Norwegian Archaeological Review

Things Are Us! A Commentary on Human/Things Relations under the Banner of a 'Social' Archaeology

Timothy Webmoor [a]; Christopher L. Witmore [b]
[a] Archaeology Center, Department of Anthropology,, Stanford University, USA [b] Joukowsky Institute for Archaeology and the Ancient World,, Brown University, USA

First Published:June2008

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Things Are Us! A Commentary on Human/Things Relations under the Banner of a 'Social' Archaeology

TIMOTHY WEBMOOR and CHRISTOPHER L. WITMORE

What work does the adjective 'social' in social archaeology do? What is the character of human/things relations under the rubric of social archaeology? We raise these questions in relation to the recent *Companion to Social Archaeology* by Meskell and Preucel. While the corrective of the 'social' has been extremely productive, in broaching these questions we enter very murky waters. Our task in this article is to show where meanings of the 'social' have broken down; our charge is to demonstrate how frames of reference in understanding people/things relations have become muddled. By building on the strength of archaeology with regard to *things*, we seek to revisit the question: what is it to be human?

THE SOCIAL OF ENCHANTMENT, THE ENCHANTMENT OF THE SOCIAL

The enchantment of the 'social' has achieved orthodoxy in archaeology, as it has in the other social sciences. To modify the title (and scope) of Alfred Gell's (1992) piece, 'the social of enchantment, the enchantment of the social' envelops archaeological reasoning so completely that the social seems to enchant archaeologists as archaeologists enchant the social.[1] That is, the social seems to become both the *explanandum* and the *explanans* for archaeological inquiry. How can we explain the complexities of the archaeological past (or present) by attributing a Durkheimian 'force' behind the scenes which directs and compels events but which nonetheless is not itself explained? This indeed appears to be a puzzling

(enchanting) spell. In stating that social processes, or social meanings, or social discourse accounts for the events of the past, we seem to be stating less than we would like to. Something fundamental and potent is at work with the 'social', but our explanations have come to be cloaked in a shroud of secrecy with regard to *what the social is*. Or perhaps there simply is a tautology at work, as the social is not, in fact, doing any work whatsoever. The 'social' comes as a stand-in, a modifier, a catch-all prefix. It attaches itself, as if by super glue, first to domains of study: 'social lives', 'social meaning', 'social body', 'social structure', 'social landscape'; then it goes on to define the very fields undertaking research into these domains: 'social archaeology'. What does the 'social' do? What does it qualify? Much like Ian Hacking's

Timothy Webmoor, Archaeology Center, Department of Anthropology, Stanford University, USA.
E-mail: tim.webmoor@stanford.edu
Christopher L. Witmore, Joukowsky Institute for Archaeology and the Ancient World, Brown University, USA.
E-mail: cwitmore@brown.edu

(1999) edification through tongue-in-cheek, do we need to attach 'social' to everything? Does it clarify? Does it do any work other than assert the hard-fought battle of academic underdogs (sociology and its closest allies) to partition reality into nature versus society, so that in this partitive scheme there was incontrovertible ownership of the 'social territory' and the blitzkrieging advances of the natural sciences could be contained? Is it simply entrepreneurial branding in an academic free market overrun by lobbying groups? If we were to investigate directly the work of assembling this social stuff, would the 'social', much like Gell's enchanting technology, divest itself of its mysterious, even mystifying, qualities?

We believe it is time to reassess the presumption of the social in archaeology as an explanatory category. In this article we address these very questions in the context of social archaeology as exemplified by the recent publication edited by Lynn Meskell and Robert Preucel, *A Companion to Social Archaeology* (2004). Social archaeology, according to Meskell and Preucel, 'refers to the ways in which *we* express ourselves through the *things* that *we* make and use, collect and discard, value or take for granted, and seek to be remembered by' (p.3, our emphasis). We are concerned that for a discipline specializing in the study of the complicated relationships of humans and things (not to mention our fellow creatures as 'companion species') the 'social turn' veers us too far from an understanding of these very relationships. Instead, we will argue that it has been an edifying corrective to assumed dogmas of naturalism, but one that has itself become dogmatic in its humanism.[2] Far from proposing yet another turn in the revolving door of archaeological reasoning, we wish to question the framing of the debate in archaeology, a debate stifled by dialectics (the impoverished logic of contradiction), by digging to the heart of the matter, and asking what is it to be a human being. Who are the *we* invoked by Meskell

and Preucel? Moreover, how do *we* fit into this complicated puzzle with *things*? These questions are as critical to the issue of where we, as archaeologists dealing with material pasts, begin our analyses, as they are crucial to understanding the vast importance of archaeology in the contemporary world. These questions, we suggest, set us upon a more productive path toward reassessing the presumption of the 'social' for archaeology. But there is more.

For social archaeology, 'materiality' is an area 'where archaeology can make significant contributions to contemporary social theory' (p.4). It is precisely here where social archaeologists are hamstrung by things and things are hamstrung by social archaeologists. Whereas many, such as Meskell and Preucel, would have us fighting under the colours of social theory, we contend that archaeology comprises a wider suite of transdisciplinary practices and sensibilities unique in their ability to cross-cut the sciences and humanities at large. But, as a profession, we can only make the most of this position by excavating underneath the very divides which separate the humanities and sciences in the first place. Though many, including Meskell and Preucel, now use the sufficiently all-encompassing and ambiguous term of *materiality* (refer to discussion in Ingold 2007), we agree that archaeology's strengths lie with *things*. However, with regard to these strengths there are a number of fundamental disagreements which need to be aired.

THE CORRECTIVE OF THE SOCIAL

It is important to recognize the various impetuses behind the 'social turn' in archaeology. Indeed, aside from the pioneering works of Gordon Childe (1949), Graham Clark (1939) and, later, Colin Renfrew (1973), the real push for a 'social understanding' in and of archaeology comes from the Cambridge 'underdogs': Hodder (1982), Shanks and Tilley (1987a, b) and their

compatriots in social arms. There was indeed a sense in which the 'natural' had ridden roughshod all over the interests and curiosities of archaeologists less naturalistically inclined. And they were right to point out with Hawkes (1954) and Binford (1962) that there was more to archaeology than solely the lower rungs of the past culture ladder (though, as we will suggest, there are fundamental problems with the revolutionary gesture, the dialectical movement, which accompanied it). What makes us human? Are we human because of the upper realms of intentional behaviour? Is it symbolism? Or, ideology? There was a refreshing honesty in those works, remonstrating archaeologists for dividing-off the work in the discipline from the work of being human, for anaesthetizing ourselves to the socio-economic and political dimensions of the field. Instead, there was a re-conceptualization of culture, or more operationally, society, as an ongoing negotiation of 'individual agents' with the structuring of their 'social roles', and the appropriation of, and 'objectification' through, material culture in these processes. The formerly staid, stimulus–response model of society as an extra-somatic means of adaptation to the environmental substratum was greatly re-configured and complexified. And, in tandem, the ambitions of archaeological explanation sprung up the ladder of inference. The work of these bold thinkers served as a much-needed corrective to the brilliant but ultimately limiting framework of an explicitly scientific ambition.

But things have changed in the intervening 20 years. What was a reaction to the totalizing and closed concept of the natural in the new archaeology has come to be the shibboleth of the inheritors of post-processual archaeology. The idea of social archaeology swallows up all concerns with the past. And the enchantment is both pervasive and persuasive: as it has been stated recently for the discipline, 'everything is social' (for discussion of this shift see Hodder 2004:26–29). But what work has the social done for archaeology? Has it better

served to understand society past and present? Does social explanation in archaeology still serve us as a corrective, or has it superseded its role as a reminder not to forget the discursive and non-discursive strategies of past 'individuals' in the accretion of the archaeological 'record'? To get at some of those provoking questions stated earlier, we want to look a little more closely at a recent book that may be said to canonize the social in archaeology.

