

## CHAPTER TWO

# THIRD SPACE ENCOUNTERS: HYBRIDITY, MIMICRY AND INTERSTITIAL PRACTICE

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The social encounter is a particular kind of meeting from which a wide range of different responses may emerge (e.g., confusion, misunderstandings, tension, trauma, and possibly social change). It is not a situation only restricted to confrontations between different individuals and groups, but also concerns encounters between individuals and materialities.<sup>1</sup> In a basic sense, we all are involved with various encounters on a daily basis; most of them pass us by unnoticed, while a few may change our lives substantially. The normal everyday encounters can be described within the concept of structuring practices that re-constitute the basis of the inert social fabric, while the latter kind rather concerns a different range of provoking confrontations that demand some sort of reaction or response. It may seem likely to assume that a higher rate of confusion and conflict occur when people do not share the same traditions or language - but that is not necessarily always true. Also the most mundane social situations involve a certain rate of uncertainty and misunderstandings (Žižek 1989). Such aspects are not solely characteristic of 'cultural encounters' between people of different traditions. It is thus important to point out from the start that in any kind of encounter, things may seem strange and incomprehensible or perfectly understandable and familiar, but the social significance and effects can only be determined for each given case.

Nonetheless, confrontations with incompatible social practice, ideologies and differing material worlds often have unforeseen effects, far beyond the

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<sup>1</sup> In contrast to the concept of material culture, materialities refer to a wider range of 'natural' and 'cultural' material substances including e.g., animals, landscapes and trees, buildings, artefacts and refuse, *that potentially can be of social significance in a given situation* (Fahlander 2008).

intentions of the involved individuals, and the results may even run directly against the intentions of the involved agents. A popular tale of such a case is the encounter between the Spanish and the Aztecs in the 16th century. When the Spanish initially accepted gifts from the Aztecs it was according to Aztec logic and tradition an act of submission. That the gifts would only encourage the newcomers to raid the new world for more valuables was thus an effect the Aztecs did not account for. Another somewhat classic encounter concerns the complex twists and turns of Cook's arrival at the Hawaii islands in 1778-79. Sahlins has stressed that the time and circumstances of Cook's first encounter happened to match quite well with the local mythology of the god Lono and Sahlins argues that the Hawaiians therefore greeted and apotheosized Cook as Lono. According to Sahlins' interpretation, they thus incorporated the appearance of unknown European people and materialities into something understandable and already familiar (Sahlins 1985, 1995; but see Obeyesekere 1997, Li 2001). Encounters in history and prehistory have generally been discussed as such culture-clashes, a kind of political history, in which the encounter is understood in terms of a confrontation between social totalities. Cook and Cortés are thus merely icons representing European culture (or 'civilisation'). As I will try to show further on, such gross generalisations of the complexity and many faceted effects of encounters does seldom account for anything at all - except as examples of western mythmaking of the Other (Obeyesekere 1997). It is also important to acknowledge that many effects of an encounter are not necessarily determined by acts of officials such as kings, chiefs or military leaders, but also in many more contradictory ways by other less prominent involved individuals and their materialities. In the case of Captain Cook, a more thorough analysis reveals the event in fact consisted of many different encounters between different fractions and individuals of Hawaiians and Europeans (Li 2001). Contrary to a culture-historical perspective, encounters between people and materialities are perhaps better described as complex rhizome networks of transecting chains of effects and causes of which neither the involved agents nor we can fully comprehend.

The social encounter is clearly a central aspect of research for archaeology. But in order to avoid simplistic arguments of the importance of specific individuals or generalising models of anonymous acculturation, diffusion, invasion, or exchange, the analytic field of encounters need to be adhered from a more varied and complex perspective. The material dimension is not to be forgotten here. Not only people are involved in encounters, but also plants, animals, bacteria, artefacts and other material elements (cf. Diamond 1997) An encounter with a previously unknown kind of tool, aesthetics or material substance may have as profound social impact as a meeting between individuals of different traditions and cosmologies.

In this paper, I will explore the possibilities to discuss a greater variety of possible strategies and responses that may emerge in situations of encounters with unfamiliar practices and materialities. The principal theoretical frame departs from Homi Bhabha's (2004) concepts of 'the third space of enunciation' and 'mocking mimicry', which serve as a more elaborate and promising perspective on the various kinds of social encounters between people and materialities.

### **'Postcolonial' encounters**

Traditional generalising models of culture-contacts in archaeology have recently been challenged by ideas and notions from so called postcolonial theory. Postcolonial studies cover a great variety of approaches outlined in the works of e.g., Said (1978), Spivak (1999) and Bhabha (2004) but does not constitute a single coherent strand of thought. In general terms, however, postcolonial theory can be characterized as a political standpoint of social and humanist scholars that seek to deconstruct traditional polarised views of the relations between the coloniser and the colonised. The majority of postcolonial studies consequently concern the former western colonies in Asia, Africa and the Americas. The epistemology is generally based upon varieties of post-structural theory and normally concerns discourse analyses of written texts (fiction as well as scholarly texts). The focus on texts as the primary medium for deconstruction of colonial situations may at first seem to exclude any relevance for archaeological cases, but although the data and social circumstances differ, the main issues raised within postcolonial discourse still have profound implications to archaeological analysis of 'cultural relations'. Up to this point, postcolonial inspired archaeological texts have generally been concerned with three main issues: (a) the writing of alternative histories from the colonised point of view, (b) the growing awareness that a colonial situation cannot be addressed from a homogeneous dualistic point of view, and (c) the recognition of the hybrid nature of social practice and material expression (van Dommelen 2006:108).

