What about 'one more turn after the social' in archaeological reasoning? Taking things seriously

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Abstract

This paper discusses the principle of symmetry for archaeology in light of the discipline's theoretical legacy. At the core, this principle involves a reconfiguration of how the relationship between humans and things is characterized. Advocating the recognition of mixtures of what are routinely parsed into categories of nature and society, a symmetrical archaeology centres itself upon the equitable study of the discipline's defining ingredients. It is argued that such symmetry of humans and things undercuts many pesky dualisms exhibited throughout the recent history of archaeological theory and practice. The article summarizes the salient formulations of this relationship in archaeological thinking and suggests that a symmetrical focus on ontological mixtures removes the reliance upon multiplying epistemological settlements that fragment the discipline. An example is given of how heritage might be rethought.

Keywords

Archaeological reasoning; disciplinary history; heritage; science studies; symmetry; things.

What is a symmetrical archaeology and why is a symmetrical archaeology? In this introduction to the collective work of a heterogeneous group of archaeologists (Hicks 2005; Olsen 2003, 2005; Shanks 2004; Webmoor 2005; Webmoor and Witmore in press; Witmore 2004), I want quickly to address these identifying questions. But, as I proceed, hopefully it will become clear that encompassing both these questions and, in turn, giving the greatest ballast to such an embarking is the question of *how* a symmetrical archaeology. *How* symmetrical archaeology reconfigures a host of basic dualisms – such as past/present, subject/object, meaning/referent, representation/represented – will serve as the best lineament of the what and why questions. At the outset it is important to highlight the most fundamental compass point for symmetrical archaeology; and that is how it

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attends to the relations of humans and things. Drawing insight from actor-network-theory (Callon and Law 1997; Latour 1993, 1999 [1992], 2005; Law and Hassard 1999), itself, not unlike contemporary Anglo-American archaeology emergent from the diatribes of idealists/constructivists versus scientific realists, a symmetrical 'attitude' undertakes a re-characterization of this most primordial ontology. This is the starting point in rethinking some of the other dualisms just mentioned. If archaeology is etymologically the 'study of old things' by contemporary people, then this should be a common enough denominator, not division, for all our interests in archaeology.

While I want to emphasize the relations of humans and things as primordial for the discipline from the outset, I should specify that not only do such topics comprise the entirety of the domain of archaeological reasoning, but it is precisely with such a presumed common focus that there is such increasing fragmentation of archaeology into a diversity of intellectual camps. With the maturing of the discipline, the once solid bedrock below the house of archaeology has fractured into multiple pieces as a result of the proverbial sand dilemma. There are a plethora of specialty theories in archaeology today – most evident in sampling the interests of the various theoretical 'readers' and programmatic statements grouped variously under processual and post-processual archaeologies (e.g. Hodder 2001; Meskell and Preucel 2004; Preucel 1991; Preucel and Hodder 1996; Tilley 1993; Ucko 1995; VanPool and VanPool 2003). Now, as historians of archaeology such as Schnapp (1996) and Trigger (1989) have pointed out, there has never been a monolithic corpus of interests among archaeologists. And this is certainly the case today. Yet we may note that the ripples of a post-Kuhnian image of scientific inquiry reached archaeology precisely at the time it was – particularly in the States but in Britain as well – attempting to shore up a unified approach to the past. So today most meta-commentators and theorists, keeping in step with a disunited vision of science, have encouraged, rather than bemoaned, the increasing number of practising camps in archaeology (e.g. Hodder and Hutson 2003; Wylie 2006). Now what disunites these camps seems to fall along the lines of Ian Hacking's (1987) idea of 'styles of reasoning', each motivated by different questions and different evaluative procedures for assessing claims as an outgrowth of divergent emphases in methodology and theoretical beliefs. I do not want to belabour such differences, as an honest assessment of the contemporary archaeological landscape should suffice – with landmarks to note such as varying pedagogical priorities in graduate programmes, varying citational practices in publications, the themes of the publication venues themselves, performance evaluation criteria for research and teaching, and so forth. Why I even bring up such a worn fact of the field is this: rooted in the humans and things equation, the discipline nonetheless branches far from its seed along the spectrum stretched between the presumed ontologically immiscible categories of things and humans. This is why the symmetry principle abjures the division of humans and things and, as the epithet attests, operates instead from the premise that humans and things cannot artificially be sieved apart, but rather must be treated as *a priori* ontologically mixed (Webmoor and Witmore in press; see Witmore this issue).

