

The World as Artefact: Material Culture Studies and Archaeology

Terje Oestigaard

Firstly, ethno-archaeology gave rise to both the processual and the post-processual paradigm in archaeology (Tilley 1989). In processual archaeology, “ethno-archaeology” was intended to be a fresh solution to archaeology’s methodological crises. Paradoxically, it was the variation in the ethnographic record which gave rise to the notions of cross-cultural laws, which also undermined its own basis and gave rise to its counterpart – the post-processual archaeology (Hodder 1982a, 1982b, 1982c). Traditionally, “ethno-archaeology” has, on the one hand, been the sub-discipline which aimed to bridge archaeology and anthropology and, on the other hand, it has been seen as a methodological tool providing analogies and interpretations. The relationship between archaeology and anthropology is nevertheless debated, and the extreme positions are represented by, on the one hand, Binford’s well known characteristic of “archaeology as anthropology” (Binford 1962) and, on the other hand, Clarke’s equally well-known statement that “archaeology is archaeology is archaeology” (Clarke 1968:13). These two traditions have continued in various forms. Secondly, a central topic in archaeology is the relation between culture and nature (materiality),

which includes the debate on methodological collectivism and methodological individualism.

Within post-modernism, the dogma of mind's superiority over matter has been forced to its extreme; there is nothing but language. When social scientists have acknowledged nature as a relevant aspect in social constructions, it has most often been approached as a unified entity – as one thing – Nature. I aim to illuminate the interrelatedness of culture and nature not as opposing categories but as different interacting spheres of human beings and materiality. Thus, I shall give a historical introduction to ethno-archaeology and the relation between archaeology and anthropology, and then analyse the paradigms of archaeology from the perspectives of methodological collectivism and individualism, and finally, I shall explore the concept of material-culture studies as a successor of ethno-archaeology bridging processual and post-processual archaeology.

Chris Gosden claims that “all archaeology today is postcolonial” (Gosden 2001:241), and he even states that “ethnoarchaeology is immoral, in that we have no justification for using the present of one society simply to interpret the past of another” (Gosden 1999:9). David van Reybrouck (2000) has given a critical and historical discussion of the importance of contextual ethno-archaeology. Ethno-archaeology is often associated with the heyday of processualism, but the sub-discipline had a vital role in the early, post-processual writing. “Ethno-archaeology” is a combination of two disciplines: archaeology, which is constituted by techniques for recovering and recording material remains of culture, and ethnography, which is the study of human behaviour and social organization in living societies (Haaland 1988:130). The specific aim has been to understand the processes between the artefacts and the cultural environment within which they are produced (Haaland 1977:1). Most of the early contextual archaeologists were involved in ethno-archaeological research. Among others, Hodder (1982b) studied in Baringo in Kenya and Miller (1985) in India, but also studies of mortuary practices in Britain (Pearson 1982) and a comparison

between Swedish and English beer cans (Shanks & Tilley 1992) were conducted. Thus, there was a change in “ethnographic archaeology” which stressed that “ethnographic analogies” do not only refer to *other cultures*’ analogies but also encompasses the scientists’ world of reference (Podgorny 2000:19). To sum up, “If British ethnoarchaeology was largely contextual, contextual archaeology was also largely ethnoarchaeological” (Reybrouck 2000:41). As a reaction to processual archaeology, the primary aim of the early, post-processual archaeology was to see how symbols were negotiated and manipulated in social contexts – how they were *symbols in action*. Hodder argued that “the main response to the new questions has naturally been to turn to ethnoarchaeology” (Hodder 1982d:14).

As with all other archaeological practices, there are no agreements as to what “ethno-archaeology” is or how it is possible to combine archaeology and anthropology. There are numerous definitions of ethno-archaeology, and Nicholas & Kramer in their *Ethnoarchaeology in Action* refer to twelve different approaches to ethno-archaeology (Nicholas & Kramer 2001:12). Kleindienst & Watson (1956) called it “action archaeology” and Gould (1974) used the term “living archaeology”. One definition of ethno-archaeology is that it is “neither a theory nor a method, but a research strategy embodying a range of approaches to understanding the relationships of material culture to culture as a whole, both in a living context and as it enters the archaeological record exploiting such understandings in order to inform archaeological concepts and to improve interpretation [... it is] the ethnographic study of living cultures from archaeological perspectives” (Nicholas & Kramer 2001:2). Despite the importance of ethno-archaeology in the early days of contextual or post-processual archaeology, its decline in the 1990s was a result of three parallel agendas: a rhetorical, a theoretical and a political one. Rhetorically, “there was no longer a need to draw upon such ethnoarchaeological and modern material culture studies” because “those already convinced by the new approach did not need any further examples from the present, while those still

sceptical wanted to see how such an alternative perspective might improve an understanding of the past itself” (Reybrouck 2000:44). Theoretically, post-processual archaeology found its inspiration in hermeneutics and post-structuralism rather than in anthropology, emphasising “reading of text” without drawing parallels with contemporary case studies. Politically, post-structuralism claimed the absolute authority of the text – open for multiple readings – but nothing was outside the text (ibid:45). Implied in an ethnoarchaeology practice was a cross-cultural comparison and an inherent belief in generalisation, and this position became increasingly problematic in post-processual discourse: “... this new theoretical course limited the role of ethnoarchaeology: this could only show *that* material culture played an active role, not *which* one; *that* it was socially constructed, not *how* exactly in particular cases” (ibid.).