Lynn Meskell and Robert Preucel have pulled together a compilation of essays under the rubric of 'social archaeology' that is as rich as it is indispensable. Moreover, there is a diversity of important issues addressed by some of our most renowned and most respected disciplinary practitioners in *A Companion to Social Archaeology* (2004). However, we do not consider every essay. Because of their excellent work contextualizing social archaeology we have the great advantage of airing our concerns on the basis of Meskell and Preucel's editorial sections.

Meskell and Preucel divide the field topically into 'key constituents of a social archaeology'; namely temporality, spatiality, and materiality (p.4). Under the ambit of each constituent, there is a disciplinary history of the usage and development of each as categories. Within broad parameters these concepts are undeniably central to archaeological work, yet the 'ity' modifying each term tips off the intent of the editors in their characterization of archaeology. These are not objective matters of existence, 'out there' in reality, but are instead the components of the 'social world', or Kantian a prioris refracted through the prism of social being. Here we are getting closer to what the mysterious stuff under the banner of the 'social' is; the banner behind which Meskell and Preucel rally. As they state: 'just as humans produce notions of time and space to mediate their existence in the world, so too do they produce notions of materiality and, indeed, these concepts are fundamentally

interdependent because material culture practices serve to concretize and reproduce particular modes of space-time' (p.4). So a 'growing appreciation of archaeology in this "social" sense' entails the recognition that humans produce for themselves their own world propped up by a substratum of real things (p.3). 'Real things', if indeed they are admitted as such, only present themselves through the filters of human consciousness (filters, no doubt, clogged by the sheer complexity of the world they must strain out!). What is more, once these things are 'socially produced' under various conceptions, with specific values, or through particular sensations (so long as they are all 'embodied'), they reinforce recursively their conceptual packaging by adding something human consciousness still is incapable of producing for them: the real, obdurate physicality of things (cf. Olsen 2003).

Now, there is no doubt, as the editors emphasize under 'the social and contemporary society' (p.4), varying cultural traditions have *conceived* of existence and the constituents thereof in alternate manners. Such has been the important lesson for archaeology engaged in non-western and indigenous appraisals of the 'past'. Indeed, the acknowledgment of archaeology as a practice located within contemporary society, with its particular interests and influences driving our understanding of the past, remains an important check on our scholarly (mostly 'western') presumptions. The issue we want to raise, however, is this: is this really how humans relate to the things of the world? Just how 'plastic' are these things? How dexterous is the social in handling and packaging things of the world to present to themselves? And most importantly, is this social stuff really something so powerful and determining that it allows us to 'overcome' or 'transcend' so many of the modernist dualities which have hampered our efforts to understand the nature of people/things relations?

FROM THE IMPOVERISHED LOGIC OF DIALECTICS TO THE NOTION OF MIXTURE

Here we detail the impoverished logic of dialectics, a logic often deployed under social archaeology in understanding people/things relations. We then go on to articulate the notion of 'mixture'. However, in pursuing the first portion of this project, we will not tackle the diverse body of philosophical literature. Neither do we feel it necessary to address all the dialectical treatments of material culture (*turned* materiality), nor are we obliged to review all the literature in which dialectics is invoked within social archaeology. We wish to begin humbly, from the ground up, with a single quote from the companion to the social archaeology which is our focus. With regard to the matter at hand, Meskell and Preucel assert:

Studies of materiality cannot simply focus upon the characteristics of objects but must engage in the *dialectic* of people and things (p.16, our emphasis).

Let us focus in on this mantra (as it is repeated in Meskell 2004a:2, b:249 and 2005:4) and, more precisely, detail the nature of human and material relations specifically characterized in terms of the 'dialectic'.

Along with social archaeology more generally and so many others across the humanities and social sciences, Meskell and Preucel are weary of what we might characterize as modernist dichotomies – subject/object, mind/body, culture/nature and so on – in understanding how human beings relate to the material world. Their conclusion is that the inherited (modernist) dichotomy of objects and subjects 'must be overcome' in the study of materiality, as, more properly termed, 'people and things' are equally agentic and mutually constitute each other in an indissoluble process (p.16). Here Meskell and Preucel offer sage advice in urging archaeologists to rethink debilitating dichotomies of thought; dichotomies which

stem from our inheritance of modernist thought, most particularly from Kant's so-called 'Copernican Revolution' (Latour 1993:56–59). Specifically, we ought to rethink our sacrosanct ideas of purified subject and object, of Nature and Society as real distinctions (Latour 1993:56). Forming their aim, Meskell and Preucel (p.16) suggest a rehabilitation of our categories: 'the study of materiality entails deconstructing our own notions of objects and subjects as discrete and essential entities that inhabit particular, impermeable worlds.'

The problem is that, despite hoping to *move beyond*, never mind *transcend* or *resolve*, 'impermeable worlds', Meskell and Preucel are still taken in by the enchantment of the social and the modernist priority of humans as the locus of action sanctioning it. Their assessment of materiality, the topic most surely amenable to taking matter seriously, ends by claiming that 'humans create their object worlds, no matter how many different trajectories are possible or how subject-like objects become' (p.16; see also Meskell 2004a:3, b:249). Without doubt, the editors are right to keep us from regressing back to an occult of the 'object' (a dreadful situation so long as the object exists in opposition to the subject); to a sect often associated with a traditional, classificatory-historical or materialism paradigm. This would simply constitute another go-around in the revolving door of archaeological theory between two extremes (separated by an ever-expanding divide): a generalized priority of the nature pole – priority of the society pole – priority of the nature pole (Webmoor 2007d). But 'dialectics' will not advance a novel manner of understanding people and things. On the contrary, this is where the 'enchantment of the social' only deepens the divides mentioned above and in doing so inhibits the discipline from contributing to wider debates. Why?

Deploying the term 'dialectic', we suggest, is not the correct trench to be digging in if we are to excavate underneath these divides.

And this strategy is to be distinguished from 'overcoming these divides' which dialectical thought would have us believe is possible. We should stick to our archaeological metaphors, because the means to bypass these rifts is not to take to the dialectical high ground of resolution or transcendence, but rather to dig down to the roots of the problem, to the source of the myth, and undercut it. This course of action requires some explanation and clarification.

When the editors (along with many other archaeologists), for example, deploy the term 'dialectic' they are basically subscribing to the belief that people make things and things make people as emphasized in the statement: 'in constructing objects society also constructs people' (p.14; for more iterations of this notion of 'mutual constitution' refer to Meskell 2004a:3, 4, 6; refer to Miller 2005:9 for a different assessment in relation to the equally mystical process of 'objectification'). This mutual constitution is perfectly fine insofar as we do not presuppose the nature of entities we deal with or the nature of their relations. To characterize such relations as *dialectic* in nature is to *begin* with a particular, asymmetrical bifurcation of the world. Things and human beings are regarded as ontologically distinct, as detached and separated entities, a priori.

Of course, within dialectics it is possible, many claim, to escape dualism through a fusion, a synthesis of the two extremes. Indeed, with this third position, a dialectical scheme allows for hybrids, but it is very much a hybrid, a composite, of two refined and unadulterated components in equal proportion (for this use of hybrid in characterizing recent work in social archaeology refer to Meskell 2004a, b:250). Dialectics begins with the bifurcation and separation of entities such as people and things or agencies and structures or pasts and present and then moves toward the resolution of that dichotomy. And this scheme is to be repeated, over and over again.

