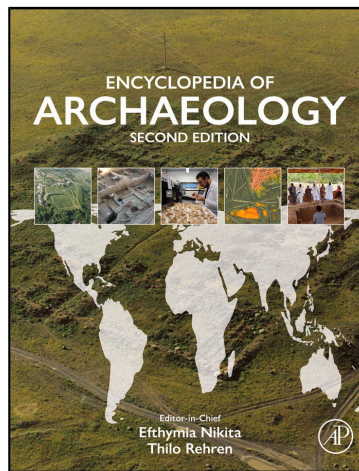


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Archaeology and the New Materialisms

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Key Points

- Exploration of materiality and the matter of the world
- Posthuman challenges to representationalism and dualistic ontologies of separation between human-nonhuman
- Vital matter, capacities and affect
- Agency, intentionality, causality
- Relationality: exploring how the material world is in relationship through Deleuzian assemblages
- Agential realism: questioning the ontological status of the thing as bounded entity and examining intra-actions
- Porosity and blurred boundaries

Abstract

The New Materialisms are part of a wider turn to matter in the humanities and social sciences. This theoretical approach draws attention to matter, exploring the materiality of the world and specifically challenging anthropocentric approaches that prioritize humans over other nonhuman beings and entities. New materialists question dualistic ontologies that separate humans and nonhumans and problematize representationalism as another means of distancing humans from the rest of the material world. Key to the New Materialisms is the understanding that matter is not inert and passive, but has agency, distinct from humanist notions of rationality and intentionality. The relationality of the material world, examining how the materials of the world are in relationship, is a key concept in the New Materialisms, although new materialists diverge in how they approach this. Assemblages explore how (im)material entities are continual in flux as they move into and out of relationship, while agential realism argues that the world is not made up of separate bounded entities. Instead, things-in-phenomena emerge from intra-actions and the agency of matter.

Introduction

We are not outside observers of the world ... rather, we are part of the world in its ongoing intra-activity

Barad (2003, 828).

The New Materialisms is a relational ontology, which is gaining traction within the wider social sciences and humanities (Coole and Frost, 2010; Fox and Alldred, 2019; Attala and Steel, 2019). This approach is essentially a turn to matter, inspired by Post-humanist ideas (Braidotti, 2013) that question the privileged position humans have assumed for themselves within Enlightenment-inspired ontologies. While these anthropocentric ideas serve to separate and distance people from the rest of the

physical world, the New Materialisms recognize the innate materiality of the world and challenge the human exceptionalism that assumes matter is simply inert and passive, waiting to be manipulated, shaped and controlled through human actions. As such, the New Materialisms recognize the agency of a multiplicity of human and non-human actors/actants, all of which are *equally* involved in the co-creation of the material world. The scholarship underpinning the New Materialisms is multi-disciplinary—informed by philosophy, quantum physics, political science, anthropology, feminist theory—and draws upon the ideas of scholars such as Barad (2003, 2007), DeLanda (2006, 2016), Bennett (2010), Coole and Frost (2010), Drazin and Küchler (2015). Deleuze and Guattari's (1980) exploration of becoming, nomadology and assemblages in particular, has been especially influential on the development of new materialist philosophies.

Overview of the New Materialisms: Key Concepts

Three core theoretical concepts underpinning the New Materialisms are matter, agency and relationality, the latter of which has been explored as assemblages (or agencement) and agential realism. These concepts are informed by Posthumanist ideas challenging the notion of the human “at the ontological center or hierarchical apex” (Bennett, 2010, 11) and a rejection of the binaries separating nature and culture. Rather than an inert, passive material world waiting to be worked upon and assigned meaning by people, the New Materialisms draw attention to how we are part of the matter of the world in its continual physical becoming. This approach actively embeds humans within the matter of the world and highlights how human agency is constituted by the matter with which it interacts.

Materiality and Matter

The New Materialisms draw attention to the matter of the world and “its brute ‘thereness’” (Coole and Frost, 2010, 7). The focus is on the capacities and physical properties of matter (Drazin and Küchler, 2015), its vibrancy and vitality (Bennett, 2010), indeed its very materiality (c.f. Ingold, 2013, 27). The underlying theoretical standpoint emphasizes how rather than being passive and inert, something to be made meaningful by human action, matter is creatively in relationship, working to co-produce the material world. It is the flow of material agency, described by Barad (2003, 817) as “an ongoing open process of mattering,” that makes the worlding world (Latour, 2017, 35). This materially embedded, Posthumanist understanding of the world effectively moves attention away from humans, displacing them from the center of enquiry (Bennett, 2010, 11; Fox and Alldred, 2019), instead focusing on the affective capacities of the non-human.