Writing alternative histories is an important point for archaeology in order to cope with the conceptual heritage of western biased views on small scale societies (Bhabha 2004:245, cf. Fahlander 2004). The principal aim of such studies is generally to re-valuate the agency of colonised groups (e.g., Roman provinces, Australian Aborigines and American Indians) but also to correct biased prehistory of neglected, 'subaltern' groups of today (e.g., the Sámi). Traditionally, colonised peoples have been regarded passive victims of a brute hegemonic colonisation, in which coloniser's culture and ideology was forced upon the colonised (Bhabha 2004:248ff). Indeed, the colonial administrations were often brutal and used force to maintain hegemony, but that does not mean

that the colonised were passive victims in the process. On the contrary, postcolonial theorists argue, based on Foucault's ideas of power as something relationally constituted, that the relations between colonised and coloniser are more of a mutual relation in which the coloniser also changes by the relations with its colonies. This notion is, of course, of great importance, but it may also have non-intended negative results. There is a tendency of certain groups (not necessarily subaltern ones) to employ similar reasoning to score political points or revive an 'original' ethnicity based on more or less fictive 'cultures' of the past (cf. Li 2001:244f, Normark 2004). To emphasise the agency of the subaltern may be appropriate in some cases, but in others be too optimistic. We should not forget that some imperialist conquests can be very ruthless and effective in their efforts. Nicholas Thomas summarises the problem elegantly:

Scholarship around colonialism tends to lapse / . . . / into binary contrasts or reactive positions: it makes of *either* local continuity, culture, and agency or global intrusions, politics and dominance a sufficient and independent frame of analysis. Against the mutual exclusiveness of these frames of analysis, a zone of appropriations and cultural strategies can be imagined in which local and extralocal determinations are significant according to the nature of the encounter. It is not enlightening to argue that local agency and autonomy are significant *in principle*; what is important rather are the ways in which local efforts to encompass colonizers' activities and offerings may be efficacious in some circumstances and limited and unsuccessful in others (Thomas 1997:43).

The second issue concerns the simplified notion of cultures and ethnic groups as homogeneous entities, which perhaps is the most troublesome, but yet prevailing, notion in archaeology and anthropology. Although the concept of culture also is employed in western nation states, the rate of cultural homogeneity nonetheless tends to escalate when it comes to peripheral small-scale societies. In colonial times, the use of subjectivating terminology, such as 'Indian' or 'negro', was often employed by colonial administrations as a strategy to deny the social diversity of the Other (Bhabha 2004:90). But also in contemporary discourse we find other, but yet questionable terms, like indigenous peoples, natives, and aboriginals etc, which carry notions of being something different from citizens of Western nation states. The debate concerning Cook's encounter at the Hawaiian island is telling in this context. Sahlins' original argument, that the Hawaiians understood the appearance of Cook from a mythological point of view, is dismissed by Obeyesekere (1997) as a naive Eurocentric and colonial stereotyped idea of the mythical savage. According to Obeyesekere, a more intricate and complex play of power was at work between different fractions of Hawaiians and Europeans. It seems evident that not all, if any, of the Hawaiians believed that Cook actually was Lono (Li 2001). In order to get a better grip on encounters between people of different

traditions one clearly has to recognise that most social collectives are heterogeneous and consist of series of individuals and groups with different means of agency and power.

The third issue relates to, and thus modifies, the second and concerns the hybridity of culture. Hybridity in this sense should not be misunderstood as a simple fusion of new and old elements into a crossbreed of ideology or practice (creolization or cultural blending). Such a simplification neglects the inequalities of power and the very basis of human interaction as well as the knowledgeability of the involved agents (cf. Young 1995, Tronchetti & van Dommelen 2005:193). On the contrary, Bhabha argues that all social collectives, nation states, cultures or small-scale ethnic groups, are caught in a *continuous* process of hybridity. They all have developed in relation to a larger context and therefore consist of elements of different origins which they to a varying extent have in common. The process of hybridity thus makes the idea of cultures and ethnic collectives as homogeneous entities inconceivable, or in Gayatri Spivak's words, elusive:

I have long held that, insofar as something called 'culture' can be accessible, either inside and/or outside, either to its theorists and/or practitioners, culture is the explanations of culture. As to the etiologies [the study of causes or origins] of contending cultural explanations, one can no doubt plot historical narratives, themselves part of the network of explanations; but the search for absolute etiologies is as fascinating and elusive as the search for the origin of language (Spivak 2004:77).

The importance of hybridity is a sadly neglected issue in archaeological analyses. On the contrary, the basic element of departure is normally generalised fictions of homogeneous cultures or ethnic groups. Of course, the rate of both heterogeneity and hybridity is a question of degree for each individual case (cf. Nederveen Pieterse 2001). But as I will show further on, their importance cannot be dismissed as either marginal anomalies, or, as Sahlins' argues, simply being elements contained within a given homogeneous cosmological scheme (cf. Li 2001:220ff). The idea of homogeneous cultures with specific heritage and origins is a powerful ideological metaphor, but is nonetheless a contradictory and self-explanatory fiction that tends to dissolve already at a first examination (cf. Tronchetti & van Dommelen 2005:193).

There can be little doubt that these three issues substantially will improve discussions on social encounters in prehistory, but most archaeologists have nonetheless been slow to employ postcolonial theory. One reason for this apparent neglect of postcolonial theory among archaeologists seems to be found in the sometimes complex and ambiguous jargon used by its proponents. Indeed, the literary style and rhetoric of much postcolonial texts can certainly be tiresome at times, but is not reason enough to refute postcolonial theory as

postmodern mumbo-jumbo. That postcolonial theory only is a matter of sophism can, however, easily be dismissed. As a matter of fact, none of the three main themes discussed here can be regarded as either especially new ideas or being without empirical substance. For instance, the notions of heterogeneity and multivocality of social collectives were noted by several anthropologists already in the early 20th century long before the birth of post-structuralism. For instance, the many layers of social identities that a normal individual will possess during a life-cycle was pointed out by Lowie 1923 and a decade later, Linton acknowledged that several, sometimes contradicting, 'normative elements' often were found simultaneously in ethnic groups. Later on, in the 1950s, Georges Balandier argued convincingly that most small-scale societies are heterogeneous, while Mauss, followed by Leach, noted that most societies, including the 'cold' small-scale ones, are in a process of change, similar to the notion of hybridity (Mercier 1966:155-74). These observations and insights are the result of empirical observations recognised by many anthropologists, but seem in general to have surpassed most archaeologists. Although some social theory can be tedious, the main arguments of postcolonial and post-structural theorists cannot be dismissed as simply rhetoric postulates. On the contrary, as I will show further on, the issues raised within the postcolonial discourse can actually be helpful in order to better understand what may seem to be contradictions and strange concurrencies in the archaeological record.