Paul Bahn advocates a general attitude in his *Bluff your way in archaeology* that “Ethnoarchaeology...[is] an excellent means of getting an exotic adventure holiday in a remote location ... After figuring out what you think is going on with the use and discard of objects (you should never stay around long enough to master the language), you return to your desk and use these brief studies to make sweeping generalisations about what people in the past and in totally different environments must have done” (Bahn 1989:52-53). Although this attitude is presented ironically and humorously, it represents quite fairly the attitude that traditional archaeologists have towards ethno-archaeology and analogies in general. Thus, the hidden prejudices have had consequences for archaeology. The critics of ethno-archaeology address not necessarily the ethnographic study in itself (although the majority of traditional archaeologists prefer that such studies shall be conducted by anthropologists rather than being an integrated part of archaeology). The main controversies have been *on which methodological criteria* it is possible to *transfer knowledge* from one context to another. I partly agree with Gosden’s statement that ethno-archaeology is immoral if the present of one society is simply used *only* to interpret the past of another (Gosden 1999:9). Implicit in this

practice is a colonial notion that the present, indigenous culture is only relevant *in relation to* something else: a prehistoric society. However, hardly any ethno-archaeological studies are conducted with this purpose, and most often it is the critics of ethno-archaeology who require ethno-archaeologists to demonstrate the “archaeological” relevance of an ethnographic study: ethno-archaeologists themselves are most often confident in their emphasis on material culture. Each study has its relevance in its own right, but it may also be a source of inspiration for other studies. In this regard, it is the traditional archaeologists by their exclusive archaeology who maintain a colonial attitude and practice.

In this light, Gosden’s comment that “ethnoarchaeology is immoral, in that we have no justification for using the present of one society simply to interpret the past of another” (Gosden 1999:9) cannot be restricted on methodological grounds to ethno-archaeology alone. Epistemologically, the same problem persists regardless of whether one uses ethnographic data, sociological data and theories (Bourdieu, Giddens, etc.), philosophical studies or even urban approaches. Regardless of who favours which position, the problem is the same: The past cannot be reconstructed by a process of sympathetic imagination and without any kind of controls: interpretations which are based on loose analogies, blurred distinctions between argument and assumption and a rampant use of untested generalizations (Trigger 1995:455).

The four-decade-long debate on the relation between archaeology and anthropology has not always been constructive. The solution is perhaps to abandon the term “ethno-archaeology” but not material-culture studies and to seek a third way emphasising materiality in a broad sense. Although both analogical reasoning and ethno-archaeology might be difficult to defend on – or reduce to – methodological criteria, these practices and processes are inevitably connected and necessary to any kind of interpretative archaeology. Answers to the question “What is archaeology?” cannot be found in normative definitions, because they are more about legitimacy and power to include or exclude colleagues than scientific arguments regarding the actual practice. Therefore, I

shall focus on what archaeologists actually do (Clarke 1973) and make a synthesis of the field of archaeology and its materialised object of study. “Every academic discipline is grounded in ontological and epistemological axioms that allow knowable *objects* of inquiry, and *how* they are to be known, to be taken for granted as the bedrock of disciplinary reality” (Jenkins 1998:4). As in most post-modern, human sciences, there are no agreements about the disciplinary bedrock in archaeology, and the totality of archaeological disagreements and diversities is the point of departure which leads to the conclusion that logically *the world as artefact* is the archaeological object for study. *Material culture* is the uniting feature combining and relating all the different practices together.

Definitions of archaeology and archaeological practices

Different definitions of the ultimate goals of archaeology have significant implications for what are considered as archaeological activities (Trigger 1994:371). David Clarke defined archaeology as such: “The aims of archaeology are of course the sum of the aims of archaeologists and prehistorians in general. Consequently, there are as many different aims in archaeology as there are archaeologists” (Clarke 1968:20). He points out that on certain occasions the variety of aims and interpretations is a strength, since no single view or interpretation can ever represent the whole “truth”. Hence, one should encourage studies of archaeological problems from as many different approaches as possible. But on other occasions, Clarke argues, the variety of aims and interpretations may also be a grave weakness (Clarke 1968:21). If there is no overall consensus about what archaeology is, the problem then becomes “How do we do archaeology at all?” (Hodder 1994:4). Different archaeologists do different archaeologies.

Matthew Johnson discusses four current approaches to archaeology in *Archaeological Theory* (Johnson 1999:177p). Archaeologists have different emphases in their practices, and the different aspects and approached can be summarised

schematically: Firstly, the *scientific* aspects of archaeology, as emphasised by Binford (1987). Secondly, the *discursive* approach as stressed by Shanks and Tilley (1992) in which they argue that theory is thoroughly subjective. Thirdly, the *consensus* approach advocated by Renfrew and Bahn (1994:473) as a “cognitive processual” synthesis in the 1990s, which is supposed to unite the best of the processual and post-processual thoughts. Finally, the *plurality* of approaches and interpretations, as celebrated by Hodder (1991). Common to all these authors and approaches to archaeology are disputes about the criteria for accepting or rejecting hypotheses or interpretations or, in other words, what the disciplinary or scientific aspects of archaeology are within an academic community. The lack of agreement is problematic, but as Hodder notes in another place, there are at least some indications of moves forward, “despite the enormous gaps and disagreements about fundamentals, and despite the evidence that archaeological theorists are trapped in separate, non-communicating discourses” (Hodder 2001:10-11). He emphasises the increased engagement with other disciplines and the entry of archaeology into wider debates as important fields for archaeology in the future (ibid).