The New Materialisms have emerged from the feminist third wave (Braidotti, 2013; Fox and Alldred, 2019) as a neo-materialist movement that extends materialism to the body, dealing with the politics of gender and embodiment and challenging patriarchal systems of knowledge production. More recent new materialist thought has shifted the focus to how the body itself is situated within a wider world of substances. This New Materialities approach (Attala, 2019; Attala and Steel, 2019; see also Govier and Steel, 2021) draws attention to the very materiality (capacities and affect) of the myriad substances of the body and how the body itself works with, and is provoked, enabled and constrained by, the agency of other substances to co-generate the material world. Emphasizing materiality recognizes that humans are not simply entangled within the matter of the world; rather, people are not only composed of, but equally are part of the substantive matter of the world. As such, the New Materialities firmly situate humans as part of the many co-constituted matterings of the world.

The new materialist focus on matter and matterings rejects the anthropocentric tendency to represent the world (Barad, 2003, 2007; Coole and Frost, 2010, 2; Fox and Alldred, 2019, 1), questioning why language and culture are perceived to be more reliable than the matter of the world (Barad, 2003, 801). Instead, the New Materialisms emphasize how these discursive practices effectively serve to distance humans from the physical world, as is clear in the tripartite nature of knowledge production inherent in representationalism: the knowledge (representation) separates the thinking subject (who represents) from the known reality (what is represented) (Barad, 2007, 46–7). Following Haraway (1992), Barad (2003, 803; 2007, 71–94) proposes a diffractive methodology, which focuses on the intra-actions that occur within research, rather than reflecting upon the world as something that pre-exists and is separate from our enquiry. Such an approach, she argues, elucidates how the boundaries between what appear to be separate entities are in fact blurred and indefinite: there is not a sharp distinction between things in static relationship to each other, but rather an ongoing doing and becoming. Representation and reflexivity both serve to create an ontological gap between how humans know (or represent) the world and the physical world, whereas the New Materialisms blur boundaries, demonstrating the inherent permeability and entanglement of the matter of the world (Attala and Steel, 2019; Averett, 2021).

Vibrant Matter

Jane Bennett (2010) draws attention to the vitality of matter. This approach attends to the agency of nonhuman things and substances and their capacity to act and produce effects, and is influenced by Deleuze and Guattari's (1980) material vitalism. Core concepts of vibrant matter are assemblages (discussed below) and thing-power, the latter of which Bennett defines as the vitality of nonhuman actants producing affects upon the world, beyond how they might be socialized and given meaning by humans. Bennett equates agency with materiality and notes how this agency flows around and through human bodies. While this might appear to perpetuate dualistic ontologies, in fact Bennett shifts the emphasis on the human away from rationality to

an understanding that human-power (agency) derives from the very materiality of the human body. It is an assemblage (see below) of diverse interacting vital materials (2010, 10–13). Indeed, for Bennett, the “structured materiality of all things” bridges the ontological gap between people and the matter of the world. Humans are both in and of the world (Bennett, 2010, 114; Coole and Frost, 2010, 7, 18–20), an understanding which underpins the distinct approach of the New Materialities discussed above (Attala, 2019; Attala and Steel, 2019), which explores human bodies as a set of interacting materials in relationship with each other. Thing-power also allows us to explore social worlds and culture as being more than purely human constructs, but instead coming into existence through the affect and capacity of nonhuman forces.

Agency

Key to the New Materialisms is the concept that nonhuman matter has agency, namely the capacity to affect. Agency is viewed as being the preserve of rational thinking humans in western Enlightenment-inspired ontologies, typically being equated with intentionality (Gell, 1998, 16–17; Bennett, 2010, 29–30; Coole and Frost, 2010, 7). For the new materialist, agency is not aligned with the thinking, rational human but is a characteristic of the matter of the world and how it materializes or comes to matter (Barad, 2007; Bennett, 2010; Coole and Frost, 2010). Nonetheless, Coole (2013) highlights possible pitfalls inherent in equating human intentional agency with the agency of nonhuman matter, as this potentially allows humans to dissociate themselves from responsibility for their destructive actions in the Anthropocene. Recognizing agential capacities of matter allows us to explore and engage with its vital forces, while still taking responsibility for human actions in our co-production of the material world.