Dialectics, as a myth of an eternal return (a revolving door), deploys a logic and

vocabulary 'so impoverished that anything and everything can be drawn from it' (Serres with Latour 1995:155). Within this over-simplified scheme, as Michel Serres has pointed out:

you only have to set up a contradiction, and you will always be right … From the false comes anything. Contradiction enables you to deduce anything from anything (Serres with Latour 1995:155).

This logic of carefully positioned invariants gives history direction; it provides history with a progressive momentum. Whereas those subscribing to modernist thought might regard this 'advancement' as liberating, for Serres it actually leads to boring repetition and, far worse, violence. Such repetitions, tethered as they are within excessively simple chains of contradiction, keep us from the novel and inventive. Such violence casts the outmoded, the outdated, to the wayside (Witmore 2007b). In forgetting what are rhetorically regarded as old-fashioned, abandoned relics, we risk repeating past arguments, past violence (Serres with Latour 1999:53). Yet, it is the *unforgetting* which is a key strength of archaeology especially in the contexts of such violence (González-Ruibal 2006).

Taken on its own account, this 'dialectic', of Meskell and Preucel, actually forefronts the 'social' as the causal ingredient over the material so that things merely become a passive, pliable substratum for the social to project or imprint itself upon (p.16). In this sleight-of-hand 'resolution' of dichotomies we are promised a more mutually constitutive process, but instead we are left with the strong arm of humanism. This gesture shares many features with material culture studies and the unity-in-plurality of 'objectification' (Miller 2005; see note 7 below). A couplet of quotes, bookending the editors' introduction, reinforce this impression: 'we wish to offer a different but related, view of archaeology, one that acknowledges the *social*

construction of time, space, and material culture as constituent of social being' (p.16, our emphasis); and again, 'social archaeology refers to the ways in which *we* express ourselves through the things that *we* make and use, collect and discard, value or take for granted, and seek to be remembered by' (p.3, our emphasis). Here is the empty function of the social as both ingredient and outcome which we began with. What is this 'social stuff' that supposedly designates something more real than materials (Latour 2003)? Are the editors taking a social constructivist explanation which forefronts a 'we', humans-among-themselves, as the sole producers of the infrastructure of society? Rather than a hybrid, rather than a composite of what were held as two ontologically distinct realms, things continue to come across as passive recipients of social intention. Here, the editors really seem to fall prey to the terms of the tiresome realism versus anti-realism/idealism feud so common in the science wars. 'Social realists', to be certain, the editors engage in a 'dialectic' that merely champions this still unexplained social stuff as the arbiter of reality – past and present. In lieu of interrogating fundamental concepts and bypassing dichotomous thought, we have one pole of a dichotomy (the social) assumed and asserted as primary. Consequently, we get the social spread across the divides of subject–object, or culture–nature, like an explanatory bridge (not to mention an enveloping bulwark and bastion). The social encompasses and absolves division in its embrace; and, as this volume purports, it embraces everything (well almost everything, as a contradiction (antithesis) is still possible). So, to raise the issue again, if the social unifies everything and all explanations of the 'both/and' (or, likewise, 'either/or') variety subscribe to its charm, then what is gathered under the banner of the social? Surely, the answer must encompass more than human intention alone. It is precisely here that social archaeology threatens to

collapse under the weight of binary traffic over its unexplained, fragile suspension; it purports to bridge deep chasms, yet explanatorily it extends very little from the social shore. Yes, we may say that everything is social and feel satisfied that the enchantment has banished the perfidious dichotomies, but then we're still left without an explanation as to what the 'social' is.

Let us return to the crux of the matter, which is the question of how we understand what it is to be a human being and how human beings in turn relate to the material world. For social archaeology in general, no matter how much 'agency' is granted to things, it seems difficult to shed the belief that the initiative always comes from the thinking, free-standing human being (again refer to the quote above from p.16, Meskell 2004a:3, b:249). There is no need to repeat the alternative argument to this myth in detail here as it is laid out in previous editions of this very journal (Olsen 2003; Witmore 2006a). Let it suffice to say that we are neither limited to what is in the head nor what is in the skin. We are mingled with the things of the world in such a way that we are *ontologically indivisible* (for innovative archaeological approaches inspired by cognitive science refer to Malafouris 2004, Knappett 2005, for others engaging with actor-network-theory refer to Olsen 2003, Webmoor and Witmore 2004, Witmore 2004, Van Reybrouck and Jacobs 2006, also Shanks 1998).

The problem with dialectics is that it does not and cannot *begin with* the mixture (also Latour 1993:55–56). Dialectics cannot perform 'the work of the multiple' (Serres 1995:101). There is no place for the minions of quasi-objects (and quasi-subjects) which populate the world, which stabilize our relations and which include everything from the change in your pocket, the excavation photographs from Çatalhöyük or the pages of this very journal to ancient inscriptions of arbitration, Greek cult statues or even modest bits of pottery (on the quasi-object,

and the failure of dialectics to deal with it, refer to Serres 1982, 1995, Latour 1993). Bonds between 'social' entities alone would be 'fuzzy and unstable', like those of baboons, if they were not mediated by things (Serres 1995:87–90, also Latour 1994, Olsen 2007). In archaeology these things can include theodolites, GPS receivers, even the 'extended brain' of the internet archive (Webmoor 2007c), or, as we will soon witness, maps and eyeglasses. All these entities come together to comprise the archaeologist. Indeed, while the human being is entangled with other entities of the world, this is not a mingling of pure forms. *Mixture is an ontological state prior to the process of purification which dialectics is complacent in accepting and exacerbating* (Latour 1993). It is, therefore, with the mixture that we must begin.[3]

Mixtures are not against differentiation – far from it. These mixtures, these imbroglios, are bewildering in their variety. They are substantially more complex than oversimplified and asymmetrical dualities and bifurcations. Here, it is all right to speak of relations between people and things so long as we understand that things are an entangled aspect of what it is to be human and that many achievements of many people (materials and companion species) are always folded together into a thing. In this regard 'humanity begins with things' (Serres with Latour 1995:166, in archaeology refer to Olsen 2003). Far from shifting receptacles or 'embodiments' of meaning to be read, with things we find that which is most durable about us.[4] But all this, as we have repeatedly underlined, is not to fall into the revolving door of a dialectical return to the positivism/naturalism which can be said to have characterized the 'new archaeology' (Shanks and Tilley 1992:29–45, Webmoor 2007c, Wylie 2002:78–96). Indeed, how this occurs is what separates the work of Bruno Latour from that of Hegel or even Marx.[5] There seems to be some confusion over this and it is worth taking the time to map out this blind spot.

For Meskell and Preucel, the bifurcation of people/things comes to replace the duality of subject/object (pp.14, 124). But this is not enough, for the dialectical turn begins anew. Consider that some archaeologists have deployed subject/object and human/nonhuman as if these were stable concepts freely interchangeable with each other to account for a bifurcation of people and things (e.g. Robb 2004:131). First, it needs to be emphasized that these notions designate entirely different 'phenomena' (or better still, 'concrescences'; cf. Latour 1999:153 after Whitehead 1978): the former (subject/object) a hyper-incommensurable duality which was produced out of a long process of modernist purification; the latter (human/nonhuman) refers to a way of designating and maintaining difference in the relations between people and things in a way which is not predicated upon a modernist contradiction, but one which simultaneously allows for mixture (refer to Latour 1993, 1999:20–22). Second, casting aside the duality of subject/object does not rid us of the logic of contradiction. This error is captured by the frequent mischaracterization of science studies practitioner, Bruno Latour, as a proponent of 'object agency' (Hodder 2004:36, Meskell 2004a:4, Miller 2005:12.).