What is in need of clarification is how symmetry is any different from other archaeological camps looking to matter to mediate theoretical division in the discipline (e.g. Knappett 2005; Meskell and Preucel 2004). These discussions, to note just a few, emphasize 'materiality' or 'materials' (e.g. Ingold 2007) as a purview unique to

archaeology, and draw upon inter-disciplinarian inspiration. Moreover, ontology seems to be the fashionable theoretical trench everyone wants to be digging in (a legacy owing to the importation of phenomenological thought in the discipline) now that epistemological issues are exhausted from the (equally inter-disciplinarian) 'science wars' (Parsons 2003). So a symmetrical levelling of humans and things (Webmoor and Witmore in press), a reassessment of ontology, may at first seem far from novel in the discipline. To draw out the unique contribution of symmetry, then, I look to previous and contemporary archaeological thought. This is especially important as much 'ontological discussion' was, in fact, present in earlier 'styles of reasoning', and a hope of symmetry is to overcome an 'academic amnesia' with regard to previous scholarship. While space does not allow for the exhaustive review that these 'styles' deserve, salient examples will be selected and overall trends highlighted. Fortunately, Olsen (2003, this issue) takes up the task of distinguishing symmetry from more recent material culture studies, Shanks (this issue) draws out connections to earlier disciplinarian attitudes and Witmore (this issue) further develops the implications for a symmetrical levelling.

The visibility of objects

To highlight the manner in which humans and things are currently mediated in research traditions, let me give a few (overly) rapid examples to illustrate my point. Approaches that may be aligned most closely with processual archaeology would appear to foreground human and object interactions, particularly as these two components constitute the depositional processes that form the archaeological record recoverable by archaeologists for study. Indeed, in a recent programmatic assessment of behavioural archaeology, LaMotta and Schiffer state that: 'Behavioral archaeologists define the basic unit of analysis precisely as the interaction of one or more living individuals with elements of the material world. As a unit of analysis, behavior includes *both* people and objects' (2001: 20). Such an explicit emphasis upon both people and objects and their mutual engagement in formation processes should come as no surprise, considering that within such a programme was the birth of 'modern material culture studies', which, in the reincarnation at the University College London department, places great emphasis on the 'mutual constitution' of humans and things through processes of Hegelian objectification (Miller 1987, 2006). Behavioural archaeology presents us with a detailed and well-thought-out attempt at parity in dealing with humans and things as both are theorized to designate, collectively, archaeologically recoverable 'behaviour', in distinction from coeval functionalist accounts which emphasize external, material constraints – i.e. generally environmental conditions – as largely determinative of human behaviour. LaMotta and Schiffer emphasize this distinction themselves: 'This analytical focus on both material and organismal aspects of behavior distinguishes behavioral archaeology from other theoretical perspectives founded upon purely *organismal* conceptions of behavior' (2001: 20).

In publication reports subscribing to behavioural archaeology, however, the stress of explanation lies squarely with *disentangling* humans and things into humans-in-themselves and things-in-themselves – in, for example, the familiar models of c(culture)-transforms and n(nature)-transforms – in the hope of sieving out extraneous variables in order to

reconstruct formation processes responsible for the encountered state of the archaeological record (see Binford's critique of these terms (1981)). And while these formation processes hinge upon actions of the human counterpart in this mutual formation of the record – actions such as 'abandonment', 'reuse', 'discard', etc. – the end results typifying such studies are 'artifact (or architectural) life histories' (Schiffer 1976: 46). Along the spectrum mentioned above spanning humans to things, behavioural archaeology admirably embraces both as the proper domain of archaeological investigation, yet in results tends to shift emphasis to a position lodged with 'things'. Obviously, it may be countered that this favouring of things is an unavoidable methodological consequence due to the reality of the archaeological record: artefacts are recoverable while their behavioural counterparts – living, acting people – are not. The motivations of past people – their behavioural decisions – must be inferred by reducing out the more demonstrable n-transforms to posit the c-transforms of things. This seems commonsensical enough. And, despite the disagreements between the two programmes, evolutionary archaeology takes a similar tract in respect to the human-to-things spectrum.

At the outset, both humans and things are subsumed under the aggregate analytic category of 'human phenotype'. For purposes of applying Darwinian natural selection, Leonard explains that 'the objects of archaeology were part of living organisms. Behavior and technology are components of the human phenotype' (2001: 72). Merging things *and* people into a novel third ontologically posited category of 'phenotype' that is collectively acted upon by the forces of natural selection, Dunnell and Leonard are then able to explain the archaeological visibility and variability of things through their 'replicative success' (Dunnell 1980; Leonard 2001: 73). As their posited ontological category includes both things and people, the observance of artefact variability in the record carries the supposition of past acting people as their phenotype carriers. There is something very culture-historical about such a one-to-one identification of the visible with invisible. And like culture-historical accounts, the results of such evolutionary studies consist largely of flow charts and branching 'pedigree' diagrams of artefact variability (cf. Leonard 2001: 84–92). There is a favouring of things along the archaeological spectrum (Fig. 1), reinforcing not only the notion of a distinction between humans and things, but the very duality itself. Confined within such a deeply ingrained dualism, archaeology has shifted back and forth and to the middle of this humans and objects spectrum.