### **'Postcolonial' archaeologies**

Hitherto, attempts to employ postcolonial thinking in archaeology mainly concern proto-historical cases of Greek and Roman conquests/colonisations and the period of contact in the Americas. In Mediterranean archaeology, the concept of colonisation is well established and it is no surprise that we find most attempts by archaeologists to apply postcolonial theory in this area (e.g. van Dommelen 2005). The same goes for historical archaeology of the Americas, Asia and Africa (e.g., Stein 2005, Lightfoot 2004). One typical area of research concerns the so-called "Romanisation" of the Mediterranean world. It has become obvious to many scholars that the Roman conquest of the provinces worked very differently and at a different speed in different provinces (Alcock 2001). Greg Wolf (1998), when discussing the Roman conquest of Gaul, argues that the process has been simplified by putting too much stress on the written sources, and that the archaeology of Roman Gaul indicate a greater diversity in different local responses to the empire. Many aspects of Gallic life were to some extent transformed by integration into the Roman Empire, including most spheres of rural life. Roman and Gallic identities were opposed during an early - but brief - formative period; thereafter that opposition was supplanted by more

familiar Roman contrasts, between rich and poor, educated and uneducated, military and civilian and so forth. Most importantly, there was never a formula of how to become 'Roman'. Both the provinces and the empire experienced a number of changes, which cannot be formulated in terms of hybridisation, syncretism or acculturation (cf. Webster 1997).

Peter van Dommelen (1997, 2002, 2005) has, in a number of texts, discussed the different effects of the Greek and Punic 'colonisations' in the Mediterranean area. In the case of Sardinia, for instance, he points out the differences in Punic influence on coastal and inland areas, as well as between dispersed settlements and urban contexts of the island. Another example is Robin Osbourne's (2001) study the Greek ceramic imports in Etruria. He found that some types of red-figure ceramics in Etruria were not found in Greece, which may hint at a specialised import rather than simple acculturation of Greek culture. The ceramics were certainly not just dumped upon the Etruscans Osbourne suggests that the example reveals an active and creative element in the manner which the indigenous peoples of Etruria appropriated Greek mythology (Osbourne 2001:290).

Adolfo Dominguez (2002) provides a similar example which concerns the emergence of carved stone sculptures in Iberia in the 6th century BC. The earliest sculptures bear typical Greek traits, but their original associations became altered over time. After a century, the general style, technique and composition of the sculptures became more varied and their location changed to a funeral context. This alterations of style and context indicate something else than just a hybrid between Greek and local cosmologies. On the contrary, Dominguez relates this development to political and ideological changes in the ongoing urbanisation process and suggests that the local elites intentionally transformed the meaning and location of stone sculpturing as a form of resistance towards Greek imperialism (2002:68, 74f).

There are, of course, many other examples of archaeological studies inspired by postcolonial thinking, but it is safe to say that the majority mainly are occupied with the first and second themes: The writing of alternative histories from the colonised point of view, and attempts to address the colonial situation from a mutual point of view. The third point, concerning hybridity, has been less addressed, despite its obvious relevance for the analysis of social encounters. In the following text, I will therefore take some time to examine this line of thought and discuss its implications more thoroughly. A natural point of departure will be the work of Homi Bhabha, which has most exhaustively explored the notion of hybridity and who offers the most promising and interesting discussion on the complexity of social encounters.

## Homi Bhabha: Close encounters in the third space

Homi Bhabha is one of the most influential theorists within the postcolonial movement and it is not surprising that his ideas and concepts have gained much interest among archaeologists the recent years (of which this volume is but one example). Bhabha's theoretical basis departs from a general poststructuralist stance (Lacan, Derrida and Foucault) whose legacy he develops via Franz Fanon and Edward Said in his deconstruction of colonial texts (e.g., Conrad, Kipling and Forster) and modern-day African-American novels (e.g., Toni Morrison). Although Bhabha argues convincingly in many of his textual deconstructions, there are a number of inconsistencies and diffuse reasoning in his work which has led to some misunderstanding. It is therefore important to examine his work in a detail in order to point out both weaknesses and possibilities for archaeological studies.

Bhabha is most explicit in advocating the notion of hybridity. To Bhabha, social collectives (cultures) are specific temporal constellations, which to a large extent consist of elements that they share with others (2004:52). This hybrid nature of social collectives makes any claim of hierarchical 'purity' of cultures as well as concepts such as syncretism, cultural synergy and transculturation untenable. A culture-contact can thus never be reduced to a clash between totalities based on, for example, culture, race, ethnicity or religion, but is rather constituted by a *series* of encounters between individuals and groups in different social circumstances. A most interesting aspect of Bhabha's reasoning is the prospect of encounters to actually result in something *new* and substantially *different* than just conglomerates of new and old elements (Bhabha 1990:210, 2004:162). A social encounter may result in radically new practices and ways of thinking about things that cannot be traced back to a specific origin. Most such hybrid effects are, however, seldom radical and revolutionary, but rather consist of small displacements or glitches in the social fabric. Most such alterations are just temporary, but in conjunction with others, they can result in an important social change of the long term in a similar sense as formulated in Giddens' (1984) theory of structuration or Braudel's discussion of the event, the short- and the long term. It can therefore be little doubt that by taking the notion hybridity and its effects seriously it will force us to look quite differently at social change and the emergence of new practices and materialities of any given time period.

### Intervening hybrid spaces

With his emphasis on hybridity, there is no surprise that the encounters discussed in Bhabha's texts are quite far from the adventures of Captain Cook or



Cortés. Instead, Bhabha argues, social encounters result in contradictory and ambivalent spaces in which social identities and ideologies are questioned and negotiated. This effect is referred to by Bhabha as the "third space of enunciation" (2004:54).

The intervention of the Third Space of enunciation, which makes the structure of meaning and reference an ambivalent process, destroys this mirror of representation in which cultural knowledge is customarily revealed as integrated, open, expanding code. Such an intervention quite properly challenges our sense of the historical identity of culture as homogenizing, unifying force, authenticated by original Past, kept alive in the national tradition of the People (2004:54).