To suggest that the notion of 'object', which Latour argues was thoroughly sanitized by the moderns, can have agency (which has its own black box) is to frame the question in such a way that the answer is a seemingly obvious no; or, in the least, a strong not really! Latour backtracks, digs, and exposes the dialectical process of modernist purification which resulted in a radical gulf between intentional subjects and inanimate objects (1993). He recognizes the extreme difficulty (bordering on futility) in redefining the object (as did Heidegger), which is why he has never been a proponent of 'object agency' – a true oxymoron in a direct modernist sense (on Heidegger and 'objects' refer to Harman 2005).[6] For Latour to be such a proponent implies a 'both/and'

response (a dialectical one, as we have already pointed out) to the problem of modernist dualities (this is a solution advocated by Ian Hodder (1999)). Rather, Latour's path, taking inspiration from philosophers such as Michel Serres and Alfred North Whitehead (both philosophers' work relates to the metaphysics of a Leibnizian tradition), was the less trodden and largely forgotten one of *neither/nor* (Crease *et al.* 2003:16–18, Latour 1999:5, 6, regarding Leibniz refer to Deleuze 1993, Serres 1968, 1972). This path involves a very different vocabulary; it involves completely different frames of reference.[7] To freely mix the purified products of 'modernism' (regarding this term refer to Witmore 2006a) with the very different (non-modernist) notions of distributed action found within Latour's work, and science studies more generally, is an error which adds more confusion. Contradictions, asymmetrical bifurcations do not lead to mixtures. Mixtures, multiplicities, make contradictions and bifurcations possible.[8]

In liberally and eclectically blending concepts and categories belonging to completely different frames of reference 'social' archaeologists have missed the fundamental importance of this point. Of course, while we should be careful of black-boxing terms, we must also reach some agreement about the vocabulary we deploy. This requires us to be more precise in our use and understanding of cross-disciplinary categories, concepts and frames of reference if we are going to trust those who operate at the inter-disciplinary sieve. Let us not ignore the two rules of the sieve: 'Be sure you have the proper mesh. If you are not sure, err on the side of caution. And pace yourself. Take your time, for otherwise you are quite likely to miss something!'

If this article reads as a dose of ones own medicine, it is. Throughout the editorial essays of *A Companion to Social Archaeology*, Meskell and Preucel repeatedly and quite rightly advise: 'interrogate the very

foundations of our imposed categories' (p.123). Readers are instructed that 'we cannot assume a priori that what we consider as natural, no matter how institutionalized, is fundamental' (p.23). We could not agree more. Indeed, this kind of critical practice is one of the many great merits of the editors' work more generally. However, by adding the second half to the first quote above from page 123 the full statement reads: 'interrogate the very foundations of our imposed categories and try to understand *social* domains in their *cultural* context' (our emphasis). Are we to understand that the 'social' and 'cultural' are not a priori assumptions of what we consider to be natural? Shouldn't we subject the 'social', this most fundamental and determining of concepts, to the same debunking scrutiny? Whatever your frame of reference, we can be fairly certain that we have to dig deeper in addressing the questions raised at the beginning of this article.

   All misunderstanding aside, within the notion of mixture articulated here, *things are us*! Still, again, this is not a claim to an undifferentiated world. Quite to the contrary, in lieu of over-simplified and presupposed schemes we need to multiply the entities. We need to uncover even more nuanced differences and more subtle connections. And we must never confuse this analytical levelling with notions of *axiological* or *ethical* equivalence (Latour 2005, Witmore 2007a). The former is a strategy for teasing out a vast network of associations among a variety of entities; the latter arises out of these associations.

ONTOLOGIES OF MIXTURE: CYBORG, 'POSTHUMAN' ASSOCIATIONS

Other 'social theorists' are in fact not concerning themselves with the dialectic of people and things. Instead, they are investigating how the very supposed and distinct poles of these troublesome dichotomies have been made in the first place (cf. Latour 1986). Here we find the most effective strategy for demonstrating how they are no longer, and have never been, apt descriptions of the world. These bifurcations are vast oversimplifications. As outcomes, such as a uniform 'Nature' as opposed to 'Culture', we cannot treat these bifurcations as starting points to be overcome by pulling on the elasticity of the social from one pole to the other. Likewise with 'subjects' and 'objects'. On the contrary, phenomena (not, we hope, to be confused with 'things') are described which defy any presumption at the outset of investigating any ontologically distinct compositors. Here we would like to offer two examples of how the notion of mixture works. Let's begin with the case of an archaeological map at a large, complex site such as Teotihuacan, Mexico (Webmoor 2005).

   Consider the most precise and optically consistent projection of Teotihuacan to date: the exemplary survey map of René Millon, Bruce Drewitt and George Cowgill (1973). Published in 1973, the 'Millon map', as it has come to be known, manifested a systematic coordinate system (the first for Teotihuacan) for the archaeological site. At a scale of 1:2000, the map divided the city into grid units of 500 m², extending precisely drawn grid lines from the concrete and steel 'zero point' marker along the 'centre line' (Millon *et al.*:12–13). The monumental architecture itself has a role to play in this far from arbitrary imposition of Euclidean coordinates: the central avenue (avenida or calle de los muertos) cuts a swath of more than 2 km through the densely urbanized zone at 15 degrees, 25 minutes east of astronomical north. Millon (along with a host of surveyors, colleagues, instruments, and media) oriented his 'centre line' along this avenue and hence tied the coordinates of his map to this alignment (Millon 1964) (Fig. 1). The immobile features of the site were translated into the coordinate system of the map; the precise lines of the map become a graphical translation of the (less precise) alignment of

structures. Thereafter, the coordinate lines, the metrical basis for the map, play a part in the combined action of archaeologists with other things. It provides a basis for subsequent archaeological engagements with the site.

Twenty years on from the publication of the Millon map, the La Ventilla excavations (e.g. Serrano Sánchez 2003, Gómez Chávez 2000 for full discussion) of the National Institute of History and Anthropology (INAH) enrol the Millon map in the delineation of their excavation units. Here, Millon's block 91 (S1W2) is further divided into 100 m squares and the north-east corner of the block, designated as the crossing point of *x*- and *y*-axes, 'N1W1/N1W2/S1W1/S1W2', becomes the primary datum for the excavation (refer to Fig. 1 in Serrano Sánchez 2003:52). In the process of laying out the initial trenches in excavation areas 1–4, coordinate, orientation, and line are translated into stake, orientation, and string. In the movement between paperwork and trenchwork, in the movement between the 'abstract' and the 'concrete', roles shift, the coordinate lines are replaced by threads of cotton which orient and direct the articulation of excavation baulks. The former, by virtue of its materiality, is delegated the task of maintaining a Cartesian grid, *x*- and *y*-axes, and thereby locating the trench on a flat, 2-dimensional surface. The latter, *having taken on properties* of the former – orientation, linearity and, hence, translatability into two dimensions – comes to share the role of maintaining the grid among its many other tasks (the baulk will, for example, also contain a profile of stratigraphic relationships). While these cotton threads and baulks co-direct the movement of the excavators and implements, they are also a practical outcome of relations between varieties of entities. Outlines of the structures of 'Palacios A' and 'B' are uncovered, and these also have a say in how the excavation proceeds. At this point in the excavation, there is a complex network of

actants, of things and people, who all perform in the course of action. And when primary excavations are complete in 1994, something of the dirt walls of excavation trenches and areas, the outlines of prehispanic structures encountered at La Ventilla, and even the 'blank' areas of undisturbed grass and nopal cactus, transform into the lines of the La Ventilla barrio map, appended to the crisscrossed axes of the Millon map. A full cycle of translation, or a series of *shifting associations*, constitute the practice and result of archaeological research. Just as the qualities of the Millon map facilitated both the layout and transportation of features encountered in the La Ventilla excavations, these new lines of La Ventilla on the Millon map will continue to toil in future projects at Teotihuacan.[9]