The importance of people

This is best demonstrated with the subsequent post-processual shifts. One component of the reaction to processual approaches was the post-processual promotion of a recovery of people, even of individuals, who, it was argued, had been de-emphasized or overtly characterized as epiphenomenal to archaeological understanding. I think that this was exaggerated for rhetorical purposes, as the tenets of a behavioural programme testify. Nevertheless, the programmatic shift of focus was pronounced. Essentially, the early advocates inverted the relationship of things and people in theoretical focus and explanatory method, granting priority to the society pole of the spectrum at the expense of things (Fig. 2). Now, while humans and things were bound up in the archaeological

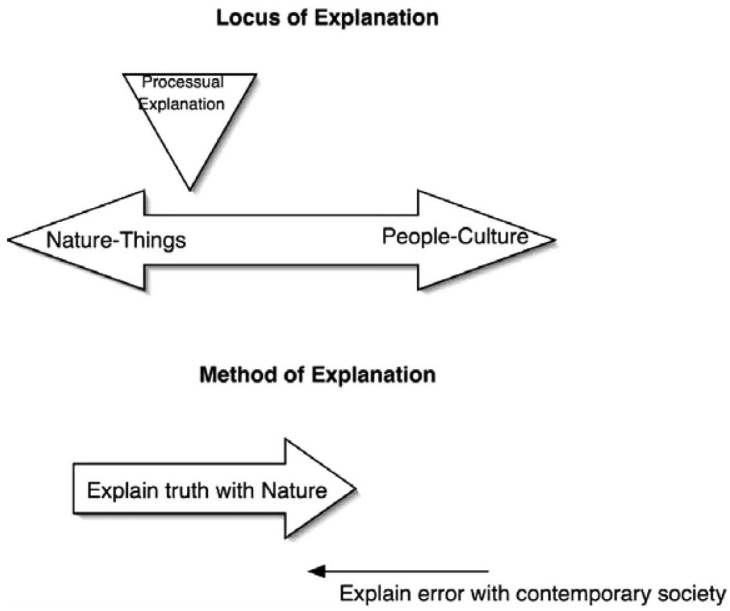

Figure 1 Mediating humans and things in processual explanations.

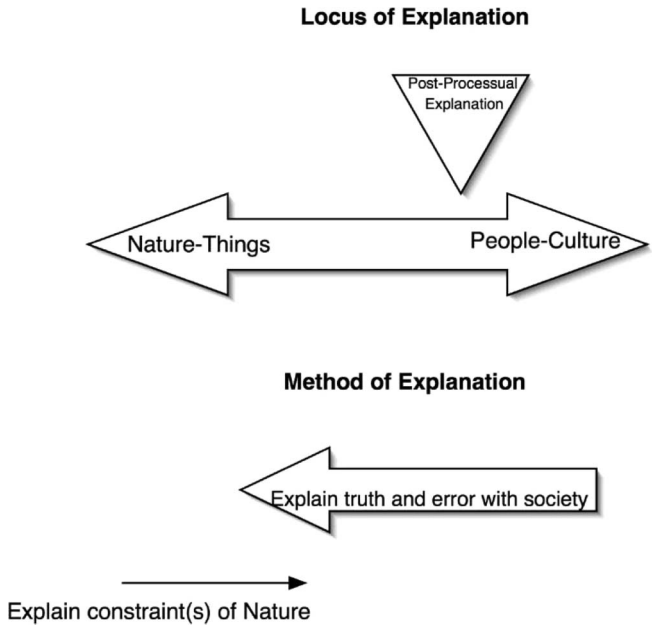

Figure 2 Mediating humans and things in post-processual explanations.

record, things were prioritized for their meaning-bearing qualities. Such a move may be seen as the antidote to an oversight of the symbolic and agency-bearing dimension of past humanity that was largely absent in processual accounts. But the move also

corresponded (if somewhat late) with extra-disciplinarian, post-Kuhnian criticisms of scientific practice, especially those which developed in the sociological camps of the 'strong programme' (Bloor 1991; see Shanks this issue), which spring-boarded from Kuhn's paradigmatic schema and the ineliminable influences of socio-political factors in scientific endeavour. The vector of this push accelerated with the general 'social constructivist' position. For archaeological studies under such an ambit, things took on a malleable quality, shaped by the vagaries of past actors utilizing things to objectify and negotiate meaning *and* by contemporary Kuhnian-type archaeologists themselves in their present-day social and political manoeuvring (e.g. Hodder 1984; Shanks and Tilley 1987). Post-processualists had indeed ushered in the end of innocence for the discipline, and for things-in-themselves. Like the swing of a pendulum, such a move in archaeology was necessary and therapeutic in its self-criticism.