It is far from clear what the notion of 'third space' actually represents, but it is evident that Bhabha wants to bypass simplistic interaction theory by pointing out the complexity of an encounter. The third space of enunciation is employed as a metaphor for the ambiguous virtual field that emerges when two or more individuals interact. Enunciation is a key-word here, which on one level can be rephrased as 'articulating', or if we put it from a perspective of practice rather than speech or text, we may also add 'performance'. Enunciation can, however also be translated as the articulation of speech from the point of view of its intelligibility to an audience. Here we may suspect that a number of different aspects are at play, like for instance the ambivalence of slang, dialect, accent and insufficient understanding of the language in question. In a sense, the third space is the space of hybridity itself. The colonial discourse is split in enunciation between various positioned agents who (mis)appropriates the dominant ideology in order to intercede against and resist it. Somewhat contrary to Spivak, Bhabha thus allows the subaltern a voice (Bhabha 2004:85, cf. Parry 1987:40). It can be no doubt that Bhabha draws heavily from the psychoanalytical theory of Jaques Lacan and the work of Slavoj Žižek when he points at the ambiguities of inter-subjectivity (Bhabha 2004:264). The hybrid nature of societies and their social diversity (heterogeneity) thus also implies that misunderstandings and uncertainties is not something that only occurs between individuals of different traditions or cultures, they also characterise much interaction between individuals *within* the same nation or ethnic collective (Žižek 1987; cf. Fahlander 2003).

The pact of interpretation is never simply an act of communication between the I and the You designated in the statement. The production of meaning requires that these two places be mobilized in the passage through a Third Space, which represents both the general conditions of language and the specific implication of the utterance in a performative and institutional strategy of which it cannot 'in itself' be conscious (2004:53).

A less philosophical question, but yet significant, is what 'space' actually signifies in this context. Philips (1998) has noted a disturbing slippage between actual and abstract spaces in Bhabha's writings. Bhabha's examples are mainly taken from novels and other fiction texts and in that context, the third space seems to be found in the interstices of 'texts' in a Derridean sense. He does, however, provide us with a few more substantial examples. One concerns a Mexican performance artist situated on the border between USA and Mexico, who takes advantage of his ambivalent in-between position in his provocative broadcastings. According to Bhabha, the artist inhabits 'an intervening space', which is neither Mexican, nor American, that seems to 'demand an encounter with newness' (2004:10, 312). Another example (2004:11) concerns a Norwegian ship that on arrival was greeted with the Norwegian National anthem despite that it was running under another nation's flag by convenience and with a non-Norwegian crew. Only the ship's captain heard a familiar melody. The incident is indeed a peculiar situation, but it is more an example of third-space effects than a third space per se. Bhabha likes to point out such in-between situations, or 'interstices' where inter-subjective notions overlap and become displaced (1994, 2004:2-6). In order to understand Bhabha's way of thinking, it may be illuminating to recall his metaphor of the house (which he borrows from Renée Green). A house may consist of several floors that are accessible by a staircase. In order to move from the first to the second floor or vice versa, one needs to use the stairs. The staircase is thus metaphorically speaking transcending 'certain binary oppositions' such as high and low by offering a liminal space and a pathway between the extremes. The liminal space of the stairwell is, according to Bhabha, an 'interstitial passage' in a similar sense that allows a social subject to move in and out of, for instance, different racial subject positions.

The notion of interstices is, of course, inspired by Derrida and Lacan, but also derives from the work of Lefebvre and Frederick Jameson (Bhabha 2004:310). Unfortunately, none of these examples from Bhabha's texts gives any clear answer as to whether 'space' is to be regarded as strictly virtual or real (or both), but it nonetheless seems evident that Bhabha's concept of third space is best understood as a metaphor, an analytical tool, which primarily signifies a virtual space, not a physical room. But, of course, encounters of the third space certainly not only appear while confronting texts, but also emerge in material context when people interact. On such matters, however, we get little help from Bhabha: he ignores the complex issue of the social *production* of space as well as the social significance of materialities (cf. Moore 2001). This ambiguity regarding space (which probably is intentional) has led to some misconceptions as well as alternative uses of the term 'third space'. One example is Edward Soja's (1996) use of the notion. Soja is clearly inspired by the work of Bhabha,

but his concept of 'third space' is something quite different. To Soja, the term represents 'lived space' in contrast to 'perceived space' (1<sup>st</sup>) and 'conceived space' (2<sup>nd</sup>). Soja apparently wants to 'translate' the term to something more tangible, but he nonetheless ends up with a quite different concept.

Of course, encounters in real life occur at specific locations and their social and material constitution certainly plays major roles in the process, but there is little use in trying to identify any geographical 'third spaces' in prehistory. Rather, the potential of the concept lies in discussing elements of the archaeological record as possible *results* from third space encounters. From such a viewpoint, the ambiguity and fuzziness of the concept of 'the third space of enunciation' pose no real problem. Bhabha employs the concept for the effects that occur in any situation of encounters, which have more or less significant consequences. The important lesson that can be learned from Bhabha is that confrontations with other people or materialities can have a variety of outcomes, of which not all are necessarily intentional or foreseen – or can be traced back to any specific origin.

### **The location of 'Culture'**

In a similar sense as regarding the meaning of space, it is quite clear that the *location* of culture in Bhabha's framework is not to be found in physical space - or within social collectives - but rather in the inter-subjective realms (third spaces) between individuals and groups. In Bhabha's view, the cultural is defined as: "...a disposal of power, a negative transparency that comes to be antagonistically constructed on the boundary between frame of reference/frame of mind" (2004:163). Culture is thus something that is exercised, an effect of discriminatory practices and power relations between various individuals and groups rather than a network of institutions and ideologies. Cultural difference, he continues, is the "process of enunciation of culture as 'knowledgeable', authoritative, adequate to the constructions of systems of cultural identification" (2004:50). To put it simply; a culture may only be identified by its difference to other cultures, just as ethnicity is an aspect of relationships rather than a property of a people (Eriksen 2002:12). The 'cultural' has thus no inherent essence but is articulated in relations with an Other and its 'location' is found in the gaps, the third spaces, between diverging subject positions.