Having the map will enable not only certain decisions (such as where to survey, where to excavate, where to predict subsoil deposits), but also will likely 'suggest' these possibilities. Indeed, our aim has been to distribute agency (and so the anthropocentric term 'agent') to include the capacity of nonhumans such as the map to 'persuade' and 'enable' a course of action. The map works like a cognitive and sensory prosthesis in the hands of a map user (literally 'mapwork' in Webmoor 2005, Witmore 2006b). In practice, in action (the pragmatic measure of knowledge, Webmoor 2007a), the many seemingly discreet entities – archaeologist and map; map, metal stakes and cotton thread; metal stakes, cotton thread and excavation trench – swap many properties, confounding the identification of a locus of exclusively human sovereignty[10].

Of course, it is all too easy to overemphasize these relations at the expense of others. Indeed, none of these articulations would have occurred in the first place without a host of other protagonists who lend their action to the excavation. Here, a deeper genealogy of this 'thing' (notice, we did not say a 'representation') would reveal a much more complex history full of various
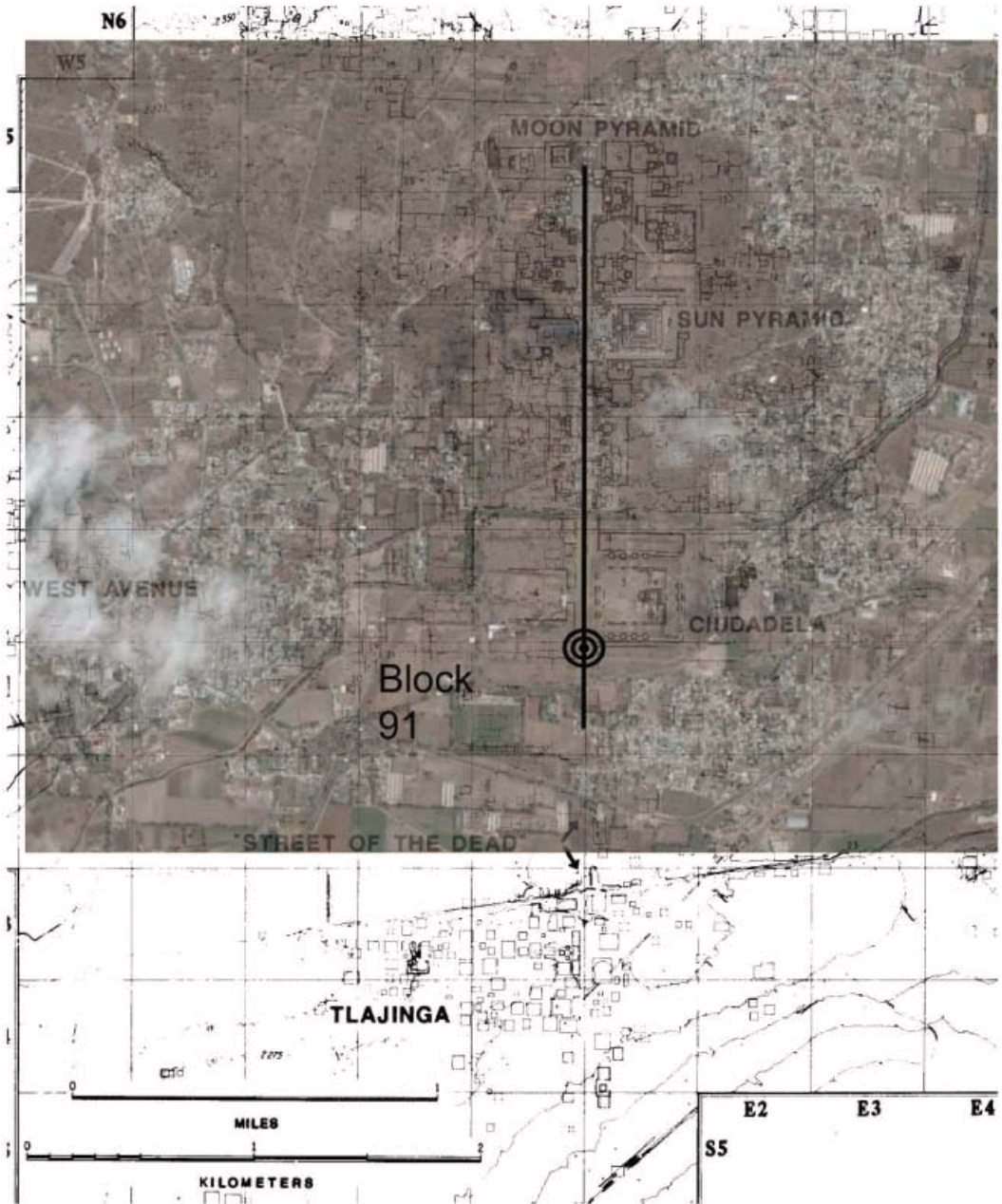
Fig. 1. *The 'Millon map' with satellite image of Teotihuacan (after Millon* et al. *1973). 'Teotihuacan North' (15° 25′ east of astronomical North) is at the top. The location of the surveying team's 'centre line' and 'zero point' are marked, along with their designation of 'block 91' ('S1W2'), where the principal La Ventilla excavations of 1992–1994 were located.*

contributing 'actants' (both humans and nonhumans) and their translated achievements (Witmore 2004). Early military and colonial history deploys a host of engineers, cartographers and personnel on the ground; this history reveals numerous governments, institutions and particular interests; all come together in producing mobile, compatible and optically consistent images of territory at different scales (Latour 1986, Witmore 2006b). But, if we dig deeper, it also entails a technological trajectory (of ever increasing precision relative to the things on the ground) moving between paper and compasses, to theodolites and survey stakes (and now to GIS software programs and on-line databases). This brings us to our notion of a thing.

What is a thing? To briefly address this question let us consider the pair of eyeglasses worn by one of our archaeologists at Teotihuacan (a usual and yet, in contrast to Meskell (2004a:1), very archaeological thing which connects us intimately with past eras!). Taking an etymological tack on the thing *as a gathering*, what, we may ask, is gathered together into a pair of eyeglasses? Glass: a material behind which there are many, many transactions between humans, silica, fire, ovens, and other things made of silica. These transactions have resulted in many innovations, both substantial and subtle, some forgotten, some repeated, which stretch over many continents (the Near East, Egypt, Europe, etc.) and which fluctuate throughout more than four millennia (Macfarlane and Martin 2002, Tait 1991). Aluminium: a metal, which is extracted from bauxite (an extremely difficult process in itself) and is manipulated by smelting (an activity behind which there is an even longer sociotechnical genealogy than that of glass). Optics: a body of mathematical calculations which is manifested in the curvature of the lens. From the geometry of Thales (an arbitrary starting point) to the optical tables of Hero of Alexandria and subsequently al-Haytham to the work of Kepler (Authier 1995), behind present day optics rest cascades of flat, two-dimensional inscriptions. Of course, these chains are, perhaps, standard European ones – we might also track such genealogies through, for example, Chinese glass and optics with the work of the astronomer Shen Kua (Zielinski 2006:84). Our point: all of these global elements, these materials, these components (and we could continue in a similar way with plastics and finishes or issues of design, comfort and strength), while not exclusive to our era, are nevertheless simultaneously present in a pair of glasses. They are gathered together because multiple transactions were made durable.[11] Events and engagements were transformed into things; things which possessed properties that allowed them to circulate beyond the context of their collective articulation.[12]

