

that a given assemblage is a type fossil which is produced as a determined response to a given climatic stimulus. The archaeological record represents the use of a set of cultural materials in a strategic adaptive behaviour, and what is evidenced at each particular site is the technology required to carry out a particular set of activities under a given set of conditions:

I do not wish to imply that there is a causal relationship between the form of the environment and the form of the assemblage, only that the utility of a given location for particular forms of human use is modified with changes in the environment.

(Binford 1973: 232)

'CERAMIC SOCIOLOGY': DEETZ, HILL, LONGACRE

The same optimism which characterized studies of prehistoric social structure based on mortuary analysis can be seen in a group of papers published in the 1960s which made use of stylistic variation in ceramics as a means of addressing patterns of residence and descent (Deetz 1968; Hill 1970, 1972; Longacre 1964). All were concerned with pueblo settlements (large, conglomerate residential structures in the American Southwest: Fig. 11.5), and all were attempting to substantiate whether currently extant patterns of social structure had prehistoric antecedents. The arguments began with the observation that, in modern-day pueblo society, the skills of pottery manufacture and decoration are passed from mother to daughter (Hill 1970: 37). These communities are matrilineal; that is, husbands at marriage go to live in the family home of their new wife. It follows, then, that microtraditions of potting style build up in the individual matrilineages (Deetz 1968: 45). Using data from the excavated pueblo at the Carter Ranch Site, Longacre set out to test the hypothesis that a similar pattern of residence and descent existed during the life of the site, in the period AD 1100–1250. If it were the case that matrilocality and matrilineality existed in the past, it might be expected that particular stylistic elements on pots would be localized in specific areas of the site. For the prediction to hold true, it would be necessary that then, as now, potting had been an exclusively female activity. Moreover, the pottery analysis would have to be compared with a series of non-female associated artefacts, which should not demonstrate the same localized patterning of stylistic traits (Hill 1970: 38). If spatial variation was demonstrable over the site, it would still have to be shown that the spatial units so defined were functionally equivalent, rather than representing different activity areas, in which characteristic forms of pottery might easily be employed.

At the Carter Ranch, 175 design elements of pottery were found to have a non-random distribution across the site. Moreover, particular design elements appeared to cluster in contiguous groups of rooms. The results of the investigation of design