Material culture studies presents us with a field of study which developed out of, and in tandem with, much post-processual thought (e.g. Buchli 2002; Miller 1987). Yet there remains the recalcitrant 'social' as an abiding irony in such a 'materialist'-focused programme (see Olsen this issue). While such a platform foregrounds the concept of the material as constitutive of culture, material culture studies nonetheless lodge explanation within the social realm by utilizing interpretative models of explanation, particularly that of material culture as text (Olsen 2003). The practical result of such studies is to 'clothe' materiality – the things of both the past and the contemporary – within the social realm as the recipient of meaning ascription by human consciousness. A guiding example for material culture studies is a notion of the social agency of things as espoused by Alfred Gell (esp. 1998). Here things are acknowledged to be active rather than passive bystanders in society. Yet things in Gell's scheme have agency only when inserted within human interaction. The actions of things have significance only in relation to 'social agency'. Ultimately such relations of humans and things remain asymmetrical, as people, first and foremost, constitute society, with things factored in only 'after the fact' as they impinge upon human-to-human engagement.

We might say that together these three aforementioned general approaches in archaeology remain fundamentally *humanist* in relating things and people – a humanism that views the world from a perspective presupposing humans in a privileged position with respect to nature. That is, while things are variously discussed as integral to archaeological reconstruction of culture, explanation in all of these accounts privileges either the objects pole or the people pole of the spectrum. The problem from a symmetrical perspective is that a humanist assumption corrupts the explanatory focus before research has even begun by separating humans from things *a priori*. The resultant 'turns' in archaeology, or at least the multiple research platforms, then variously traverse this spectrum depending upon what component is emphasized in explanation. Symmetrical archaeology views the initial separation of humans and things as unhelpful, and as responsible for the wide divergences, or hyper-pluralism, of approaches characterizing current archaeology.

Diagnostic of the future of such incommensurable platforms may be the rising debate concerning multi-vocality, or the ethical imperative to incorporate stakeholders into archaeological interpretation. Developing from internal reminders of the contemporary socio-political context of archaeological work, as well as from independent, external legal mandates, multi-vocal approaches incorporate many important debunkings of inherited

dichotomies such as past-present and objectivity-subjectivity. The leverage of neo-liberal conceptions of individual autonomy and legal standing serves to tie such progressive calls to a humanism favouring, once again, a deep divide between the discipline's fundamental matters of concern.

The proposition of symmetry

Symmetrical archaeology does not present itself as a unifying theory for the discipline. Symmetrical archaeology does work at re-configuring the ingredients that are fundamentally what archaeology concerns itself with: it excavates beneath the duality of humans and things and traces out a different path (Webmoor and Witmore in press). The guiding proposition is as follows: what if we were to treat things and humans symmetrically (Fig. 3)? Such a 'one more turn after the social turn' (cf. Latour 1999: 281) literally turns the arrows of explanation 90 degrees so that, rather than nature and society posed across from each other on a horizontal axis, nature-society is regarded as a complex imbroglio of humans-things which cannot be reduced apart and explanation