The reasons why archaeology is in this current state of discrepancy needs more attention. Rorty argues that “what philosophers have described as the universal desire for truth is better described as the universal desire for justification” (Rorty 2000:2), not in Popper’s belief in an objective truth (Popper 1995) because a criterion differentiating truth and justification is that which is between the unrecognisable and the recognisable; “We shall never know for sure whether a given belief is true, but we can be sure that nobody is presently able to summon up any residual objections to it, that everybody agrees that it ought to be held” (Rorty 2000:2). Such an approach in archaeology would probably have been labelled as “processual” and assigned by post-processual archaeologists to Binford and his companions. The reason is, in the words of Ernest Gellner, “Primitive man has lived twice: once in and for himself, and the second time for us, in our

reconstructions” (Gellner 1988:23). Our knowledge reflects the present conditions under which the constructions are made. Knowledge of the past and the reality of the past are two completely separate entities (Holtorf 1998:94-95). The challenge for archaeologists is to re-construct past constructions.

Material culture and materiality

The role of ethno-archaeology as *material-culture studies* as an integral part of archaeology has hardly been criticised – simply because material culture is part of the bedrock in the discipline. Nevertheless, “If we were to attempt to create a material culture discipline we would probably find some resistance from both archaeologists and museum workers, who may not wish to cross boundaries and have to ascribe to yet another set of constraints and definitions” (Miller & Tilley 1996:7). The paradox is that while material-culture studies lack disciplinary foundation and have the advantage of being un-disciplined (*ibid*), any definition of “archaeology” includes, and is based on, material culture. Bahn’s critical (or ironical) comment on ethno-archaeology is in stark contrast to his dictionary definition of “archaeology”, which is “the study of the past through the systematic recovery and analysis of MATERIAL CULTURE. The primary aims of the discipline are to recover, describe and classify this material, to describe the form and behaviour of past societies, and finally to understand the reasons for this behaviour” (Bahn 1992:28). He gives three main primary aims of archaeology, but if, by this definition, he also indicates the order or succession in the progress whereby one starts with excavation, classifying the material, etc., this may equal Hawke’s ladder of reliability and interpretative process (Hawke 1954). Post-processual archaeology has eloquently demolished such a successive, interpretative ladder of progress. Archaeology aims to study the relation between materiality and humans because material culture not merely reflects culture but also actively constitutes it (Hodder 1982b).

Daniel Miller called for “an independent discipline of material culture” (Miller 1987:112). Material-culture study is a discipline concerned with all aspects of the relationship between the material and the social. It strives to overcome the logistical constraints of any discipline. The aim is to model the complex nature of the interaction between social strategies, artefactual variability, and material culture (Miller 1985:4). Miller & Tilley’s definition of material-culture studies does not differ much from Nicholas & Kramer’s definition of ethno-archaeology – the aims of these approaches to material culture are the same: “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 present, or the mediation between the two” (Miller & Tilley 1996:5).

It is important that the most fruitful definition of artefact in this sense is a very wide one. “Artefacts are a means by which we give form to, and come to an understanding of, ourselves, others or abstractions, such as the nation or the modern” (Miller 1994:397). “The concept of the artefact is best defined in the broadest terms. *There is little point in attempting to distinguish systematically between a natural world and an artefactual one [...]*” (Miller 1994:398, my emphasis). The main characteristic of materiality is its physicality, and “to study material culture is to consider the implications of the materiality of form for the cultural process” (ibid:400). Defined broadly, *the world is an artefact* and the archaeological object for investigation. Logically, the life-world that people live in must be included in archaeological analysis, because otherwise one would not grasp the relevant variables for an understanding of how material culture actively constitutes cultures, human perceptions and the world they exist in.

The post-processual archaeologists’ emphasis on landscape analysis is an approach to incorporate the material world that people inhabit and live in. Landscape, environment, nature, space or other words designate the physical surroundings of the world that human beings live in, but different meanings and schools of

thought are associated with the various terms. “Landscape” is a black-box category, but it often refers to the meaning imputed by local people to their physical and cultural surroundings. Painters introduced the term in the English vocabulary into the late sixteenth century as a technical term. Thus, “landscape” had originally connotations to “scenery” or picturesque images. The cognitive, cultural and representational aspects are in the foreground, and the actors are somehow outside the landscape (Hirsch 1995). Whereas “environment” often implies notions of “constraints”, “landscape” refers to notions of “constructions”. There are therefore implicit hierarchies implied in the various concepts. “Space” is in archaeology a neutral category, and, as such, it does not denote any particular meaning. But, as Godelier notes, the very concept of “space” is social, because space is distributed among communities which exploit territories or appropriate natural resources (Godelier 1988:55). “Nature” is untamed and controls human beings, “environment” is a contested field of relations between man and nature, where human beings are most often the inferior part, and “landscape” designates the surroundings culturally conquered by man. The point of departure in archaeology is “that ... monuments took over the significance of important places in the landscape and brought them under control” (Bradley 2000:17). Human beings built monuments and therefore natural places have a significance in people’s *minds* (ibid:35). Man conquers Nature.

The opposite approach is the historical materialism in Marxism, whereby people are determined and subdued to external forces, modes of production or material conditions, which include Nature. Engels writes on the subject that “The materialist conception of history starts from the proposition that the production of the means to support human life and, next to production, the exchange of things produced, is the basis of all social structure [...] From this point of view, the final causes of all social changes and political revolutions are to be sought, not in men's brains, not in men's better insights into eternal truth and justice, but in changes in the modes of production and exchange”

(Engels 1970). Marx himself writes in 1859 in his *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* on the basis of his analysis of society: “In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. *It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness*” (Marx 1970: 20-21, my emphasis). Marx tackled the problem of the contradiction between determinism and free will, and he tried to solve this problem by *dialectic materialism*. Dialectic materialism approaches society as containing both progressive and conservative variables. It rejects both a mechanistic materialism (which reduces ideas to matter) and an idealist dialectic (which reduces matter to ideas). In the Marxist theory of history, the ideal and the material are opposites but nevertheless constitute a unity. Marx emphasised that within this unity the material is primary. Owing to the contradictions and the conflicts between the opposites, there is always a historical process and constant change. Dialectic materialism is therefore a synthesis of the dialectic idealism of Hegel and the mechanical materialism presented by Feuerbach (Lenin 1982). This relates to the scientific debate on methodological collectivism or methodological individualism – the difference between determinism and free will.