Agential realism (see below) offers a different perspective on material agency, which not only moves the concept away from a traditional humanist focus, as an attribute of human intentionality, but also requires that we rethink the causal relationship between things. For Barad (2007, 175, 214), agency is not the attribute of a (human or nonhuman) subject with affective capacities acting upon and affecting another separate entity, but rather it is an enactment which only exists in-phenomena. Different possibilities and effects (phenomena) are either enabled or constrained and excluded by different intra-actions. Causality within such an agential realist approach therefore, does not comprise the one-way movement of cause and effect between the things, matter and substances but instead emerges from intra-actions. Agency emerges from the very materialization or mattering of the world (see Govier, 2019b; Govier and Steel, 2021, 301–02).

Relationality

Key to the New Materialisms is the understanding that the material world is not fixed and stable, composed of discrete bounded entities; rather it is fluid, permeable and in a constant state of becoming. As such, the New Materialisms emphasize how the matter and entities of the world are in relationship. This relationality has been articulated through two key concepts: assemblages (DeLanda, 2006, 2016; Bennett, 2010) and agential realism (Barad, 2003, 2007). These understandings of relationality are embedded in the matter of the world and do not privilege the position of the human in the relationships.

Other relational ontologies that are sometimes included within new materialist thought include Actor Network Theory (ANT) (Latour, 2005; Witmore, 2014, 208–10; Fox and Alldred, 2019), entanglement (Hodder, 2012) and symmetrical archaeology (Witmore, 2019), all of which explore connectivity between human actors and nonhuman actants. ANT, developed by Latour (2005), extends social networks beyond human actors to also include non-human actants, which are envisaged as nodes that interact within a string of connections to form a network. Hodder's entanglement (Hodder, 2012, 95) argues that people and things are intertwined, interconnected and bound together in meshworks (see Ingold, 2010), acting upon each other. Symmetrical archaeology (Olsen and Witmore, 2015; Witmore, 2019) likewise places people and things—defined as “*every being in the world ... individual and differentiated entities or units that cannot be broken into their parts*” (Olsen and Witmore, 2015, 191, original emphasis)—on an equal ontological foundation and draws attention to the agency of nonhuman things in social and material worlds. These approaches are all framed within a flat ontology, in which humans and the nonhuman material world have equal agency but are distinct from each other, thus perpetuating the separation of human and nonhuman. Moreover, they focus on people and things as separate bounded entities, whereas the core aspect of the New Materialisms is the matter of the world (Coole and Frost, 2010; Fox and Alldred, 2019; Govier and Steel, 2021). Assemblages and agential realism however, more firmly situate humans as an integral part of the inter-relating matters of the worlding world.

Assemblages/Agencement

The assemblage, as a means of making sense of the unpredictable relationality of the material world, derives from the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1980). They draw upon the multiplicities of rhizomes, continually in a process of flux, flow and becoming: growing, multiplying, breaking apart, reconnecting. Likewise, an assemblage is an ongoing process of becoming: the coming together, connections and interactions of a heterogeneous group of entities (DeLanda, 2006, 2016; Bennett, 2010). This becoming is non-hierarchical, with no ontological primacy attached to any of the constituents of the assemblage. An assemblage is multi-scalar, from the microscopic through potentially to the hyperobject (Morton, 2013); moreover, both physically tangible entities and the immaterial might cohere to co-produce an assemblage. DeLanda (2016), for example draws attention to social structures while Bennett examines the force of things in the seemingly mundane assemblage of rubbish (2010, 4–6). There is inevitably continual flux and flow in an assemblage, which is always open-ended (Bennett, 2010, 24) and in a constant state of becoming (Harris, 2014a, 90). All constituents of an assemblage have agential capacities, but equally these come together to co-create the

agency of the assemblage. Like Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome, an assemblage actively links this multiplicity of interacting entities by establishing relations between them (Delanda, 2016, 2) in a recursive and ongoing process of becoming.

There are certain problems inherent in the discussion of assemblages, which relate to the translation of the word from the original French term *agencement* (Delanda, 2016, 1; Hamilakis and Jones, 2017, 80; Govier and Steel, 2021, 306–08). *Agencement* literally means the process of arranging, ordering and organizing and as such neatly encapsulates the open-endedness, relationality and material flows of the concept. Given the very distinct nuances separating the terms of assemblage and *agencement* in French, some scholars have chosen instead to return to the original French term *agencement* (Phillips, 2006; Anderson and Harrison, 2010; Anderson et al., 2012; Abbotts, 2017; Govier and Steel, 2021). Such a distinction potentially has especial resonance for archaeologists, for whom assemblage already has a very specific meaning (Govier and Steel, 2021, 306), as it could help avoid the inevitable confusion implicit in the elision of two very different ontological concepts under one term.