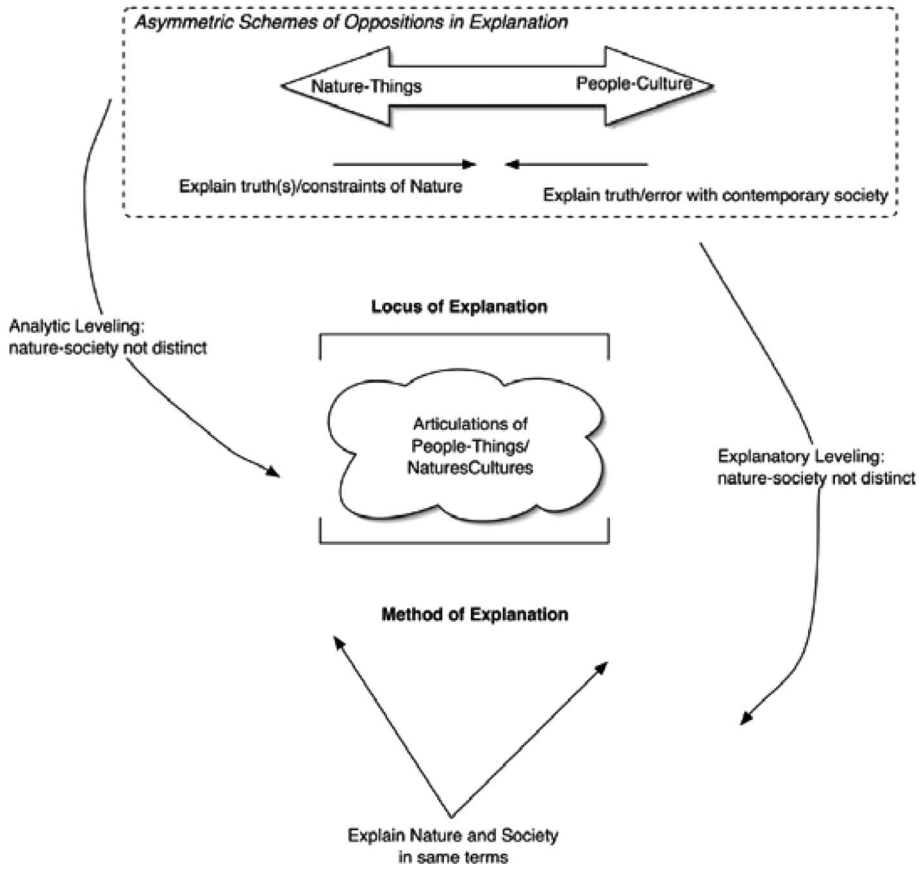

Figure 3 Humans – things in symmetrical explanation.

comes vertically from the common pole of nature-society. This *post-humanist* repositioning de-centres humans as autonomous, independent beings, in need of distinct explanatory concepts, making the non-(a)modernist recognition that things are just as much a part of *being* (Hayles 1999; Latour 1993, 2005).

What is the root justification for treating humans-things, or 'naturescultures', as entangled? With modernist thought, such categories were viewed as separate because of differences due to inherent qualities or essences. The inferred possession of these qualities placed an entity into one category or the other. First and foremost among such qualities was 'intentionality' or 'consciousness'. It may seem overly philosophical, but such presumed essences give rise to a host of resultant concepts key to archaeology and based upon an either/or reasoning. So, if humans possess intentionality, nature, as substratum, does not. Discussions of agency and meaning are slotted, in this either/or ticking of attributes, under human or society; while time, environment or objects, lacking intentionality, are slotted into nature and things. The problem, as brought most illustratively to light in the 'trenches' of actually studying how such divisions are (or are not) utilized in scientific practice, is that such 'essences' prove un-demonstrable and are furthermore often 'mixed' in actual research. The best examples come from technoscience where human research goals and models and the capacities of instruments create grey areas where *both* are responsible in an indissoluble manner for research outcomes (e.g. Haraway 1997; Latour 1999: 145–73; Pickering 1995).

As an example in archaeology, the Millon map of Teotihuacan, a touchstone for archaeological survey and mapping techniques, was intended to be as comprehensive as technology then current (1960s) allowed. Yet hand drafting based upon aerial reconnaissance allowed only so much imaging resolution. The recent construction of a Walmart in the south west portion of the archaeological zone revealed more sub-surface structures than the map was capable of predicting with its coarse resolution. Was this the fault of the then available mapping techniques, the omissions or inaccuracies of the survey teams? Again, none of these is fair – far from it. It is more reasonable to say that it was the result of the particular instrumentation and research goals bound together at the time. Indeed, similar arguments have been highlighted even for Palaeolithic technology where lithic composition merges with the knapper's desired result to produce particular 'diagnostic types' of tools – so that a quartzite folsom point would be rare indeed. Where does the intentionality of the researcher end and the material capacity of the instrument begin (Lemonnier 1976)? Which is more responsible for the temporary stabilization of the outcome?

Incorporating and building upon the insights from such inter-disciplinarian fields as have likewise endured the polemic of social constructivism versus scientific realism, a symmetry in archaeology advocates the need to suspend metaphysical questioning (assumed or explicit) regarding 'essences', 'intentionality', realism versus idealism and so forth. Why? Because, like the examples concerned with 'human intentionality', such questions, characteristic of metaphysical probing, remain open-ended and contentious, supplying the oil for the 'revolving door' of theoretical turn-over. Instead, a symmetrical approach retains the insights of previous archaeologies while dismissing the unsolved 'epistemological dead-ends' that have led to acrimonious – and premature – dismissal.