This virtual definition of culture, no matter how appropriate, suffers from a similar ambivalence regarding the real and the virtual as noted on the issue of space. It is evident that Bhabha tries to avoid dealing with clusters of elements that certain larger collectives indeed seem to share. It is certainly true that social collectives are to some extent disordered by conflicting ideas, multiple voices, and interpretations, but as Barth argues, we should nonetheless expect to find:

“...*some* functional imperatives, *some* normative pressures, *some* deep structural patterns, *some* effects on the relations of production on life chances, and *some* shared cultural themes in ranges of local institutions” (2002:31). Bhabha’s surprisingly harsh critique of Fanon and Said is telling on this matter. He attacks what he regards to be a tendency of both scholars to maintain notions of social totalities such as ‘the West’ and ‘the East’ (which makes one wonder how he should react to traditional cultural anthropology). When Bhabha at certain instances addresses societies and ethnicities, he is quick to point out their hybrid and fluid constitution. To Bhabha, social groups and minorities have no or little essence but are mainly *effects* of expressions of power and certain discourses. This perspective suggests that we cannot speak of cultural diversity, only cultural differences. Concepts such as multiculturalism are to Bhabha only ideological constructions which “attempt both to respond to and to control the dynamic process of the articulation of cultural difference, administering a *consensus* based on a norm that propagates cultural diversity” (2004:47, 50). Bhabha does acknowledge that some ‘cultural symbols and icons’ can have certain homogenising effects (2004:52), but what he seems to forget is that a belief in a common identity, values and a homogeneous culture is a very powerful ideological metaphor, which, although it may not exist in the real world, sure has major social effects. Moreover, cultural notions of belonging and unity among many social collectives are not only matters of ideology and discourse, but is also rooted in materialities, practices and ‘real’ space which importance cannot simply be overlooked.

### **On mimicry and materialities**

Another interesting concept that Bhabha has developed is the subversive dimension of mimicry (2004:122ff, 128, 172). The notion builds on Lacan’s discussion on how subjects, like animals, can employ certain mimic strategies in the struggle for survival. An insect or animal can, for instance, camouflage itself by mimicking the background, or imitate poisonous plants in order to avoid being eaten. Bhabha employs the concept in his reading of English 19th-century colonial literature, in which he exposes “flawed colonial mimesis”, such as the subalterns struggle with being Anglicized but not *emphatically* English (2004: 125).

What emerges between mimesis and mimicry is a writing, a mode of representation, that marginalizes the monumentality of history, quite simply mocks its power to be a model, that power which supposedly makes it imitable. Mimicry *repeats* rather than *re-presents*...

To adopt the colonizer's culture, assumptions, institutions, ideology and values, is never a case of simple imitation or reproduction; the result is never in perfect concordance with the hybrid 'original' (cf. Brokaw 2005). It is something 'almost the same but not quite'; an ironic compromise which is once resemblance but also menace (Bhabha 2004:123, cf. Parry 1987:41). Unfortunately, Bhabha never really succeeds in developing the notion of mimicry from the rather stiff Lacanian use of the concept. To Bhabha, mimicry is an aspect confined within the colonial discourse and is merely an expression of the subaltern's pathology rather than an active strategy (Aching 2002:38). But of course, mimicry can intentionally be employed as a subversive strategy in most unequal power relations. Mimicry and reproduction always contain misreading, inabilities or adjustments, which in the long run may turn out to be in disadvantage to the colonial administration (cf. Li 1995). For instance, mimicry makes the binary opposition between the two smaller and smaller which in the long run it more and more difficult to withhold any ideology of supremacy based on skin colour or race ('almost the same but not white' (Bhabha 2004:126). Mimicry always borders on pastiche or irony, which means that mimicking behaviour, iconography and habits of the other is a safe subversive strategy. While the subaltern seems to adjust and assimilate to a dominant discourse (e.g., behaving and looking European) it gives a false impression that the colonised is pacified and harmless, while actually opening a space for hidden agendas. Some practices may be that strange that they could only be performed as irony, something that most understand as mockery, but is too subtle to be suppressed or punished by the administration. Ironic mimicry can thus be employed as solidarity strengthening strategy that authorities will have difficulties to ban (cf. Bhabha 2004:122). As an illustration, we can turn to a historical case described by Gitta Sereny (1995:196ff). She describes the strategy of a Czech Jew at Treblinka who applied a kind of mimicry in order to survive the holocaust. He resorted to a clean appearance in extreme, always wearing new fresh clothes, silk cravat, meticulous shiny polished shoes and shaved himself up to seven times a day. He was not mimicking German appearance, but German virtues, which actually gained him respect from the Nazis. It is mimicry in reverse, applied *not* to blend in with the background (crowd), but the opposite, distancing himself from the other prisoners and thus reclaiming his individuality. Another contemporary example of such mimicry can be found in the wigger-culture. Wiggers are mainly white urban middle-class teenagers who mimic the ways and attitudes of Afro-American Hip-hop culture. In this case, the mimicry is hierarchically reversed as the middle-class teens imitate a lower-class life-style without themselves being subaltern.

The concept of mimicry also applies on a material level. Similarities between objects are one of the major indications employed by archaeologists to

signify ethnicity and cultural contact. But instead of simply viewing similarities as an indication of diffusion, exchange or acculturation, we may be able to identify more complex processes of mimicry. For instance, Dominguez's example of the Iberian stone sculptures can also be discussed in terms of mimicry. Despite the alterations in style and context, the sculptures are similar to the Greek originals, but yet signify something different (cf. Tronchetti & van Dommelen 2005 on stone statues at Sardinia). Another, more intricate example, concerns the knapped glass bottle artefacts discussed by Harrison (2002, 2003, Harrison in this volume). In some areas of Australia, Aboriginal people knap traditional artefacts using modern day materials such as glass and ceramics, which might be seen as a special kind of mocking mimicry. The knapped spear points manufactured using broken glass bottles and ceramics look similar to traditional Aboriginal stone artefacts, but are of little practical use (Harrison 2003). It is thus not simply a case of appropriating or assimilating new materials as additions or substitutes for the traditional. It is rather a practice that involves both mockery and resistance.



Fig 1. Swords and a fishing hook made of flint from the Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age (National Museum of Denmark, photograph by the author).