Methodological collectivism or individualism: An archaeological approach

Methodological collectivism and individualism are two ideal types of historical explanation; the first is holistic and the latter is individualistic. The first principle states that human behaviour can be explained by being deduced from (a) macroscopic laws which apply to the social system as a whole and (b) descriptions of the positions or functions of the individual within the whole. The latter principle states that events and processes should be deduced

from (a) principles governing the behaviour of acting individuals, and (b) descriptions of their situations (Watkins 1973:88). Methodological collectivists start with society or the whole from which the individual's behaviour is deduced; methodological individuals start with the acting individual from whom society or social units are deduced (Gilje & Grimen 2001). Methodological individualism is the doctrine that all social phenomena are in principle explicable in ways that only involve individuals and their properties, goals, beliefs and actions. Thus, methodological individualism is a form of reductionism.

Methodological collectivism, on the other hand, assumes that there are supra-individual entities that are prior to individuals in the explanatory order. In Marx's philosophy of history, humanity appears as a collective subject, but there are also elements of methodological individualism in Marx's thoughts (Elster 1987:5-7). Marx believed that history was directed towards a goal, the communist society, but the functional explanations of beneficial consequences for agents tended towards methodological individualism (ibid: 8-29).

Materialism defines reality as a form of "matter": "An idealist is one who denies ontological reality to matter; a materialist to mind" (Gorman 1982:20). The main question and controversy are about whether Marxism emancipates or enslaves human behaviour. Processual archaeology in its extreme version represents a methodological collectivism, whereas its counter-reaction, post-processual archaeology, in its extreme version represents a methodological individualism. "It is argued by the processual school in archaeology that there are systems so basic in nature that culture and individuals are powerless to divert them. This is a trend towards determinism ... There is a close link between discarding notions of cultural belief and of the individual" (Hodder 1994:7). All materialist Marxists define subjectivity impersonally and freedom as realisations of objective laws (Gorman 1982:57), and hence the neo-Marxist reaction within post-processual archaeology.

New archaeology adapted parts of neo-evolutionism, as developed by Leslie White and Julian Steward. These approaches represented vulgar materialism, because human behaviour is more or less shaped by non-human constraints (Trigger 1994:292). It has been a truism in cultural ecology that “culture” is man’s means of adaptation to his environment, but this is problematic for two reasons. On the one hand, if culture is systems of symbols which man exposes to the external world, then the environment which they are exposed to must be empty or without significance; meaning is thoroughly culturally constructed. On the other hand, if culture is a means of adaptation, and environment is in a state of flux, devoid of form and meaning prior to the ordering through cultural categories, then logically culture is adaptation to nothing at all (Ingold 1992:39). Nature in itself is a world without meaning and culture is a framework not for perceiving the world but for the *interpretations* of it (ibid:52-53).

Culture was problematic for these ecologists, and Steward once wrote that “what to do about this cultural factor in ecological studies [which] has raised many methodological difficulties” (Steward 1955:31). One of the first who used neo-evolutionism in archaeology was Meggers (1960). She rewrote White’s law (1949:390-391) that *Culture = Energy x Technology*. Since archaeologists work with small-scale societies, the formula *Culture = Environment x Technology* would, according to Meggers, enable the archaeologists to reconstruct prehistoric societies.

Binford’s “Archaeology as anthropology” (Binford 1962) is normally seen as the paradigmatic break and the start of processual archaeology, and he saw culture as man’s extrasomatic means of adaptation. Determinism, system thinking, environment and cross-cultural laws were some of the characteristics of processual archaeology. This school of thought might be characterised as materialist and methodological collectivist, because “what emerges is an eschatological materialism in which human consciousness plays no significant role” (Trigger 1981:151). Hodder says that “by materialist approaches [I mean] those that infer cultural meanings from the relationship between

people and their environment. Within such a framework the ideas in people's minds can be predicted from their economy, technology, social and material production ... By idealist I mean any approach which accepts that there is some component of human action which is not predictable from a material base, but which comes from the human mind or from culture in some sense" (Hodder 1994:19).

This definition of materialism is too narrow, because even the slightest hint of some component of human actions not determined by nature is seen as an idealist approach. This rhetorical stance has to be seen in the light of the early post-processualists' need to distinguish themselves from the processualists, giving the impression that all who were not vulgar materialists were in fact post-processualists and idealists. The extreme methodological individualism is advocated by Jon Elster's somehow paradoxical conclusion in *The Cement of Society* that "There are no societies, only individuals who interact with each other" (Elster 1989:248). Most researchers aim to combine culture and nature; as Godelier says, "human beings ... do not just live in society, they *produce society in order to live*" (Godelier 1988:1, my emphasis). The contextual approach in the early post-processual archaeology emphasised that "Societies are not purposive, but individual agents are ... *Positioned subjects [who] manipulate material culture as a resource and as a sign system in order to create and transform relations of power and domination*. Determinism is avoided, since it is recognised that in concrete situations contingent situations are found and structures of meaning and domination are gradually restructured" (Hodder 1994:9, my emphasis).