As I began, the hope for this paper is to manifest the need to re-centre, re-focus and re-tool archaeology as a discipline rooted symmetrically in the study of humans and things.

Implications for symmetrical practice in archaeology

As the simple diagram indicates (Fig. 3), this analytic move complicates what were mistakenly categorized as separate entities to begin with. This is the trade-off for analytically neat divisions, so that a host of subsidiary notions thought to pertain exclusively to one pole or the other, such as 'practice', 'agency', 'representation', 'change' and 'time', are likewise re-configured. Practice, rather than being framed in terms of Bourdieu's dialectic of the active individual negotiating with both constraining and enabling structures, becomes a matter of the success or failure of assemblages of humans and things (both instruments and objects of investigation) to stabilize. In archaeology, such parlance should be familiar enough: 'assemblages' were a taxonomic type characterizing certain time periods. For instance, San Martín orange ware is consistently found at Teotihuacan, Mexico, throughout the site's later phases (approx. 350–600 CE). Rather than distinguish such things from the people who utilized them, a symmetrical archaeology would treat the Teotihuacanos and orange ware of this period as inextricable. For understanding prehistoric practice is it helpful to distinguish the users of the ubiquitous ceramics from the ceramics themselves? With the proliferation of 'cyborgs' (cf. Haraway 2003) through history, the contemporary, politically relevant example would be Latour's discussion of the National Rifle Association (politically conservative champion of 'gun rights') in the United States: is it the gun in the hands of a individual which kills people? Or the individual with a gun in the hand? Neither, symmetrically speaking, is quite right: it is the special assemblage, or 'cyborg', of gun + individual which is uniquely responsible for killing, and which is *sui generis* reducible neither to human intention nor to mechanical function. It takes the (daunting) assemblage to practise killing. And, however unfortunate, such an assemblage, much like the early hominid with her crude hand axe, proves to be very stable over the long term.

Such a notion of practice, one focused on stabilizing assemblages of technology and people, re-distributes 'agency' in a more democratic manner – 'democratic' because it is inclusive irrespective of humanist bias. So the 'material agency' (viz. Pickering 1995) of things must be considered an integral part of action. In fact, due to the embeddedness of 'agency' within humanist thought, 'action' may be preferable to de-privilege the idea of humans as the primary locus of action. As in the example above, once the assemblage of hominid + tool stabilized, it would be a partial description to discuss the agency of humans as if they acted without technological prostheses. Things (hand axes, guns, electron microscopes, theodolites) must be given their credit. While granting action to things may initially strike one as anthropomorphic or even fetishization (in Marx's sense), it is more accurately the de-fetishization of humans as mysteriously autonomous 'givens', divorced from their 'relations of production' with things.

Furthermore, attending to the mixtures of humans and things removes the burden of representation inherited from Platonic and Cartesian thought and reified in

Anglo-American philosophy of science. Conceived within both idealist and realist philosophies as a gap between word and world, or mind and reality, scientific representation was to bridge this gap by matching up to the things of the world, thereby justifying truth claims as correspondence-to-reality (Rorty 1979). As an inheritor of such a theory of knowledge, archaeology is no exception. In fact, archaeology relies to an exceptional degree upon its media – maps, plans, stratigraphic profiles, photography – as the immortal witnesses of a past 'destroyed' for representational rebirth (Fig. 4). With the failure of correspondence theories, most notably the logical-positivists' programme for the sciences, archaeology has been increasingly disbanded into 'intellectual camps' due to the resulting epistemic dispersion: some practise a 'watered-down' probabilistic-statistical version of verification (e.g. Salmon 1982), others have moved to justification via coherence theories (e.g. Kelley and Hanen 1988), still others move (back) to Popper's falsificationism (Bell 1994) and many, if not all, of the post-processualists have adopted a hermeneutic 'tacking-back-and-forth' for justification of epistemic fit (e.g. Hodder 1999: 33; Wylie 2002: 161–8) – if much conscious attention is granted to evaluation of claims.