There is an almost endless range of materialities that are 'almost the same but not quite' in the archaeological record. One example is the elaborated flint items of Southern Scandinavian Late Neolithic and Early Bronze Age discussed by Varberg in this volume. The flint daggers are clearly similar to bronze daggers in shape and are commonly believed to be substitutes manufactured in flint by individuals and groups that lack metal (Stensköld 2004:66ff, 84f). But

as Varberg and Stensköld point out, the extraordinary craftsmanship that these items represent, the great quantity and special context imply a more complex story. Indeed, this category of flint objects can be seen as representing mocking mimicry by individuals and groups who might want to distance themselves from others who use bronze tools by making delicate, but yet more or less unusable items in flint, such as swords and fishing hooks (fig. 1). The ranges of different ways in which mimicry may work in social practice and in material expression are plentiful and there can be little doubt of the concept's usefulness in archaeological analysis.

### **Committed to theory? Archaeological implications**

It is not an easy task to summarise such an extensive and wide-ranging body of work like Bhabha's. But in a general sense, it is apparent that all his main concepts are interrelated. The various instances of mimicry foster hybridity and ambivalence, which are articulated in third spaces (where we also find the location of culture). Bhabha's framework provides us with ways of discussing social change in a more nuanced way than traditional models of acculturation and diffusion (cf. van Dommelen 2006:119). In a general sense, Bhabha's work is a devastating critique of mainstream archaeology. He makes it difficult to maintain general fictions of the past as consisting of homogeneous cultures or ethnicities rather than heterogeneous intersecting collectives. We do not need Bhabha to understand that social collectives are normally heterogeneous and that individuals are simultaneously subject to ideologies, while at the same time their actions maintain or alter them (Fahlander 2003). But, we do need to come to terms with the fact that our most familiar entities of prehistory (Bell-Beakers, Greeks, and Vikings etc) also were caught in processes of hybridity. Besides the notion of hybridity, it is also evident that Bhabha's concept of third space of enunciation is interesting to pursue in archaeological analysis. This is especially the case for the idea of encounters as productive in the sense that something radically new may emerge from them (2004:56, 296, 312). 1980:131ff). This can force us to look at familiar data with new eyes. Also the concept of mimicry can help us to discuss similarities in materialities and practice above simplifying concepts such as imitation and reproduction.

Despite these promising points, there are nonetheless some inconsistencies in Bhabha's work that need to be discussed and elaborated before we can apply his ideas with confidence. First, we need to recognise that most prehistoric social structures are much less institutionalised than the historical and modern day societies that Bhabha discusses. It would be ridiculous to expect a similar kind of colonial machinery at work in prehistory as in Bhabha's examples.

Nonetheless, his notions of the varied results of third space encounters (misunderstandings, mimicry etc) may still be valid.

Bhabha's refusal to deal with real space has already been noted, but a more problematic issue is that his analyses only occasionally refer to the material context. In his analysis of the colonial discourses, Bhabha seems to ignore the necessary relationship of the management of physical space, of resources and bodies in the discursive processes he discusses (Brokaw 2005:159, van Dommelen 2006:112). Let us consider an example provided by the historian Peter Englund (2003). The case concerns a situation that occurred in January 1879, when the British decided to finally occupy Zululand in the south of Africa. The British forces comprised some 1,200 men and were fighting against ten times the numbers of Zulus. The fight was nonetheless a mere routine issue for the English; the Zulu warriors were only equipped with standard ox-hide shields and stabbing spears and could not match the heavily armed English troops. At the battle of Isandlwana 10 miles east of the Tugela River, something nonetheless went wrong. The beginning of the fight was a mere massacre; despite their overwhelming numbers the Zulus were gunned down in great speed by the English army. But after a while problems emerged for the English as they began to run out of ammunition. The ammunition was transported in heavy wooden crates which only could be opened by unscrewing nine large screws. Due to logistic problems, there were only two screwdrivers in the English camp. It thus became impossible to keep up and deliver new ammunition to the soldiers and the English were finally defeated by the Zulus. The lost battle of Isandlwana stunned the world. It did not stop the English from colonising South Africa, but the incident did have larger implications. It was unthinkable that a "native" army armed only with stabbing weapons could defeat the troops of a western power armed with modern rifles and artillery. The shock of the defeat and loss at Isandlwana caused a catastrophic drop in morale among the British forces invading Zululand. Of course, the outcome of the Isandlwana battle was not solely a result of the lack of screwdrivers, but the example nonetheless illuminates the importance of materialities (including logistics, time-space and the material circumstances) in social encounters.

Another problematic issue in Bhabha's work is the question of the scale of analysis. Several scholars have criticised Bhabha for making too general statements from a single text and thus neglecting the social difference and heterogeneity he otherwise is keen on pointing out. Talpade Mohanty (1984), for instance, argues convincingly in her discussion of the postcolonial situation of women that in order to fully understand the social complexity of colonial encounters, it is necessary to keep the analysis on a local level (cf. Parry 1987). The criticism is true to some extent: Bhabha elegantly moves between the local



and particular to the general and global. It is, however, evident that he views the local as *interrelated* to the larger surrounding world (e.g., Bhabha 2004:359f, cf. Schueller 2003:41). Like Foucault, he employs particular examples and statements in order to expose the structure of modernist and colonial discourse. It is, however, important to recognise the great variability and different effects of similarly identical kinds of encounters; there are no formulas or schemes with universal application even to historically known colonisations (cf. Stein 2005).

Considering these critical objections to Bhabha's work, we thus need to elaborate his general and abstract discussion and relate it to real social circumstances. In this case, it may be helpful to enter a historical study that concerns hybrid encounters. One interesting and suitable example is Richard White's study of the French colonisation of the *pays dén haut* (the upper country) in the Lake Erie and the Ohio valley region during 1650-1815 AD.

### **Encounters of the Middle Ground**

Richard White's discussion of the colonisation of the upper country is a fascinating study in many respects, but also an illuminating example of how third space effects can be articulated in a contact situation. The European expansion of the *pays dén haut* was far from being a confrontation between two homogeneous social collectives. The French colonisers consisted of differently empowered individuals and groups (trappers, militaries, missionaries etc) who all had very different goals and means. The same goes for the native inhabitants. Before the French arrived in the area the Indian societies were scattered by a devastating war which resulted in a number of small tribes with changing alliances and hostilities towards each other. This state of affairs was evident to each collective, but it did not stop both sides from maintaining a simplified view of the Other as a homogeneous group. The French saw all Indians as Algonquarians (which is actually a linguistic category, not an ethnic group) while the Indians did not differentiate between the various groups of Europeans (Scott-Irish, German, English, French).

