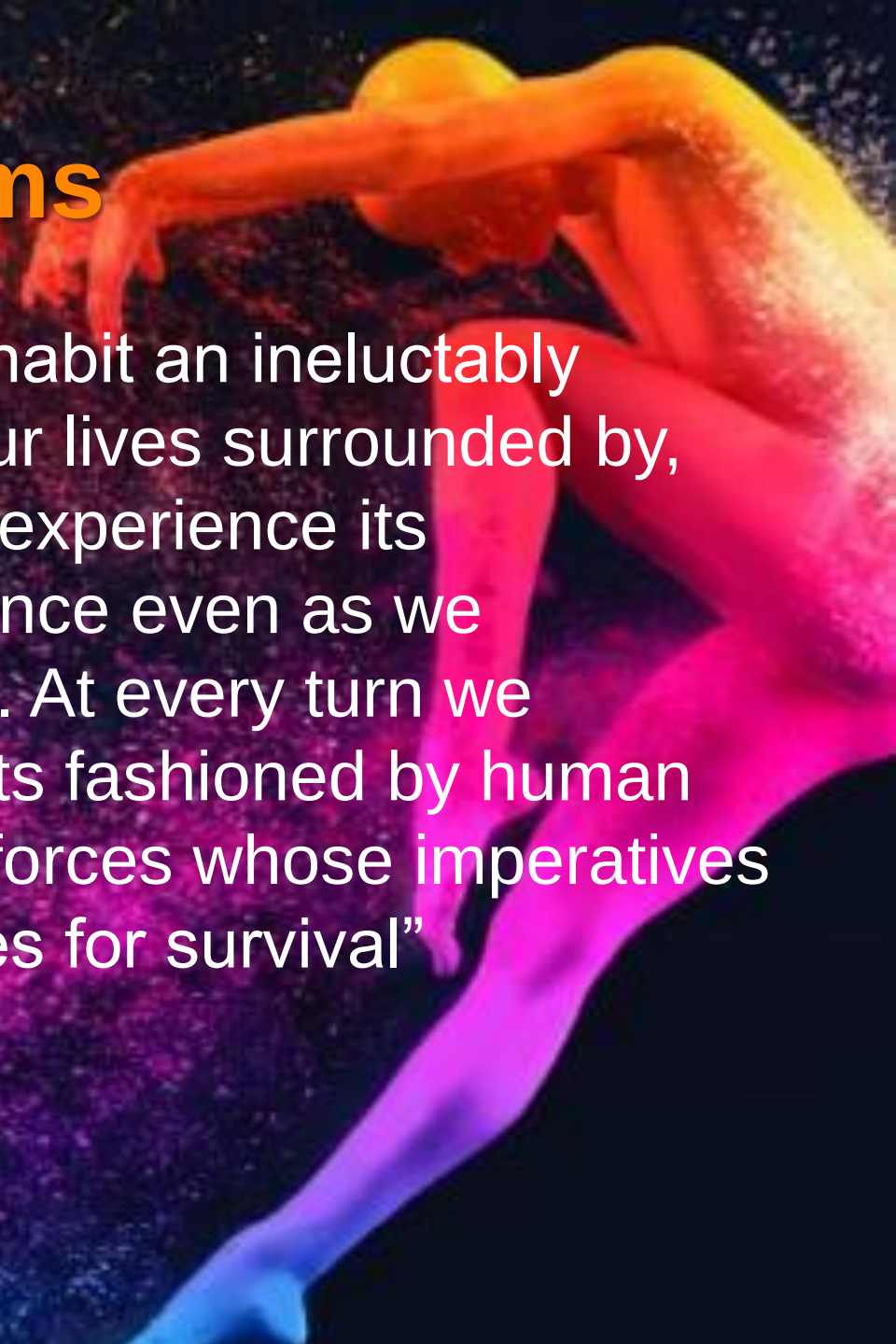


New Materialisms

- Significant approach gaining ground across the Humanities & Social Sciences
- Challenges the Enlightenment-inspired world view of the global north
- Seeks to address the position of people in the world & most significantly to focus on other knowledges that allow a less destructive relationship with the “worlding world”
- Key themes:
 - How matter matters
 - Agency
 - Relationality
 - The place of embodied humans within the material world



New Materialisms

A person is shown in a dynamic, crouching pose, possibly a dancer or athlete, against a dark, textured background. The person's body is covered in a vibrant rainbow gradient, transitioning from blue at the bottom to red at the top. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the contours of the body.

- “As human beings we inhabit an ineluctably material world. We live our lives surrounded by, immersed in, matter. We experience its restlessness & intransigence even as we reconfigure & consume it. At every turn we encounter physical objects fashioned by human design & endure natural forces whose imperatives structure our daily routines for survival”
(Coole & Frost 2010: 1)

New Materialisms

- Matter / substances have agency
- Ability of matter (substances & things/objects) to affect human life
- Questions Cartesian perspectives being human
- Questions agency as a human prerogative
- Posthumanist / More-Than-Human debate



Vibrant Matter

- “It is materiality – the physicality of matter – that gives things agency” (Boivin 2008, 129)
- Argues against notion that matter is “passive stuff, raw, brute, or inert” (Bennett 2010, vii) in opposition to active human agents
 - Through their materiality (physicality) that objects & substances have agency
 - Physical properties of materials affect material & social worlds
- “The **capacity** of things [matter]...to act as quasi agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own” (Bennett 2010, viii)
- Matter = **actant**: a source of action, it can **do** things & can produce affects

Thing Power

- “The curious ability of inanimate things to animate, act, to produce effects dramatic & subtle” (Bennett 2010, 6)
 - Things & what they can do
- Intrinsic to materiality
- Argues that this agency is always located within a human/non human group
 - Draws upon the notion of the assemblage



Materiality of Water

- How the specific properties of substances /matter shapes (human) practice:
 - Water behaves in specific ways which dictate how people interact with this substance



Assemblages

- “ad hoc groupings of diverse elements, of vibrant materials of all sorts... living, throbbing confederations” (Bennett 2010: 23)
- Becoming, ordering & interactions of a diverse, multiscalar, group of entities:
 - From microscopic to the state
- Describes the **relationship** between these entities:
 - ‘actively links these parts together by establishing relations between them’ (DeLanda 2016, 2)



Things-in-Phenomena

- Questions the existence of bounded separate entities (things)
- Think about **relationships** between matter as it entangles, works together & co-produces: **intra-acts**
- Intra-actions: continuous materialization & ongoing becomings of matter which co-mingle to co-produce the material world
- The material world is 'composed not of things-in-themselves...but of **things-in-phenomena**' (Barad 2007, 140).



Archaeological Applications

- Does this bridge a divide between scientific & social archaeology:
 - Placing people as part of the matter of the world
- Assemblages: already an archaeological concept:
 - Does this encourage us to have a more nuanced understanding?
- Intra-actions and taphonomic process?
- Is it helpful to think about archaeology from alternative perspectives?



Theoretised Practice

- How useful is archaeological theory for thinking about archaeological practice (& interpretation?)
- IS there a need in archaeology to engage with current social & cultural debates?
- Does theory help us to do that?
- Or is this an ivory tower pastime?