At this point, after this excessively brief and extremely partial sketch of what is gathered into a pair of eyeglasses, after our brief pragmatogony, we could say that people make glasses and glasses make people, but this too would grossly oversimplify this peculiar mixture.[13] In moving from the question of 'what is gathered into a thing' back to that of 'what are its associations', the eyeglasses too are a sensory prosthetic, they enhance, extend, orient, direct, mediate relations with the material world (Witmore 2006b). As a quasi-object, eyeglasses (or contacts) are required (for those who need them) to drive a car, fly a plane, navigate a freight ship, and so on. In this regard, they fulfil a contract; a contract that cannot be upheld by freestanding humans ('subjects' among 'subjects') alone – *this is a quasi-object*. Here Meskell and Preucel's assertion, along with so many other social archaeologists, that 'all awareness is mediated by our bodies' (p.10) would be perfectly fine, were it not for all the other mediators, the eyeglasses, the footwear, the clothing, the pavement, the maps, the ubiquitous 'information screen', and so on that also impact human experiences. It would be far better to say that 'awareness' is mediated

by our collective, distributed selves which are caught up in constantly shifting associations with other entities. Break or lose your eyeglasses, run survey transects or attempt to layout an excavation at Teotihuacan without the Millon map, and the importance of this distinction becomes much more apparent.

Our point here is twofold. First, achievements, which involved transactions between various entities and which occurred at a distance in space and linear time, are folded into things as utterly familiar as a map or as seemingly mundane as eyeglasses. In this way, things are packed with humans, materials, and even companion species (e.g. in the pragmatogony of eyeglasses, beasts of burden or wood transformed into charcoal). And second, these various entities come together in networks of association to *co-constitute 'society' – now better understood, as we have begun to shed our humanist bias, as a collective assemblage of diverse entities*.

CONCLUSIONS: ARCHAEOLOGY AND COMMON GROUNDS

If we trace the etymology of dialectics we will arrive at the Greek *dialektikos*. As a combination of *dialektos* and *techne*, this is the art of discussion. This is the art of debate. Back to discussion! Back to debate! For unless we as archaeologists wish to spiral into more fragmentation and incommensurability we must cut through such misunderstandings in relation to our common matters of concern – in this case, what it is to be human, how we have related to the world, and how we are to do so. At the same time we must be savvy, we must not confuse this art of discussion with a logic of bifurcation that has been imposed and presupposed.[14] Do we really wish to fall back into the wearisome alternation between two poles of thought in an effort to reach some temporary synthesis (the current one being that of fragmentation!) within a boringly repetitive cycle?[15] If not, then we need to separate the activities of clarification and

coming to an understanding, from the urge to contradict, debunk, disperse, deconstruct and discard. If we dig deep enough we uncover complex, constantly shifting, ceaselessly fluctuating, yet nonetheless, common grounds.

The alternative with social explanation is an important contribution to archaeology, but one that stacks the cards against any solution to pesky fragmentation by assuming the modernist divides it ostensibly wishes to overcome. Determined to make the social do all the work in the self-established impossible task of unifying what is distinct, the social bleeds itself dry. What is left is only the unctuous phrase: 'the social construction of _____' (insert any phenomenon) (cf. Hacking 1999). Whereby the social becomes a mysterious force behind the scenes that accounts for all and for nothing. The social itself is not explained. What is the social? 'It is everything.' 'It is a dialectic between subject and reality.' Unlike the 'everything is nature' forbears of post-processualism, the social is not investigated. It is simply assumed.

As 'humanity begins with things' (Serres with Latour 1995:166), archaeology is in a prime position, a third space (which is yet to be articulated) with regard to the humanities and sciences, to set innovative and cutting edge intellectual agendas. Undercutting such contradictions and bifurcations through dialectics begins with reconfiguring the key ingredients of the world on the ground in practice (Latour 2005:24–25; for archaeological examples of how we might do this refer to Shanks 2004; Witmore 2004, 2007b). These ingredients are not over-dramatized notions of 'temporality, spatiality, and materiality' (p.3) to which we are only granted access through an 'embodied', 'social' consciousness. Rather these ingredients are action/force ('agencies'), matter, space and time (Crease *et al.* 2003:16–19), and these should not be assembled in advance within any human-centered scaffolding. Modernist epistemologies are to be

set aside in order to accomplish the difficult task of cutting to 'ontological bedrock'; not as a retreat from difficult dilemmas, but because such problems are of our own making![16] The 'social' is one of the last and most ambitious attempts within modernist logic to solve the problems of its own making. Perhaps, in this way, we might feel compelled to rethink the need for the qualifying adjective of 'social' (which once served an important rhetorical purpose) as archaeology is packed with rich mixtures and diverse collectives of people, things and companion species – not to mention sophisticated fields of practice for engaging with them!

Ironically, through an inquiry into the associations which link collectives of humans and things in action, 'the enchantment of the social', and the impoverished logic of dialectics, may finally be explained – and dispelled.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

NOTES

[1] The 'social of enchantment' is rhetorically (and necessarily) obscure. Moreover, we do not wish for the social to be regarded as a direct substitution for technology as in Gell's title. The 'social', we contend, has become far more elusive.

[2] While we are aware of the long and complex history of this term in the 'humanities' at large, here we deploy 'humanism' in the classic sense as a suite of presuppositions that situate human beings in a special position in relation to the world of things (see note 10).

[3] While it very well may be the case that some, as Meskell claims, 'have easily been seduced by the magical potentials that objects are actors in the same way as individual persons, thus collapsing the subject:object dichotomy' (Meskell 2004a:3, b:249–250), for this to be the state of affairs is to fail to recognize this important distinction.

[4] 'Embodiment', a very dialectical term, is itself plagued by the very modernist divides it is heralded as surpassing (Joyce 2004, Meskell and Preucel 2004:15–16). This is because no matter where it goes it is forced to carry around with it the notion of a preceding separation that was once the problem in the little prefix 'em'. If only it did not seem so awkward and sound so ridiculous to drop the prefix in favor of 'bodiment'!

[5] First, while Latour is perhaps the most vocal, not to mention animate(d), there are many other philosophers and science studies practitioners whose work rises in defense of things and companion species including Geoffrey Bowker, Michel Callon, Donna Haraway, John Law, Michel Serres and Isabelle Stengers. Second, for Meskell to state that the positions of Latour and Marx are not so different, as she does in her article on 'Divine things' (2004b) is to fail to recognize the distinction as we have sketched it here.

[6] Even with *Reassembling the Social* (2005), Latour does not deploy as the subtext of a section heading in Part I, 'Objects too Have Agency', without thoroughly severing the concept of 'object' from 'a privilege given to 'objective' matter in opposition to 'subjective' language, symbols, values, or feeling' and, even then, he does so only after a long moratorium on the use of what had become a very polemical term (contrast Latour 2004:246 with 2005:76).

[7] It is here that we may locate Daniel Miller's take on Latour's work as one of 'transcendence' in relation to the 'simplistic duality of subjects and objects' (Miller 2005:10). Latour has never been an advocate of the rhetoric of dialectics to transcend, overcome, or resolve modernist dichotomies! While 'overcoming vulgarity' and appealing to 'common sense' is a brilliant rhetorical strategy and way to frame the debate,

common sense is not always the best guide and the high road is not always the best path!