Agential Realism

Like assemblages, Karen Barad's theory of agential realism (2003, 2007) is a relational ontology. This approach has developed from a cohesion of quantum entanglement and feminist theoretical perspectives, in particular performativity. The core concepts of agential realism are phenomena, intra-action, agency and entanglement. Agential realism questions the conceptual validity of the thing (Govier and Steel, 2021, 304, 308). Barad argues that things are not ontologically prior but only come into existence through the agency of matter; rather than a world made up of fixed, bounded entities (things-in-) phenomena come into being through intra-action. While the theoretical approaches outlined above describe the interaction between various (non)human actants, Barad's approach highlights intra-action: that things only exist if already in relationship. Agential realism emphasizes the ongoing materialization and becoming of the material, worlding world and also highlights relationality. Rather than the relationship of fixed, static things/entities, as perhaps described in assemblage theory (see above), phenomena only exist in relationship.

A key influence on Barad's development of agential realism (2003, 813–15; 2007, 97–131) was Niels Bohr's work on light and in particular how when this is measured differently, it appears to the observer to be either a wave or a particle. Specifically, this draws attention to how the choices made by a researcher in how to measure or record the material world affects their observation and understanding. For the agential realist, there is not a fixed, stable reality waiting to be measured and researched, independent of the researcher; rather, the researcher is entangled within their research by the choices they make, namely what questions to ask, what data to measure, collect and record, what theoretical apparatus to use to interpret this data and how to present the data and their findings. Research is *relata-in-phenomena*: the researcher is thoroughly entangled and in relationship with the research and what is researched emerges *in-phenomena* with the researcher (Juelskjaer et al., 2021, 14–15). This results in what Barad (2014) describes as the agential cut: choices made by the researcher will co-produce different research phenomena. Research, therefore, is part of the ongoing materialization of the world.

Key Issues: Archaeological Applications of New Materialisms

Archaeologists are increasingly engaging with the New Materialisms. Given the inevitable materiality that archaeologists engage with, there has been significant discussion of the affordances and capacities of materials and as such their impact on past technologies (Conneller, 2011; Malafouris, 2013). The relationality of the archaeological record has likewise been explored through a new materialist lens. The concept of assemblage, in particular has been eagerly adopted as a means of exploring archaeological assemblages (Harris, 2014a,b, 2017; Witmore, 2014; Hamilakis and Jones, 2017). Archaeologists have also engaged with agential realism both as a relational ontology (Marshall and Alberti, 2014; Fowler and Harris, 2015; Jones, 2015; Govier and Steel, 2021) and also for exploring causality and agency (Govier, 2019b).

Vital Materialisms

The core focus of the New Materialisms allows us to consider how the matter of the world both provokes and constrains our own interactions with matter and also demonstrates the porosity of boundaries between human and nonhuman. Conneller (2011) has developed an archaeology of materials, exploring how the different ways in which people worked with and responded to the capacities of different substances articulated different social and material worlds. She examines the interrelationship of material and form in various Upper Palaeolithic artifact types, including stone and mammoth ivory beads, as well as portable and parietal cave art, to illuminate not only the different capacities of materials but also how people know and work with them.

Malafouris challenges the separation of mind, body and object in material interactions involved in the throwing of pottery, showing how potters think through and with matter (2013, 236). Rather than inert matter waiting for the potter to impose his will and shape into an object envisaged in the mind, Malafouris draws attention to how the potter works with clay (and the wheel), responding to their physical properties and capacities. The clay enables and provokes the potter as much as the potter shapes the clay. Malafouris' Material Engagement Theory blurs the boundaries between human-nonhuman: the potter's hands, the wheel and the clay are blurred, permeable and fluid. In a similar vein, Steel (2020) has focused on the blurring of boundaries involved in pottery production, looking at the vital materialism of the clay used in the production of the distinctive Base Ring pottery from Late Bronze Age Cyprus. She demonstrates how potters worked with the vibrant matter of a very plastic, fine-grained clay, which responded to being shaped by hand but not using the wheel, collaborating with this substance to produce a distinctive material

world. Govier (2019b, 53) shifts the coming together of potter, potter's wheel, clay and pot, viewing this through the lens of agential realism as material in-phenomena. She likewise recognizes how the material properties of the clay, with its own distinct capacities, inform the making event.