With methodological individualism as the scientific anchorage, archaeology as a discipline gains new areas of investigation. "If archaeology is anything, it is the study of material culture as a manifestation of structured symbolic practices meaningfully constituted and situated in relation to the social" (Tilley 1989:188). In post-processual archaeology, there is an emphasis on the active individual, whereby the "agents actively using material culture need to be considered, that there is a relationship between

structure and practice, and that social change is historical and contingent” (Preucel & Hodder 1996:7). Despite the emphasis on structure and agency, free-floating sign systems and the autonomy of human agents have been the basic axioms in post-processual archaeology. The diacritical, linguistic sign consists of a union of two facets or components, the “signifier” and the “signified”. Within the concept of a sign, there exists no direct relationship with reality, because the relationship between the signifier and the signified is entirely arbitrary or a matter of convention. Meaning resides in a system of relationships between signs and not in the signs themselves. Therefore, a sign or symbol considered in isolation would be meaningless, and one has to work contextually (Tilley 1989:186). The problem is that “meaning is context-bound but context is boundless” (Culler 1982:123). The multiple interpretations in archaeology have shown that it is difficult to demarcate the context.

The problem with archaeology is “the maelstrom of conflicting interpretations”, Hodder argues, because “the past matters but to different people in different ways” (Hodder 1998:124). Thus, when ethno-archaeology has been criticised on methodological (and logical) grounds, a similar critic of the free-floating, sign systems, whereby any interpretation is a good interpretation, should be equally criticised on methodological (and logical) grounds. The solution to this debate is that strictly methodological criteria in interpretative archaeology are difficult to establish, whether they relate to the use of ethnographic knowledge or signify meaning by other means. However, since any methodological criteria can be challenged, the “anything goes” (Feyerabend 1993) attitude in post-processual archaeology is more a consequence than an intention. Shanks & Tilley emphasised what they called “resistance” in material culture in the transformation to archaeological text (Shanks & Tilley 1989:5). The “material resistance” would not allow any kind of interpretation. What this “material resistance” implied was never thoroughly elaborated, probably because it would have implied restrictions on human behaviour, and all such limitations on

possible human actions were rejected. The individual agent had free will and manipulated the social environment by a complex, symbolic world. But it is this “material resistance” that is the point of departure for a discussion of what “archaeology” is, and the role of material culture. Schematically, it is therefore possible to distinguish between vulgar processualism and post-processualism as two opposing poles. Most archaeologists are, and were, at some place in the middle. However, this third way is not sufficiently elaborated from a material-culture perspective.


<i>Processual archaeology</i>		<i>Post-processual archaeology</i>
Methodological collectivism		Methodological individualism
Materialism		Idealism
Determinism		Free will
Cross-cultural laws		Arbitrary relation between signifier and signified
Man = animal + culture		Man is constructed through language and material culture
Nature		Society
Objective		Subjective
Science		Discourse

Fig. 1. Archaeology and methodological collectivism and individualism.

Processual archaeology’s determinism enabled a “scientific” approach to be made. Since man is predictable according to cross-cultural laws, these universalisms could be deduced from middle range theory. Individualism and the human being’s free will in post-processual archaeology resulted in non-predictability and culturally specific studies. The lack of predictability in the study of humans resulted in accusations of non-science or pseudo-science by the processualists. However, the limits of cultural elaboration are not solved by a method, because the human sciences are “ontological” in the broad sense of a concern with human

existence (Obeyesekere 1990:104). Theories in human sciences are ontological in their basis, because the human sciences are about human beings and being human (ibid.). The differences between processualism and post-processualism are ontologically a debate on human nature, in which the former is negative and the latter is positive.

Post-processual ontology is freed from determinism and materialism. This ontological success has its epistemological and methodological price (Sørgaard 2001:45). It has been difficult within the post-processual tradition to argue why archaeology is an academic discipline and what the scientific aspects of the discipline are. Archaeology as a social discipline studying human beings and being human has benefited from post-processual ontology. Man's unlimited possibilities are, nevertheless, empirically unjustified, because there are both social and material restrictions in this world. Therefore, Trigger wants to overcome the distinction between methodological collectivism and individualism by advocating "a comprehensive theory to explain human behaviour and material culture must synthesize the understandings of cultural ecology and cognitive anthropology" (Trigger 2000:368). There are some hints in post-processual archaeology that the environment is an important part of material culture (e.g. Hodder 1989), but they are rare. The materiality of artefacts defined broadly limits possible actions and directs certain types of behaviour in a certain environment.

Archaeology and world-making: The world as artefact

In *Physics*, Aristotle was the first to distinguish between natural objects and things, such as artefacts, that are made by man. Nature is a kind of source and cause of change belonging primarily to, and of, itself, and not by virtue of concurrence. Things which are made, on the other hand, are not the source themselves of the making. They have an external source in something else (Aristotle 1970:23). According to Aristotle, "nature is twofold, nature as matter and nature as form, and the latter is

an end, and everything else is for the end, the cause as that for which must be the latter” (ibid:41). The intricate relation between nature and artefacts is not obvious. A human being cannot exist without society, but a society cannot exist without individuals. Maurice Godelier, among others, has emphasised the intricate interaction between man and nature which is unique to *Homo sapiens* compared to other animals. “*Human beings have a history because they transform nature*” (Godelier 1988:1). This ability to change their relations with nature by transforming nature itself is special for human beings (ibid:2). In this regard, Godelier makes some clarifications regarding modifications of nature. Firstly, there are some spheres which are outside the direct sway of humankind but still cease to affect it, for instance, the climate, the nature of the subsoil etc. Secondly, a part of nature is transformed by human intervention indirectly through for instance stockbreeding, slash-and-burn agriculture, etc. Thirdly, there is the part of nature which is directly transformed by human beings by domestic activities etc. Finally, there is the part of nature which is modified by human beings into tools or artefacts. Tools and equipments function as external organs, extending the action of the human body. “Tools, weapons, monuments and objects of every sort are the material supports for a mode of social life” (ibid:4). Artefacts or tools can either be used directly or modified from bone, stone, wood, etc. “The boundary between nature and culture, the distinction between the material and the mental, tend to ... dissolve once we approach that part of nature which is directly subordinated to humanity – that is, produced or reproduced by it (domestic animals and plants, tools, weapons, clothes). Although external to us, this nature is not external to culture, society or history” (Godelier 1988:4-5).