[8] This point is of fundamental importance and as such it warrants repeated emphasis. Our conventional frames of reference subsume disorderly multiplicities. In dealing with the material world, we cannot treat such frames as the starting points of our analyses.

[9] How could social interests and values alone propel the development of technology to eventually enable the accurate mapping of the ancient city? Was it human intentionality all the way which directed technical developments and harnessed them for social interests? Or did rudimentary apparatuses already historically available (the navigator's compass for instance) lead 'individuals' to apply them in alternate manners more akin to a Bourdieu-like technical structure? The point of identifying an originary 'intention' which led to the eventual ability to map Teotihuacan seems pointless. The actual practice, on the other hand, of laying out an excavation and tying it back in to the Million map of Teotihuacan reveals a *mixed collective*: the archaeologist-with-map on the ground (Webmoor 2005, also refer to Gell 1985, Hutchins 1995).

[10] An autochthonous, purified 'individual', capable of Goodman's (1978) 'worldmaking' through conceptual relativity, comes rather late in the game with the modernist ideal of humanism – and then (especially then!) ever more mixed with modernity's technology (Latour 1993, and Haraway's (1991) proliferating 'cyborgs'). The appeal to liberate and make sovereign the individual, historically and socially particular as it is, has strong roots. These are the roots of humanism. As Richard Rorty (1998) tracks (and subscribed to) this obsession in modernity, we are determined to be beholden to no one and no thing: first liberation from an external God, then liberation from external things, so that we are not answerable to anything but each other in our pan-humanism. A look to environmental degradation should immediately rid us of such a human-centered myopia!

[11] Make no mistake, *durability* as it is deployed in this article is not a quality of the object-in-itself, but *is a property of the relations and in many instances arises through subsequent engagements by other collectives*.

[12] The durability of an aluminium ingot is not the same as the durability of a paper-based text. It cannot be overstated: the latter requires subsequent relations to maintain and it is made more durable through its multiplication.

[13] This genealogical sketch of the eyeglasses is best described as a 'pragmatogony'. A compound of the Greek word for materials, *pragmata*, and the word for creation, *gonos*, pragmatogonies result when we accentuate the paths which lead to a particular thing, when we map a particular gathering (refer to Latour 1994; Witmore 2007a).

[14] For Nietzsche's efforts to revitalize a non-Socratic, agonistic model of dialectics as free play refer to Deleuze 1983.

[15] The latest developing bifurcation being that of materiality and immateriality (see Buchli 2004)!

[16] An analogous therapeutic recognition of 'philosophical error' in an entire framework for thinking in philosophy of science was made by Wittgenstein (1963:109, 133) at the moment of Analytic Philosophy's almost-coronation as the oracle of the sciences. But support for such a contentious advocacy of suspending epistemology comes both from those looking to ontologies, and from the deep tradition in pragmatic thought of identifying the 'spinning wheels' of epistemology itself.

REFERENCES

Authier, M. 1995. Refraction and Cartesian 'forgetfulness'. In Serres, M. (ed.). *A History of Scientific Thought*, pp. 315–343. Blackwell Publishers, Oxford.

Binford, L. 1962. Archaeology as anthropology. *American Antiquity 28*, 217–225.

Buchli, V. 2004. Material Culture: current problems. In Meskell, L. & Robert, P. (eds.). *A Companion to Social Archaeology*, pp. 179–194. Blackwell Publishers, Oxford.

Childe, G. 1949. *Social Worlds of Knowledge*. Oxford University Press, London.

Clark, G. 1939. *Archaeology and Society*. Methuen, London.

Crease, R., Ihde, D., Jensen, C.B. & Selinger, E. 2003. Interview with Bruno Latour. In Ihde, D. & Selinger, E. (eds.). *Chasing Technoscience: Matrix for Materiality*, pp. 15–26. Indiana University Press, Bloomington, IN.

Deleuze, G. 1983. *Nietzsche and Philosophy*. Columbia University Press, New York.

Deleuze, G. 1993. *The Fold. Leibniz and the Baroque*. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, MN.

Gell, A. 1985. How to read a map: remarks on the practical logic of navigation. *Man 20*, 271–286.

Gell, A. 1992. The technology of enchantment and the enchantment of technology. In Coote, J. & Shelton, A. (eds.). *Anthropology, Art and Aesthetics*, pp. 40–66. Clarendon Press, Oxford.

Gómez Chávez, S. 2000. *La Ventilla, Un Barrio de la Antigua Ciudad de Teotihuacan. Exploraciones y Resultados*. Tesis de licenciatura, ENAH, México.

González-Ruibal, A. 2006. The dream of reason. An archaeology of the failures of modernity in Ethiopia. *Journal of Social Archaeology 6(2)*, 175–201.

Goodman, N. 1978. *Ways of Worldmaking*. Hackett, New York.

Hacking, I. 1999. *The Social Construction of What?* Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.

Haraway, D. 1991. *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. Routledge, New York.

Harman, G. 2005. Heidegger on objects and things. In Latour, B. & Weibel, P. (eds.). *Making Things Public. Atmospheres of Democracy*, pp. 268–271. The MIT Press, Cambridge, MA.

Hawkes, C.F.C. 1954. Archaeological method and theory: some suggestions from the Old World. *American Antiquity 56*, 155–168.

Hodder, I. 1982. Theoretical archaeology: a reactionary view. In Hodder, I. (ed.). *Symbolic and Structural Archaeology*, pp. 1–16. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Hodder, I. 1999. *The Archaeological Process. An Introduction*. Blackwell Publishers, Oxford.

Hodder, I. 2004. The 'social' in archaeological theory. An historical and contemporary perspective. In Meskell, L. & Preucel, R.W. (eds.). *A Companion to Social Archaeology*, pp. 23–42. Blackwell Publishers, Oxford.

Hutchins, E. 1995. *Cognition in the Wild*. MIT Press, Cambridge, MA.

Ingold, T. 2007. Materials against materiality. *Archaeological Dialogues 14(1)*, 1–16.

Joyce, R. 2004. Embodied subjectivity. Gender, femininity, masculinity, sexuality. In Meskell, L. & Preucel, R.W. (eds.). *A Companion to Social Archaeology*, pp. 82–95. Blackwell Publishers, Oxford.

Knappett, C. 2005. *Thinking through Material Culture. An Interdisciplinary Perspective*. University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, PA.

Latour, B. 1986. Visualization and cognition: thinking with eyes and hands. In Kuklick, H. & Long, E. (eds.). *Knowledge and Society: Studies in the Sociology of Culture Past and Present*. Volume 6, pp. 1–40. JAI Press, Greenwich, CT.

Latour, B. 1993. *We Have Never Been Modern*, (tr. C. Porter). Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.

Latour, B. 1994. Pragmatogonies. *American Behavioral Scientist 37(6)*, 791–808.

Latour, B. 1999. *Pandora's Hope. Essays on the Reality of Science Studies*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.

Latour, B. 2003. The promises of constructivism. In Ihde, D. & Selinger, E. (eds.). *Chasing Technoscience: Matrix for Materiality*, pp. 27–46. Indiana University Press, Indianapolis, IN.

Latour, B. 2004. *The Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.

Latour, B. 2005. *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Macfarlane, A. & Martin, G. 2002. *Glass: A World History*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL.

Malafouris, L. 2004. The cognitive basis of material engagement. Where brain, body and culture conflate. In DeMarrais, E., Gosden, C. & Renfrew, C. (eds.). *Rethinking Materiality: The Engagement of Mind with the Material World*, pp. 53–62. MacDonald Institute Monographs, Cambridge, UK.