Of course, there were general differences between the colonisers and the original inhabitants. The French were part of an institutionalized literate state society whilst the Indians were organized in chiefdoms with one paramount leader. Interestingly, both groups regarded themselves as superior. The French viewed themselves as carriers of civilization and perceived the Indians as undeveloped savages because of their lack of institutionalised organization. The Indians in their turn pointed out their own free way of life and mocked the French for being enslaved by their Western laws and morals (White 1991:58). The hybrid nature of both the indigenous and the newcomers resulted in a truly

complicated encounter and it is thus no surprise that the relationship between them was tricky in several ways.

The official strategy of the French colonialists was simply to embrace the Algonquians into their own conceptual order of laws and morals, but the special circumstances of the encounter hindered such a process. The ever-present possibility of hostilities and change of alliances between the various groups within each side demanded a special pragmatic relationship. To make everyday life go on smoothly both sides needed to learn and understand the reasoning of the other in order to be successful in diplomatic negotiations. It was congruities, perceived or actual, that became the language of the area. As White puts it: ‘Cultural conventions do not have to be true to be effective any more than legal precedents do. They have only to be accepted.’ (1991:53). To solve problems there quickly evolved something that White terms ‘a middle ground’, a virtual as well as actual space where negotiations, misunderstandings, diplomacy and brute force were constantly at stake. The middle ground is best viewed as a realm of constant invention, which created cultural demands of its own. This particular form of social relations was neither an invention by the French officials nor by the Indian chiefs. The rules of the middle ground could not be established by any official strategies but were rather initiated and maintained by day-to-day negotiations. The effects of this relationship often led to results that neither Algonquians nor the French would have predicted or wished for. Instead, the world of the middle ground resulted in new sets of common conventions, which cannot be seen as hybrid combinations of elements from either side.

There are a number of different situations recorded by White that illustrates the particular relations of the middle ground. One incident concerns a French-Indian council in which the French commander Cadillac tries to persuade the Huron chief, known as the Baron, to go to war against another tribe. The Baron, who favoured peace, but still wanted to maintain good relations with the French, tried to build on both Indian traditions as well as Christian elements to promote his case. He tried to fool Cadillac by offering him a beaver as a gift while recounting a dream of an old Indian man. He was aware that dreams had no importance to the French and tried to reformulate it as a revelation posing the old man as an Indian prophet. What he did not understand was that ‘revelations’ of un-authorised individuals have no legitimacy for the French – especially coming from a non-white Indian. Cadillac mocked Baron’s flawed idea of Christian doctrine and refused to accept the beaver, knowing that receiving the gift would validate Baron’s claims of the old man being a real prophet, which later could be used by the Indian chief in future negotiations. This misunderstandings and attempts to employ the others’ customs resulted in something more than a traditional hybrid, it was a third space situation that gave

birth to something new that cannot simply be traced back to any original source (1991:54f). White echoes Bhabha's arguments when he concludes:

The crudeness of the baron's Christianity or Cadillac's mastery of Indian diplomacy mattered less than the need for each to employ these foreign elements at all. They merged them into something quite different from the Algonquian, Iroquoian, and French cultures that gave them birth (White 1991:56).

It is quite clear that the French - Algonquian relations were not determined by officials around negotiation tables or by any official strategy. There were, of course, formal diplomatic relations, like the referred council, but White maintains that the middle ground was foremost a result of face-to-face relations of daily encounters by differently situated Indian and French individuals. The economic relations (fur trade), for instance, were of little relevance to the actual day to day social relations. A strict economic relationship with special rules and permissions for professional traders was not possible due to the differences in social structure (coercive institutions etc) and the fleeting authority among the Indian and the French. The special structure of the middle ground was rather a network of fluid relationships structured by its own language, rituals and practices. Just as in the case of Cook's encounter with the Hawaiians, the structuration of the middle ground cannot be understood from the view of the traditions of two homogeneous collectives. Differently empowered individuals and groups played different roles in the process. One example is the important role that Indian women played in keeping the relations going in the middle ground. In the early period of contact, there were hardly any European women at all at the *pays d'en haut*, which imputed the settlers to form relationships with Indian women. The gender contracts of the Algonquians were not really understandable to the French. Unmarried Algonquian women had a certain freedom that the French had difficulties understanding; they could live together with one or several men without being refused a good marriage later on. The French, who lacked a category for such a gender structure, simply saw Indian woman as something similar to prostitutes (cf. the arrival of Captain Cook at Hawaii). They understood the practice of polygamy (although they resented it) but they did not understand what it meant for the Algonquian women. This particular state of affairs was, however, very important for the development of the relations of the middle ground. In a sense, the Algonquian women were more important in process of weaving the different social collectives together than the official negotiations (White 1991:60ff).



Fig. 2. Indians Giving a Talk at a Council on the Banks of the Muskingum in North America 1764. Engraving by Benjamin West. (Modified from Smith 1765).

White's discussion of the twists and turns of the middle ground has many complex and important insights regarding social encounters. In a general sense, White's observations verify much of Bhabha's theoretical discussion regarding the ambivalence and uncertainties that emerge from social encounters. White does, however, take us one step beyond Bhabha by providing more specific insights in third space logics like, for instance, the significance of daily contacts and the importance of certain categories (women). The contact situation of the upper country is, however, only one example of a colonial encounter with its own social and material circumstances. We should not expect to find similar developments in other encounter situations. For instance, the later administration of the English and their missionaries in the same area created a very different situation which by no means was built on mediation (cf. Stein 2005). White only provides us with important inspiration when it comes to

archaeological case studies. The lesson that White's discussion teaches us is the importance of analysing social encounters from a *local* small-scale perspective.