Human beings must attain knowledge and in some instances control the outer materiality: “To adapt oneself is to submit to constraints, to take them into account, in order to amplify their positive and attenuate their negative effects ... none [other species than human beings] is capable of assuming conscious and social control of part of the objective conditions of its existence” (ibid.).

Adaptation is a way whereby human beings act upon nature, transforming it and appropriating its resources (ibid:28). “The social perception of an environment consists not only of more or less exact representations of the constraints upon the functioning of technical and economic systems, but also of value judgements and phantasmic beliefs. An environment has always imaginary aspects” (ibid:35). The most material aspects of social realities – the productive forces available within a society to act upon nature – consist of two interwoven components: the material element (tools, including human beings themselves) and the mental element (representations of nature, rules of governance, etc.) (ibid:150). “The symbolic element in the labour process constitutes a social reality every bit as real as material actions upon nature; but its purpose, its *raison d’être* and its internal organisation constitute a set of mental realities arising from thought that interprets the world’s hidden order and organises action on the forces controlling it” (Godelier 1988:150). The mental cannot be set up against matter, because it involves the brain. An idea is reality, although an impalpable one (ibid:151). “Every division of labour receives its *material content* from the existing productive forces, and its *social form* from relations of production” (ibid:229).

With some few exceptions, the neglect of an explicit emphasis on materiality as a separate field defining archaeology’s subject has had theoretically negative consequences for archaeology. The time dimension is always incorporated in any kind of materiality. Materiality always exists, but in various forms at various times. Materiality is modified by people, made into artefacts, reused and remade, and given new meanings in an endless chain of re-negotiations. The world we live in is material – the world is an artefact – we conceptualise it, modify it, construct new constructions – to live is to participate in an endless series of material modifications of worlds that are already made. All materiality is old and new at the same time, but different phases of the material modifications or man-made constructions may have specific origins and dates. By including the total sphere of relations

of materiality in the analysis, logically, archaeologists studying human beings in past and present contexts have to analyse the premises for behaviour and action. Phenomenology aims to approach such problems from an intersubjective perspective. Phenomenology is beyond or before all distinctions between realism and idealism (Schutz 1971:101). “The phenomenologist ... does not have to do with the objects themselves; he is interested in their *meaning*, as it is constituted by the activities of our mind” (Schutz 1971:115). Schutz defines the life-world or the world of everyday life as “the total sphere of experiences of an individual which is circumscribed by the objects, persons, and events encountered in the pursuit of the pragmatic objectives of living. It is a world in which a person is “wide a awake,” and which asserts itself as the “paramount reality” of his life (Schutz 1970:320).

“The many stuffs – matter, energy, waves, phenomena – that worlds are made of are made along with the worlds. But made from what? Not from nothing, after all, but from other worlds. World-making, as we know it, always starts from worlds already on hand; the making is remaking” (Goodman 1978:6). A world is an artefact (Goodman & Elgin 1988:53). The life-world is a universe of significations to us (Schutz 1971:133). Man is *animal symbolicum* (Cassirer 1945) and, as Hacking argues, “we make up people” in a stronger sense than we “make up” the world because “we remake the world, but we make up people” (Hacking 1984:124). “If there is but one world, it embraces a multiplicity of contrasting aspects; if there are many worlds, the collection of them all is one. The one world may be taken as many, or the many worlds taken as one; whether one or many depends on the way of taking” (Goodman 1978:2).

Consciousness is always consciousness of something, and the forms of consciousness are connected with experiences (Schutz 1970:5). The problem is how the manifold of private interpretations of the relatively neutral concept of the world makes up a common world-view. The members of a group must share a certain number of beliefs about the world, but they must also share standardised expressions and formulations when applying or

explaining these views. This becomes a collective self-interpretation (Schutz 1970:17). Inter-subjectivity as a point of departure is un-problematic, because “the individual takes the existence of others for granted” (ibid:31). The “world of daily life” means the inter-subjective world which existed long before an individual’s birth. It was experienced and interpreted by our predecessors as an organised world (ibid:72). The world of my daily life is in no way my private world only, in so far as it is from the very outset an inter-subjective one – it is a common world to all of us (ibid:163). “The world of everyday life is the scene and also the object of our actions and interactions. We have to *dominate* it and we have to *change* it in order to realize the purposes which we pursue within it among our fellow-men. Thus, *we work and operate not only within but upon the world*” (ibid, my emphasis). We are always involved in the process of world-making. This includes the prehistoric people or those who lived in the past periods that we study. The concept of the life-world combines the various aspects; the actors on the social scene experience the world they live in as both of nature and culture, not as a private one but as an inter-subjective one.

When human beings create their world and world-views, it is a process of close and distant horizons that can be interfered with and manipulated in accordance with personal aims and wishes. Schutz distinguishes between “world-within-everyday-reach” (Schutz 1971:306), where its counterpart is the “world-outside-everyday-reach” (Kyvik 2002a, 2002b). The world-view is the picture people themselves have of the way in which things actually are, their concept of nature, of society, of self (Geertz 1973:127). The “everyday” experience and world is within reach and can be changed by the actor, and this is the most intimidating world as artefact. What the actual world is, as perceived by the actor, will vary, but the “world-within-everyday-reach” is the daily world which creates *habitus*. The “world-outside-everyday-reach” and the “experience-distant” is outside the sphere of everyday influence. In material terms, the world “near” is perceived as possible to manipulate and modify, whereas the world “distant” is

seen as stable and permanent. The materiality of the distant world is more resistant than the “world-within-everyday-reach”, which is modified and used in daily life. Together, these spheres define the world as an artefact.