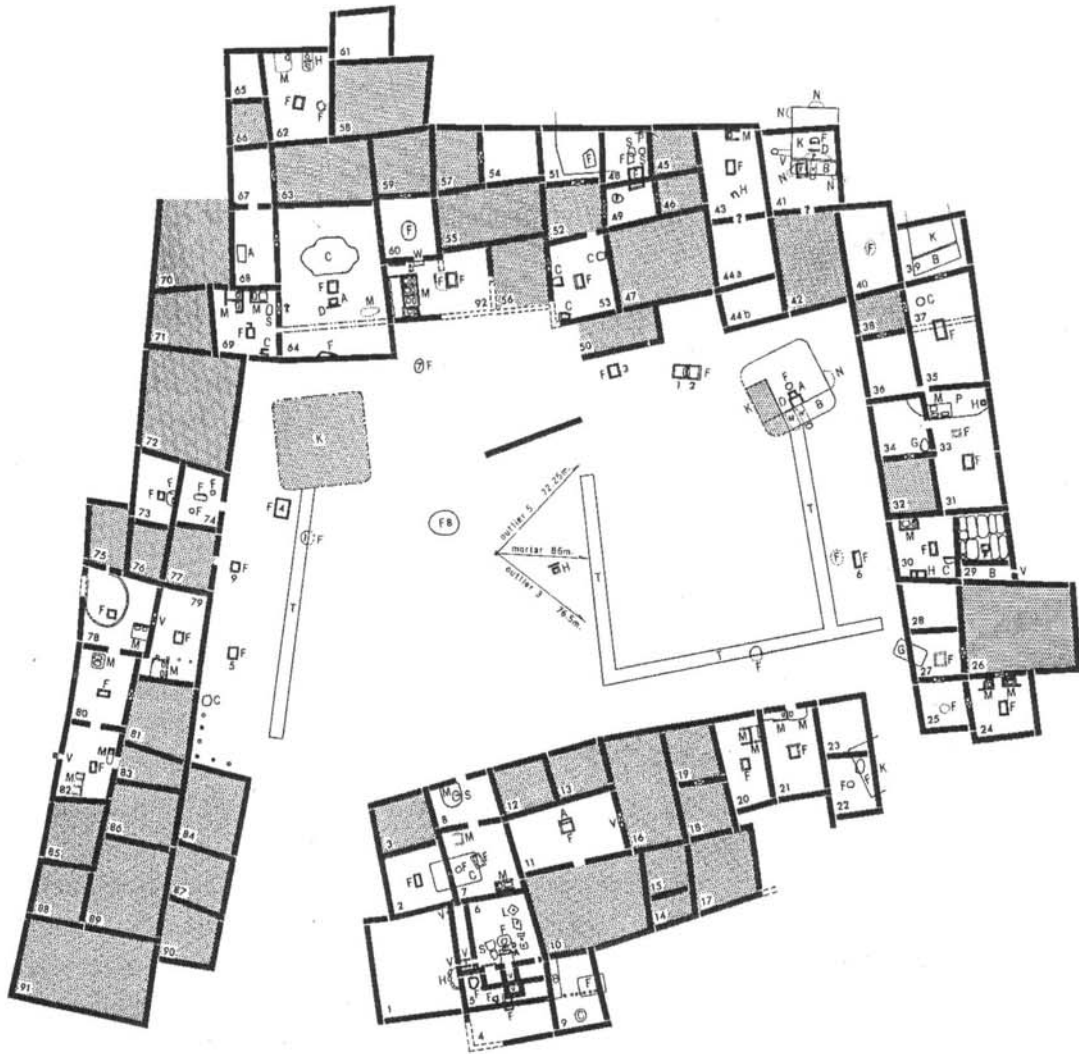


Figure 11.5 Plan of Broken K Pueblo, east-central Arizona. Reproduced with permission of The Field Museum of Natural History, Neg#A99799, Chicago.

structure were then subjected to a multiple regression analysis, which in turn suggested that three major groupings of rooms could be distinguished on stylistic criteria. Each of these groups was associated with a particular *kiva*, or ritual structure, and ceramics recovered in the cemetery associated with the settlement could be linked with the individual groups (Longacre 1964: 1455). The results thus appeared to be consistent with the model of developing microtraditions of style in potting, each associated with a particular matrilineage. While the Deetz/Longacre/Hill model was originally developed at the microspatial scale, later applications considered its implications at the inter-community level: using very much the same kinds of decorative and other stylistic traits, the attempt was made to

measure the degree of similarity between different sites, based upon the supposition that the degree of similarity is a direct product of the intensity of interaction between communities (Plog 1978).

On more sober reflection, some of the enthusiasm for 'ceramic sociology' in the 1960s came to be thought of as misplaced. While the analyses were framed as testable hypotheses in true positivist style, many of the law-like statements thereby generated rested upon a complex series of assumptions. In consequence, while the outcome of the empirical test on the evidence might be favourable, an enormous problem of 'equivinality' remained: that is to say, so much had to be assumed before the analysis could proceed that the results might be generated by a number of different processes which were not accounted for in the hypothesis. Some of the complexities of these processes began to emerge as time went on. For instance, it was evident that across the present-day Southwest neither kinship systems nor the mechanisms by which the skills of potting were passed on were as standardized as had been assumed (Stanislawski 1973). Similarly, there was considerable evidence that pottery had been exchanged over large distances, and while this might constitute interaction it certainly would not result in the clear-cut stylistic consequences of intermarriage between communities. Finally, as Plog (1978) points out, the whole approach was somewhat innocent of the processes by which the archaeological record is formed. There is no guarantee, for instance, that pots will enter the archaeological context in the same spatial location in which they were either made or used, and a distinction needs to be made between those vessels recovered in circumstances which suggest use within a particular room and more generalized demolition spreads. But beyond these procedural and empirical concerns it can also be objected that such an approach to artefact style neglected both the social processes which lay behind the production of material culture and the specificity of the cultural context, in the desire to erect global generalizations concerning stylistic behaviour (Shanks and Tilley 1987: 89).

STYLE, INFORMATION AND IDENTITY: SACKETT AND WIESSNER

Binford's original discussion of a systemic approach to material culture had left the issue of style somewhat open. Technomic, ideotechnic and sociotechnic artefacts all had primary attributes which distinctively engaged them in a particular sphere of practice. However, there were particular formal characteristics of artefacts which existed over and beyond that which could be related directly to variability in the technological or social sub-systems, or in the nature of raw materials (Binford 1962: 219).