### **Towards an archaeology of encounters**

I have already pointed out some possible areas in which a third space perspective can be applied and this is not the place to present a detailed account of an archaeological case-study (but see Fahlander 2006). I will nonetheless conclude this paper by turning the focus to the aims and means of archaeological studies of mimicry and third space effects.<sup>2</sup>

Traditionally, encounters in prehistory have been conceived as the result of large-scale 'culture-contacts' between homogeneous collectives. The variety of the processes behind such contact situations are seldom analysed in detail and the arguments rather focus on which general model (i.e., aggressive assaults, friendly exchange, acculturation etc) that best 'explains' the evidence of a given situation. The occurrence of new types of artefacts and materials, as well as new types of practices such as new ways of building houses or change in burial practice, are normally explained by acculturation, trade and exchange, migrations or hostile invasion by more developed groups. The origin of the emergence of new practices, materials or artefacts in an area is often a question to pursue, and even sometimes regarded as the main objective of the analysis. Of course, there are certainly cases of both acculturation and diffusion in prehistory and we can expect some rate of migration or 'colonisation' at times. But Bhabha's perspective provides us with additional scenarios that may actually help us to better understand the appearance of new materialities and practices at a given time and place. There are, however, no clear-cut models or strategies found in Bhabha's work that can be directly transferred to archaeological cases; we need to elaborate his concepts to better suit the archaeological conditions.

One problematic issue concerns the source of data. The previously referred examples of archaeological application of postcolonial theory are all from proto-historic periods and most of them depend quite heavily on written sources. The question thus still remains to be discussed if similar reasoning can be applied in other areas and time periods. It may seem at first more difficult to trace such complex processes in prehistory without the support of written accounts, but it is, however, not necessarily true. The material dimensions are of principal interest as material remains often give us access to social circumstances, not

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<sup>2</sup> Bhabha (1997:459, 2004:364) does actually characterise his own work as a 'postcolonial archaeology', but, of course, he refers to the Foucauldian sense of the term. Bhabha's version of archaeology does, however, include a more nuanced notion of time than did Foucault (e.g., 2004:3, 6, 344ff).

easily obtained from written sources. Lyons & Papadopolous (2002:1) actually argues that material culture may be a better point of departure because they tell a less polished story than written accounts. It would, of course, be pointless to pit one source of information against another, they both have advantages and drawbacks as sources for archaeological analysis, but the material element of encounters has not been given due attention in traditional archaeological analysis and needs to be developed further.

The second, and perhaps most tricky, issue is to discuss archaeological data from a hybrid perspective without reference to cultural, regional or ethnical frameworks. Here the microarchaeological perspective, outlined in the introduction, may be of help. In a microarchaeological approach, regularities and patterns of materialities in time and space form the basis for inferring social practice. Examples of such practices can be a certain way of doing things, a typical way of making a pot, regularities in the disposal of the dead, the way of organizing a house or settlement, etc. Such identified practices form the basis for a further analysis on more general patterns in social structure, ideology, and symbolic orders. The general idea of the microarchaeological project is that local social practices, in conscious and unconscious ways, always elaborate on a wider frame of reference. The point of departure is thus detailed analysis of small-scale events, but not only in order to define specificity, but as a way to get at large-scale patterns and processes without the need for too much generalisation.

It has already become apparent that the complexity of the social encounter makes it necessary to keep the analysis on a detailed, small scale level. Too much of regional and ‘contemporary’ analogies would certainly only result in a constructed time-space compromise which probably has little to do with the formation of a given material record (cf. Fahlander 2004). Microarchaeology is, to put it simply, a way of discussing regularities in practice without the need to confine the study within a cultural context. Instead, we find clusters of interwoven fibres, that is, practices or material patterns, of varying extent in time and space that *may* coincide with an ethnic group, but we should not be surprised if this way of looking at social practice turns out as something that crisscrosses assumed cultural units, regions or ethnicities. The microarchaeological project is thus firmly in concordance with the issues raised by Bhabha. By viewing the extent of social practice as interwoven fibres of different lengths in time and space without being regional or cultural properties we can bypass many of the problems of heterogeneity and hybridity that proponents of culture relativism or culture holism struggle with.

## Concluding remarks

In this paper, I have argued that archaeologists have a lot to learn from the writings of Homi Bhabha. It is evident that traditional culture based models of acculturation and transculturation are generally far too crude because they neglect social heterogeneity and processes of hybridity. In addition, it has also become clear that besides the three issues pointed out by van Dommelen (the re-evaluation of subaltern histories, the mutual power perspective, and the hybrid nature of social practice and material expression), Bhabha and White also point out the possibility that something *new* can emerge from a social encounter (2004:56, 296, 312). Social encounters seem to generate not only confusion and tension, but also creative misunderstandings that change the structuration of the social fabric (cf. Foucault 1980:131ff). This latter point, taken together with the notion of mimicry, is perhaps the most important aspect of Bhabha's work for archaeologists to concern. From such a perspective, we may finally abandon the idea of material assemblages as equating ethnicity, but instead explore other possible reasons for the appearance of new or 'foreign' materialities and practices at a given time and place. The notion of the third space of enunciation provide us with a theoretical perspective that accepts difference without slurring over or normalizing differential ideologies at stake; it also allows us to envisage social and material developments as enhanced by difference and misunderstanding. The various ways in which mimicry works can help us to discuss similarities in materialities and practice above simplifying concepts such as imitation and reproduction. In this case, we need, however, to liberate the concept from Lacan's pathological perspective in order to recognise the involved agents' varying degrees of agency and creativity.

In order to avoid generalising and formalised views of social encounters, it has become clear that a local, small-scale, perspective is a necessary point of departure. The microarchaeological project (Fahlander 2003) is one promising perspective in which to discuss the local material setting in relation to larger issues of ideology and the distribution of materialities and practices. It is thus apparent that Bhabha's reasoning (as well as postcolonial theory in general), not only are of interest for grand scale periods of colonisation (Mediterranean and historical). The processes of hybridity and mimicry remains also a possibility for any small scale encounters of other periods and regions. The example of mimicry during the Late Neolithic discussed here is just but one example of how the concept of third space effects can make us look quite differently at old and familiar fictions of the past (see, for instance, Fahlander (2006) on hybridity versus cultural dualism during the Middle Neolithic, or Ling (2005) on rock carvings of the Bronze Age).

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