The archaeological object – defining the discipline

Defining archaeology from a material point of view, in which the world is an artefact, includes four, different interacting spheres or fields mutually dependent on each other (fig.2): (1) the past, (2) the present, (3) nature/materiality, and (4) culture. These four spheres define (5) material culture and archaeology as an academic discipline. All archaeology is material-culture studies that consist of these five spheres. An emphasis on one or several of these spheres defines archaeological sub-disciplines, such as contract/excavation archaeology, environmental archaeology, theoretical archaeology, etc. The emphasis on either of these spheres may have political and strategic aims within research communities, but the bedrock of archaeology as a study of material culture consists nonetheless of the totality of these interacting spheres. The common feature of all sub-disciplines of archaeology is the study of material culture.

Firstly, the past sphere is what most people associate with archaeology. The long time spans and the knowledge production of ancient, forgotten or re-discovered societies and people is one of the main objectives of the discipline. Societies prior to, or without, written sources belong to one special group of inquiries in archaeology. Material culture as a set of empirical data and evidences is one characteristic of archaeology which enables interpretations of the past to be made. The past dimension of archaeology has many facets. Excavation and contract archaeology are structured around and define archaeology through the scientific method of excavation and documentation of artefacts, monuments, settlements, etc. Archaeology defined from this perspective is then a method which provides data for the analysis of prehistoric societies. Typology, chronology and ordering of the

material objects into series and museum work have a central place in archaeology. This is often the most common work for archaeologists employed in positions defined by cultural-heritage laws. But an emphasis on only the objects themselves is, however, an artefact fetishism and not archaeology as an academic discipline (Miller 1998). Material culture is the basis for constructions and re-constructions of ancient societies and processes, and even though most archaeologists are not re-constructing past societies and processes, this is the aim. The past is a foreign country (Lowenthal 1985), and the aim of archaeology is to analyse the past as it really was for the people that lived in the various periods; the past as the past for itself as an indigenous society which has disappeared but is re-discovered through excavation.

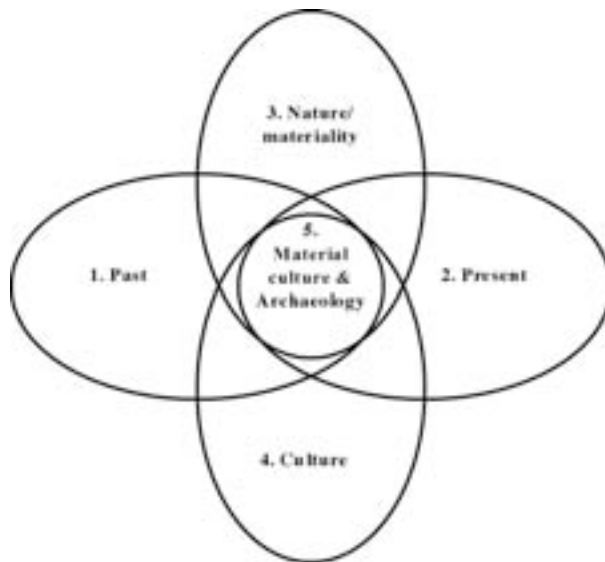


Fig. 2. Different, interacting spheres defining archaeology's study object.

Secondly, the past dimension of archaeology is problematic, because all archaeology is a contemporary scientific practice. There is no direct access to the past, even though the artefacts represent real people that did real things. Even though archaeology presents itself as a discipline mainly concerned with the past, all its activities are in the present. Our research horizon is inevitably restricted to our current knowledge, which we use when inferring processes and societies in the past. Moreover, all material culture and artefacts are contemporary, even though their *origin* might have been several thousand years ago. A 2000-year-old artefact may have been used for two millennia or only some few days. An artefact is old and new at the same time. There are different phases of use, and each of these stages is of archaeological relevance. There is therefore no simple past but a present past, a present future, and a present present (Moore 1995:53). All kinds of materiality have projections and trajectories from the past through the present into the future. The past exists in the present. Archaeology may also try “not so much to reconstruct what once was, but to make sense of the past from a viewpoint of today” (Holtorf 2000:166). This raises the question whether or not it is necessary or possible to get the original meaning of the past (Shanks & Hodder 1995:30). Monuments and objects were important for prehistoric man, but they are also a part of the contemporary landscape which we give meaning to and hence, are of importance to us.

Thirdly, materiality and nature. The neglect to acknowledge archaeology as a discipline studying materiality and material culture is a paradox. Post-processual archaeology’s positive ontology focusing on the individuality of man and his free will has led parts of this tradition into a denial of physical restrictions where the arbitrary relation between signifier and signified has enabled man’s conquest of the “outer” world through his culture or use of symbols. Nature or materiality in a broad sense is nevertheless of the utmost importance in archaeology and the analysis of human beings for several reasons. The materiality or the physicality of the artefact and monuments is what separates

these constructions from purely mental constructions. The process of modification of materiality is a cultural and social process. Modification is a product and result of organised labour and knowledge which create societies and hierarchies. The *resistance* of materiality represents deep and long structures in society which structure human agency. Language has not such a kind of resistance as materiality. Nature, the environment and ecological constraints are structuring and limiting man's rational choices and possible actions. A desert, forest or mountain environment make both possibilities and restrictions on human behaviour. The real world is a premise-giver when humans are constructing their life-worlds. Landscape analysis is an attempt to approach the exterior surroundings without turning to methodological collectivism and determinism. But landscape is not man's arbitrary relation to the environment, and the symbolic world is intimately connected with the real physical, economic and ecological world.