What happens when a split between humans and things is not presupposed? If there is no Cartesian mind-in-a-vat questioning reality but instead the recognition that brain-with-vat *is* the collective world? Popper and Kuhn both recognized the inability of the Hempelian positivists to provide a secure manner of 'hooking onto the world' with representation, and so turned attention away from the context of justification of claims to the context of discovery (see Kelley and Hanen 1988: 61–99). Spring-boarding from their advice, science studies, which emerged from the 'science wars' of the 1980s and 1990s (see Latour 2003; Parsons 2003), has looked at the practice of scientists and apocryphally announced that there was no single 'gap' between scientists (archaeologists) and their objects of study. Both are implicated in on-going relations which mobilize people

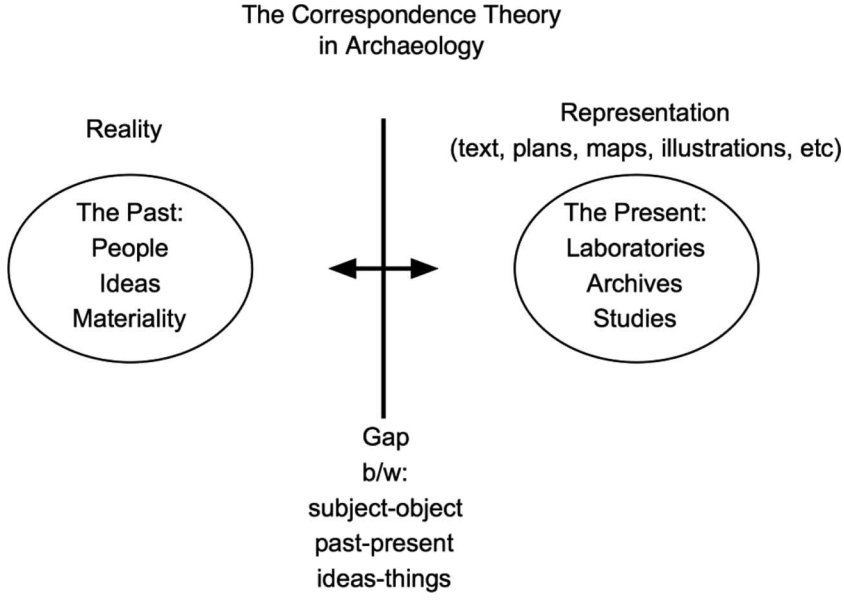

Figure 4 Correspondence in archaeology – representational rebirth of things of the past in media.

(archaeologists, politicians, witnesses) and things (instruments, objects) temporarily to stabilize phenomena (phenomena which are nonetheless continually circulating) for the purposes of justifying claims. This pragmatic approach to justification emphasizes *mediation* which is co-active and on-going (Webmoor 2007a). Mediation (re)balances claims to know the world by excavating beneath representation as conventionally understood, and provides both an ontology of the co-creation of humans-things and an epistemology not encumbered by the subject-world gap (that irresolvable dead-end) (see Witmore this issue: Fig. 2; Rorty 1979, 1999 for discussion).

Finally, change and time are other defining focuses of archaeology. But, if things and people are mixed, then what are the implications for the 'solvent' – time? As archaeologists, we intimately know that things from the past remain today as ruins, as the residues of what came before. However, looked at symmetrically, we are perpetually mixed with things: we are cyborgs with our cell phones, cars and other technological accoutrements. So, as the archaeological sensibility makes us aware, we are equally mixed with things from the past: cars are assemblages of recent *and* 'stone age' technology (wheels), cell phones and computers incorporate the initial discovery and harnessing of silicon and, more mundanely, as burgeoning heritage studies reminds us, ruins and monuments of the past act upon us every day in directing traffic around obelisks, altering city and suburban growth, shifting our economies to archaeo-tourism or creating territorial or religious conflicts over Hindu-Islamic sanctuaries.

Indeed, let us consider the example of 'heritage', a most ambiguous idea. In particular, what about the ethical imperative to incorporate 'other voices' in archaeological practice at sites deemed germane to many other interests and activities that may not subscribe to an archaeological canon of knowledge and manifestation? Such moves to facilitate 'heritage for all' are replete in the archaeological literature, most especially in the litigious contexts of North America, Australia and New Zealand. Indeed, 'heritage', deriving from and fostering a value relativity for things of the past and present, is just such an arena where a symmetry principle is most challenged and yet has much to offer. A recently completed study undertook an unpacking of just what 'heritage' is for local denizens and Mexican visitors of the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Teotihuacan, Mexico (Webmoor 2007b, in press). For instance, spiritual or 'new age' practices form a common (and spectacularly apparent) form of engagement with the archaeological zone. Beyond simply being a monumental backdrop or stage, passive recipients for the attribution of 'irrational' meaning to validate these practices, what stake(holding) do the things of Teotihuacan have (Plate 1)?