Assemblages

Archaeological applications of assemblage theory have largely focused on the physical groupings of archaeological materials, such as the Early Bronze Age burial remains from the Isle of Man (Crellin, 2017). Cifarelli (2018) for example, examines beaded dress ornaments made from various materials (including carnelian, shell, vitreous substances and copper) as well as copper armor scales buried with a small group of women in Early Iron Age Hasanlu, Iran. Her detailed analysis of the biography of the different components of personal adornment demonstrates how these objects were entangled in a variety of relationships (assemblages) over generations, moving into and out of circulation in a continual cycle of "creation, fragmentation and recreation" (Cifarelli, 2018, 53) before finally coming into relationship with the women's bodies in a new sensorial assemblage.

The material engagements in a colonial context between the native Joara community and the Spanish garrison of Fort San Juan in 16th century North Carolina are the focus of a recent article by Beck (2020). This examines how the coming together of different material culture traditions might transform social structures, presenting the intersections of materials and rules as a messy network of matter and social practices. However, Beck separates the making of the objects from the final assemblage, noting how the materials are physically transformed into objects that might afterward become incorporated within an assemblage (2020, 628), rather than viewing the maker and raw material equally as part of the assemblage. Govier's (2019a, 20–2) discussion of how human bodies become-with other matter, looking at the carbon deposits on the ribs of skeletons from Çatalhöyük identified as the result of smoke inhalation, provides a more nuanced understanding of the relationality and flux of an assemblage; equally, this is embedded in a vital materialist approach to the flow of agency around and through human bodies (Bennett, 2010; Attala and Steel, 2019). Recently Steel (2021) and Averett (2021) have explored the blurring of boundaries in human-animal relations in Bronze-Iron Age Cyprus. Steel discusses the wearing of animal skins and masks, as depicted on the ceremonial vessels from Bellapais-Vounous, alongside the ingestion of meat from the same animal species, as human and animal becoming consubstantial within theatrically charged performances. Averett focuses on the ways in which animal body parts were incorporated within cult practices in ritual spaces, most notably how the wearing of bucrania as masks by practitioners of cult enacted a material assemblage that enabled a becoming-with human-animal.

Lucas (2012) elides the traditional archaeological assemblage—the depositional and typological groupings of finds—with the Deleuzian open-ended assemblage, examining various material flows into and out of relationship that are implicit in archaeological practice. The archaeological record itself is presented as a new materialist assemblage, composed of both tangible and intangible entities; there is an ongoing flux and flow of relationships through the processes of excavation, recording, analysis and publication through which the archaeological record becomes-with the archaeologist. Edgeworth (2012) also explores the relationality between humans and the archaeological record in excavation. He highlights the direct encounter between archaeologist and material during the process of excavation, as the archaeologist follows stratigraphic layers and the cuts and fills of features.

Agential Realism

There have been fewer archaeological applications of agential realist ideas, perhaps reflecting the innate uneasiness of a discipline which excavates and typologizes things as discrete entities with an approach that questions the ontological priority of the thing (see for example Fowler and Harris, 2015, 4). Nonetheless, this approach has allowed archaeologists to engage with their own role in creating archaeological narratives, noting that different understandings of the past result from the configuration of relationships and intra-actions in the present, which include the role of the researcher. Jones (2015) for example, highlights the agential cut inherent in research and draws attention to the malleability of the past; this is not a reality waiting to be discovered and described by the archaeologist but instead is in-phenomena with the archaeologist. Jones discusses his research of Scottish rock-art in Argyll as intra-actions between rock, rock carver, rock carvings and archaeologist, which he describes as a "dialogue with another entity: rock" (Jones, 2015, 330). He concludes that the archaeological record is a phenomenon intra-acting with the rock and the archaeologists who are measuring and recording the art, rather than a discursive representation shaped in the present. Drawing upon Barad's observation that the nature of the measurement and apparatus shapes the outcome (or agential cut) of research, Marshall and Alberti (2014) challenge the discursive representations of the world implicit in archaeological narratives. They demonstrate for example, how agential realism might inform the ways in which archaeologists engage with the biological sex or gender of an archaeological body, commenting that gender is a phenomenon that emerges from material-discursive practices of performative intra-action (2014, 28). They also examine Maori chevron amulets from an agential realist perspective, noting that these can be both ephemeral Taonga (ancestral power) and material artifact; they remain open and unbounded because they come into being through intra-action (2014, 30–2). Fowler and Harris' diffractive reading of West Kennet long barrow (2015) draws upon the light as particle-wave paradox (see above, Barad, 2003, 2007). They draw attention to the multiple overlapping and shifting (non)human entanglements and relationships which have coalesced to shape the monument over time.