Fourthly, culture. Childe said "man makes himself" (Childe 1936). Archaeology is, like any social and human science, concerned with culture. From Tylor's anthropological definition of "culture or Civilization" as "taken in its widest ethnographic sense, [it] is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (Tylor 1871[1968]), social studies have aimed to study all facets of human beings and mankind. Archaeology is no exception, rather the contrary. Archaeologists study everything in different cultures and with various time depths. The early agenda of processual archaeology, as opposed to the traditional, culture-historical archaeology, was studying the same subjects as anthropology (Binford 1962). Although the majority of archaeologists were concerned with typology and chronology, they proclaimed that their works were pre-requisites for social analyses. Cultural analysis and syntheses of past societies based on material culture were then, as now, one of the core objects in archaeology. The development of social theories explaining the relation between material patterns and

human beings and their social and cultural practices is therefore another core activity of archaeology.

Finally, these four spheres define archaeology, which logically is a broad, material-culture study. “Material culture studies derive their importance from this continual simultaneity between the artefact as the form of natural materials whose nature we continually experience through practices, and also as the form through which we continually experience the very particular nature of our social order” (Miller 1987:105). Material culture and archaeology consists of the past, the present, nature/materiality and culture. “Material culture is as important, and as fundamental, to the constitution of the social world as language” (Tilley 1996:4). Material culture is therefore the only uniting feature which logically combines all spheres of archaeology, if archaeology is what archaeologists do. Moreover, archaeology as a discipline is inevitably forced to study material culture, and consequently materiality as materiality is the spinal cord of research. The focus on materiality and material culture has several consequences. Material-culture studies as *studies* are always conducted in the present. Material culture has always a time depth, regardless of whether the things or monuments are covered by layers of sediment, which enables excavations to be carried out, or ancient monuments in use today, on which people confer new meanings in various contexts. The time depth of materiality is a unique entrance into a little investigated, social world: the material world.

The relationship between time and space is especially close (Miller 1987:121). Spatial and temporal positions will potentially signify the amount of time elapsed since it was created. Fashionable objects signify the present – they are always doomed to become unfashionable with the movement of time: that is what fashion is. Change becomes a means which reinforces the stability of the social system within which it is operating (Miller 1987:124-126). Archaeology *cannot* be restricted to only studies of material culture which is *not in use any more* or material culture that is only revealed or re-discovered by excavation. Rather the contrary, past

material culture still in use has a spatial history and time depth which relics of broken traditions cannot show, and this fact has major implication for the understanding of the material culture in society. Thus, the problem with a scientific or analogical reasoning does not exist any more, because all material culture studies is a hermeneutic knowledge production whereby one inevitably transfers knowledge from one field to another. The past, the present and the future are facets or aspects of materiality, not separate entities which can be seen in isolation.

The complexity of archaeology as a discipline, owing to the constitution of these four interacting spheres, highlights the necessary theoretical stances and meta-theory. Nevertheless, even 10-15 years after the post-processual paradigm's emphasis on the importance of theory, the majority of archaeologists were neither interested nor up-dated on contemporary theory (Champion 1991, Thomas 1995). However, epistemological, ontological and philosophical debates within the discipline seem to be increasing (Kyvik 2001), especially among younger archaeologists. Answers to the questions "Why" and "How" we are doing archaeology are of the utmost importance in an archaeological theory of science, because otherwise the discipline will be a "non-thinking activity" (Karlsson 1998:14).

"Social and cultural anthropology has the whole of humanity as its field of interest, and tries to understand the connections between the various aspects of our existence ... anthropology tries to account for the social and cultural variation in the world" (Eriksen 1995:1). This necessitates conceptualisations and understandings of "the similarities between social systems and human relationships ... anthropology is about how different people can be, but it also tries to find out in what sense it can be said that all humans have something in common" (ibid). Archaeology has the same aim as anthropology, but includes past and prehistoric people and societies as well. Thus, archaeology as material-culture studies consists of the past, the present, nature/materiality and culture. Material-culture studies are the only uniting approach which logically combines all spheres of

archaeology if archaeology is what archaeologists do. The most complete archaeology is therefore, per definition, a broad, material-culture study. Archaeology with an emphasis on excavated material objects becomes hence a sub-discipline of material-culture studies in general, and not vice versa. This approach does not solve the problems of analogical reasoning, but it puts the methodological responsibility on the archaeologists working with excavated material in a prehistoric setting. Archaeologists working with contemporary material culture cannot or should not legitimate or justify other archaeologists' use of an ethnographic present. Therefore, returning to Gosden's claim that "ethnoarchaeology is immoral, in that we have no justification for using the present of one society simply to interpret the past of another" (Gosden 1999:9), we may now turn the coin regarding matters of morality; it is those who study excavated material remains who may use present ethnographic data only for the purpose of interpreting the past, not those who study contemporary material culture. Consequently, it is the traditional archaeologists who keep on the post-colonial practice (cf. Gosden 2001:241), but a broad range of material culture studies may limit this colonial tradition. Finally, material-culture studies as a post-disciplinary science incorporate both methodological collectivism and methodological individualism in their approaches and, as such, bridge processual and post-processual archaeologies, not on their own premises but as an acknowledgement of the role materiality plays in the construction and constitution of human beings and societies. Materiality matters; it both constrains and creates human behaviour, and since all materiality has various time dimensions, archaeology as material-culture studies is irrespective of the time depth of the artefacts or materiality which are the objects of study.

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