Meskell, L. 2004a. *Object Worlds in Ancient Egypt. Material Biographies Past and Present*. BERG Publishers, Oxford.

Meskell, L. 2004b. Divine things. In DeMarrais, E., Gosden, C. & Renfrew, C. (eds.). *Rethinking Materiality: The Engagement of Mind with the Material World*, pp. 249–259. MacDonald Institute Monographs, Cambridge, UK.

Meskell, L. 2005. Introduction. Object orientations. In Meskell, L. (ed.). *Archaeologies of Materiality*, pp. 1–17. Blackwell Publishing, Oxford.

Meskell, L. & Preucel, R. (eds.). 2004. *A Companion to Social Archaeology*. Blackwell Publishers, Oxford.

Miller, D. 2005. Introduction. In Miller, D. (ed.). *Materiality*, pp. 1–50. Duke University Press, Durham, NC.

Millon, R. 1964. The Teotihuacán Mapping Project. *AMANT 29(3)*, 345–352.

Millon, R., Drewitt, B. & Cowgill, G. 1973. *Urbanization at Teotihuacán, Mexico: The Teotihuacán Map*. volume 1, parts 1–2, University of Texas Press, Austin, TX.

Olsen, B. 2003. Material culture after text: Remembering things. *Norwegian Archaeological Review 36*, 87–104.

Olsen, B. 2007. Genealogías de la asimetría. Por qué nos hemos olvidado de las cosas. In González-Ruibal, A. (ed.). Arqueología Simétrica. Un Giro Teorico sin Revolucion Paradigmática, *Complutum 18*, 287–291.

Renfrew, C. 1973. *Social Archaeology*. Camelot Press, University of Southampton, Southampton, UK.

Robb, J. 2004. The extended artifact and the monumental economy. A methodology for material agency. In DeMarrais, E., Gosden, C. & Renfrew, C. (eds.). 2004, *Rethinking Materiality: The Engagement of Mind with the Material World*, pp. 131–139. MacDonald Institute Monographs, Cambridge, UK.

Rorty, R. 1998. Pragmatism as romantic polytheism. In Dickstein, M. (ed.). *The Revival of Pragmatism: New Essays on Social Thought, Law, and Culture*, pp. 21–36. Duke University Press, Durham, NC.

Serrano Sánchez, C. 2003 (coord.). *Contextos Arqueológicos y Osteológicos del Barrio de La Ventilla*. Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, México City.

Serres, M. 1968. *Le System de Leibniz et ses Modèles Mathématiques*. 2 Volumes, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris.

Serres, M. 1972. *Hermès. L'Interférence*. Volume II, Minuit, Paris.

Serres, M. 1982. *The Parasite*. The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, MD.

Serres, M. 1995. *Genesis*. The University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, MI.

Serres, M. & with Latour, B. 1995. *Conversations on Science, Culture, and Time*. The University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, MI.

Shanks, M. 1998. The life of an artifact. *Fennoscandia Archeologica 15*, 15–42.

Shanks, M. 2004. Three rooms. *Journal of Social Archaeology 4(2)*, 147–180.

Shanks, M. & Tilley, C. 1987a. *Reconstructing Archaeology: Theory and Practice*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK.

Shanks, M. & Tilley, C. 1987b. *Social Theory and Archaeology*. University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Shanks, M. & Tilley, C. 1992. *Reconstructing Archaeology: Theory and Practice.* 2nd edn. Routledge, London, UK.

Tait, H. (ed.). 1991. *Five Thousand Years of Glass*. British Museum Press, London.

Van Reybrouck, D. & Jacobs, D. 2006. The mutual constitution of natural and social identities during archaeological fieldwork. In Edgeworth, M. (ed.). *Ethnographies of Archaeological Practice: Cultural Encounters, Material Transformations*, pp. 33–44. AltaMira Press, Lanham, MD.

Webmoor, T. 2005. Mediational techniques and conceptual frameworks in archaeology: a model in mapwork at Teotihuacan, Mexico. *Journal of Social Archaeology 5(1)*, 52–84.

Webmoor, T. 2007a. The dilemma of contact: archaeology's ethics-epistemology crisis and the recovery of the pragmatic sensibility. *Stanford Journal of Archaeology 5*, 224–246.

Webmoor, T. 2007b. Un giro más tras el 'giro social'. El principio de la simetría en arqueología. In González-Ruibal, A. (ed.). Arqueología Simétrica. Un Giro Teorico sin Revolucion Paradigmática, *Complutum 18*, 296–304.

Webmoor, T. 2007c (in press). Taking Yahoos! seriously. New media and the platform shift in cultural heritage. *Visual Anthropology Review 23(2)*.

Webmoor, T. 2007d. What about 'one more turn after the social' in archaeological reasoning? Taking things seriously. *World Archaeology 39(4)*, 547–562.

Webmoor, T. & Witmore, C. 2004. Symmetrical Archaeology. Stanford: Metamedia, Stanford University. Available online at: http://humanitieslab.stanford.edu/Symmetry/Home (accessed 20 September 2006).

Whitehead, A.N. 1978 (1929). *Process and Reality. An Essay in Cosmology*. The Free Press, New York.

Witmore, C.L. 2004. On Multiple Fields. Between the Material World and Media: Two Cases

from the Peloponnesus, Greece. *Archaeological Dialogues 11(2)*, 133–164.

Witmore, C.L. 2006a. *Archaeology and Modernity*, or archaeology and a modernist amnesia? *Norwegian Archaeology Review 39(1)*, 49–52.

Witmore, C.L. 2006b. Vision, media, noise and the percolation of time: Symmetrical approaches to the mediation of the material world. *Journal of Material Culture 11(3)*, 267–292.

Witmore, C.L. 2007a. Arqueología simétrica: Un manifiesto breve. In González-Ruibal, A. (ed.). Arqueología Simétrica. Un Giro Teorico sin Revolucion Paradigmática, *Complutum 18*, 305–313.

Witmore, C.L. 2007b. Landscape, time, topology: An archaeological account of the Southern Argolid Greece. In Hicks, D., Fairclough, G. & McAtackney, L. (eds.). *Envisioning Landscape. Situations and Standpoints in Archaeology and Heritage*, pp. 194–225. Left Coast Press, Walnut Creek, CA.

Wittgenstein, L. 1963. *Philosophical Investigations*. Blackwell Publishers, Oxford.

Wylie, A. 2002. *Thinking from Things. Essays in the Philosophy of Archaeology*. University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles.

Zielinski, S. 2006. *Deep Time of the Media: Toward an archaeology of hearing and seeing by technical means*. MIT Press, Cambridge, MA.

Editor's note

This paper was written as a comment on *A Companion to Social Archaeology* (2004) edited by Lynn Meskell and Robert Preucel. The Editors find that both this book and Timothy Webmoor and Christopher L. Witmore's discursive commentary focus on interesting and fundamental issues of importance to archaeological theory. Our original plan was, therefore, to publish the paper in our *Discussion* section along with a 'Reply to Comment' from Meskell and Preucel.

Unfortunately, Meskell and Preucel were not able to respond to our request for a counter comment. The editors, however, finding the paper by Webmoor and Witmore of interest in its own right, decided to publish it as a stand-alone contribution without a reply from Meskell and Preucel. We also decided not to invite other scholars to this discussion. Discussions are a matter of symmetry – comments on comments without a close reference to the original statement (the book) are likely to result in quasi debates, and we saw no merit in encouraging this. If, however, our readers are inspired or feel provoked to formulate other opinions on the volume *A Companion to Social Archaeology* and/or the paper 'Things are us! A commentary on human/things relations under the banner of a "social" archaeology', they are certainly welcome.