Rather than interaction between fixed entities, Jones explores the production of ancient art as an intra-action, emphasizing the fluidity of people and materials, which are in correspondence with each other (cf. Ingold, 2013, 111). "The artist or maker follows the forces and flow of the material; they attentively work with it" (2018, 24) and the blurred boundaries between substances co-create art objects.

Moreover, Jones argues that the effects of an artwork are multiple and ongoing, a continual becoming, produced by “the intra-action of people and things” (Jones, 2018, 27). Arguably, however, this approach perpetuates the separation of human-nonhuman agencies and has more in common with symmetrical archaeology (Witmore, 2019) than Barad’s agential realism. Govier and Steel (2021, 309–11) have framed the ongoing taphonomic processes of the archaeological record as a phenomenon that emerges from multiple intra-actions which archaeologists have traditionally divided into cultural and natural transformations. As such, this approach closes the gap between human and non-human; these are equally engaged in co-producing the archaeological record, which only exists in relationship.

Summary and Future Directions

The New Materialisms are potentially of great significance for the development of a theoretically embedded archaeological practice. The very focus on the materiality of the world is resonant to archaeologists who examine the material residues of past human societies. Moreover, the New Materialisms challenge the separation of the social sciences and humanities, where so much archaeological theoretical and interpretative research is situated, from the natural sciences (Juelskjaer et al., 2021, 2) that inform much of the analyses of the empirical data. As such, the New Materialisms potentially provide fertile common ground between science-based archaeologies focusing on environmental and material analyses and theoretically embedded interpretative social archaeologies (Harris, 2014b; Govier and Steel, 2021). For example, a new materialist approach should close the intellectual gap between the study of human and nonhuman components of the archaeological record (see for example Conneller, 2011; Averett, 2021; Govier and Steel, 2021). Furthermore, assemblages (or agencement, see above) enable a multi-scalar examination of the archaeological record, from microscopic environmental data, to artifact analysis at all levels (from the material sciences through to the social life of the individual artifact), through to the geographical scale of landscape archaeologies; moreover, it encourages interpretations that take into consideration how these multiple entities variously interacted with, and were shaped by, the intangible, ephemeral and immaterial (Steel, 2018).

The ongoing materialization of the world that is embedded in new materialist thought has important implications for our understanding of the taphonomic processes by which the archaeological record was created. Traditionally, the archaeological record has been viewed as a static snapshot of past human activity (Binford, 1983, 19–20, 23–4). The New Materialisms however, allow for a more dynamic reading. How the archaeological record came into being might be fruitfully explored through the relational lens of an assemblage (or perhaps better as an agencement (see above), or otherwise as an agential realist phenomenon or intra-action (Govier and Steel, 2021, 309–11). Likewise, excavation and post-excavational analyses might equally be framed within these relational ontologies (Edgeworth, 2012; Lucas, 2012). Harris, for example, has explored the matter flows on a single pot, from its production through to its excavation, as an assemblage, and highlights how the excavator also becomes part of the assemblage (Harris, 2014b, 331–4). Similarly, Joyce and Gillespie (2015) draw attention to the matter flows implicit in the itinerary of an archaeological artifact as it moves from archaeological context to excavation/discovery to museum piece: such objects are continually being framed in new relationships, including museum basements and displays, archaeological and popular texts and their possible online presence.

The multivocality of the origins of the New Materialisms, informed by Posthumanist and feminist ideas in particular, bring to the fore the ethics of research practices and knowledge production. This approach challenges notions of scientific objectivity and instead encourages the archaeological researcher to be explicit about how their own research (research question, theoretical perspectives and practical methodologies) are culturally and personally situated (Haraway, 1988; Juelskjaer et al., 2021, 18). Moreover, an agential realist approach encourages archaeologists to recognize how they themselves are embedded within, indeed part of, the research process: the archaeologists and the archaeological knowledges that they produce are not separate from each other but are inextricably entwined. The questions asked, the data interrogated and the methodologies applied each enable specific understandings of the past. This research is inherently entangled with ethics, accountability and responsibility. In particular it draws attention to the messiness of research, which seldom follows a direct line from initial inception of a research question through to final publication, but which is frequently hidden away in a coherent presentation of methodology, data acquisition and analysis (Juelskjaer et al., 2021, 4–6, 15–18).

See Also: Marxist Archaeology.

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