Tracing the associations formed through an 'Aztec bailador' or dancer reveals the active quality of things, or a swapping of properties between things and humans. The stepped causeways of *tezontle*, or volcanic rock, surrounding the plaza of the Pyramid of the Sun determine now (as they did in the prehispanic period) where such performances are carried out. As elevated boundaries, these things also provide seating for tourists seeking a spectacle. But the movement of tourists to the dance spectacle is equally guided by the modern system of fences and gates of the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (INAH) which arrest ambulation at the plaza before the performative spectacle. Instead of nationalist identity politics or valorization of Teotihuacan as constitutive of a mythic and unifying past, things, both past and present, equally enervate the spiritual spectacle. The obsidian of the 'authentic', highly ornamental regalia, drawing the attention of

Plate 1 'Aztec' bailadores or dancers in the plaza of the sun, Teotihuacan, Mexico, September 2005.

tourists, comes from grey obsidian sources, local quarries exploited by the prehispanic Teotihuacanos and now crafted in nearby workshops. These workshops likewise supply the site's ubiquitous wandering vendors, who eagerly hawk their obsidian blades and statues to the tourists gathered in the plaza. This micro-economy, enabled by this and other spectacles, is vitally important for local residents' income. Most popular are the authentic designs, which the dancers, artisans and vendors learn from visiting the site's museums and reading archaeological texts. In fact, covered by maize fields and nopal cactus up until the 1960s, the levelled plaza, the steps for sitting and the INAH fence would not exist, and there would be no 'new age' spectacle, mobilization of the local market or discussions of mythic and nationalist identity, if it were not for archaeology. The 'archaeological engine' drives all these associations at Teotihuacan, mixing humans and things in inter-connected networks that extend well beyond any ideational or meaning privileging notion of 'heritage'.

In 'taking things seriously', an examination of the 'heritage' of Teotihuacan, or public and stakeholder involvement with these sites of the archaeological imagination, reveals a set of four primary associations inter-linked and stabilized thanks to the work of things themselves: spiritual or new age practices, diversion, economics, archaeology (Webmoor 2007b for fuller discussion). The core of these associations forms what is normally taken for heritage, but a heritage extracted from the circulation of humans and things through other primary associations (Fig. 5). Tracing these associations out from a single site draws awareness to local and national identity politics, indigenous and stakeholder beliefs and

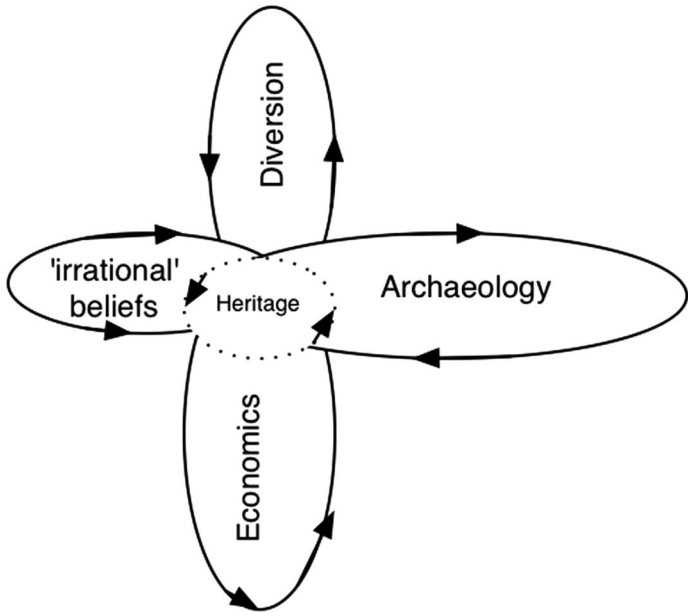

Figure 5 The associations making up heritage at Teotihuacan, Mexico. 'Heritage' (the core) is normally extracted from the real-time interactions between both humans and things which extend well beyond more restrictive conceptualizations. Each loop involves these associations of humans and things and the relative importance of the overall association is signalled by size.

rights, and the overall archaeological 'footprint' upon local and regional communities. But it also grants 'voice' to a far greater assembly: to both humans *and* things.

So, from a symmetrical perspective, the past is with us every day, acting upon us and questioning our claimed humanist and modernist 'liberation' from the uncivilized worlds of things and pasts (contra Rorty 1998). Symmetrical archaeology, much akin to a third party in a bipartisan political system, or the environmental movement, urges radical reform from an unpopular platform in order to recognize the role of things in our collective future. Anything less, such as the reassuring neo-liberalism which puts humans at the centre of concern and action, risks an unsustainable, partial ecology. Archaeology, as the discipline of things and long-term vision *par excellence*, stands to be an important contributor to understanding such a progressive, inclusive future.

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