These formal qualities are believed to have their primary functional context in providing a symbolically diverse yet pervasive artefactual environment promoting group solidarity

and serving as a basis for group awareness and identity. This pansystemic set of symbols is the milieu of enculturation and a basis for the recognition of social distinctiveness.
(Binford 1962: 219)

Binford's conception of style at this stage was one which presented it as that element of culture which is left over as a residue, once its prime adaptive significance has been exhausted. As the Deetz/Hill/Longacre argument demonstrates, this leaves some degree of uncertainty regarding the mechanisms through which style operates. At what level does style guarantee group affiliation?

One answer to this problem is provided by Wobst (1977), who suggests that style, rather than being a necessarily integrative mechanism, functions as a means of transmitting information. The character of the message transmitted, and the medium through which it is expressed, will depend upon the social distance between the sender and their target population. Thus any or all items of material culture may contain coded messages in the form of stylistic variation, yet different aspects of the total cultural repertoire will be active in different forms and levels of social interaction. Moreover, it will generally be the case that, within any definable social unit, common encoding and decoding strategies will exist, and that common responses will be elicited by given stylistic elements (Conkey 1978: 64). Wobst's and Conkey's arguments open the way for a broader discussion of the ways in which style can operate at different levels and in different contexts. Such a discussion can be found in the ongoing exchange between James Sackett and Polly Wiessner.

Interestingly, the debate has its origins with the question of Mousterian variability. Reviewing the issues which had been drawn out of the Binford/Bordes dialogue, Sackett (1973: 320) sought to clarify issues by drawing a distinction between the *functional mode* and the *stylistic mode* of a given artefact. These refer to the respective roles of the artefact in technical operation and as an indicator of cultural tradition. The stylistic mode will potentially be present in all archaeologically recovered artefacts, since it is highly likely that something which could fulfil the same function could be made in a different way. Stylistic variation thus exists between artefacts which are 'equal in use', or as he later termed it, 'isochrestic' (Sackett 1986: 268). The particular stylistic variation which the artefact will assume is determined by a given historical and cultural setting, such that objects will tend to fit into traditions of manufacture. 'Thus any statement which concerns the manner in which artefact variability is symptomatic of tradition is by definition a stylistic statement' (Sackett 1973: 321). These traditions of isochrestic variation are not generated in any conscious way, but are the consequence of picking up the techniques of manufacture for an artefact in a particular context. While people may be perfectly able to identify the workmanship of another community, this may not be through distinct features which they could easily verbalize. On the contrary, the bulk of the information which we can potentially use to detect ethnic groups in the archaeological record is not so much actively encoded as inculcated (Sackett

1986: 268). The element of stylistic variability which Sackett calls 'iconic', which knowingly symbolizes and asserts group identity, he considers to be extremely rare.

It is with this last part of Sackett's argument that Wiessner takes issue. In a way which is closer to the arguments of Wobst and Conkey, she argues that agents can actively manipulate the signifying capacity of material culture in such a way as to elicit a desired response from a defined audience (Wiessner 1984: 193). In particular, style is seen as a means by which the relationship between the person and society may be mediated (Wiessner 1989: 59). Stylistic variability is thus taken to be representative of a universal human cognitive process – that of social identification through comparison: 'style is one of several means of communication through which people negotiate their personal identity *vis-à-vis* others' (Wiessner 1989: 57). Accordingly, archaeologists might conceivably make use of style as a means of monitoring changes in the relationship between individual and society across time. Using her ethnoarchaeological studies of the Kalahari San, Wiessner argued further that different forms of stylistic behaviour could be defined, which have different aims. Where stylistic attributes refer primarily to the self, and are used by the individual as a means of articulating personal identity within the community, style is being used 'assertively'. This, claims Wiessner, is the case with the bead headbands worn by San women (1984: 193). On the other hand, where stylistic variation is used as a means of signalling group or ethnic affiliation, one is dealing with 'emblemic' style. Wiessner's example of emblemic style is the projectile points of the San which, while small, are widely exchanged, such that persons will be very aware of the origin of a projectile within a particular community (Wiessner 1983).

While Sackett and Wiessner appear on the surface to be arguing from irreconcilable points of view, at another level of generality their positions are not so far different. Both appear to accept a distinction between stylistic traits which are invested in material items in an unconsidered manner, simply because this is 'the way of doing things', and a more active encoding of messages. Their argument is really one concerning human nature, and the extent to which people routinely conceptualize and account for their actions.

FROM FUNCTIONALISM TO STRUCTURALISM: HODDER

Suppose we have a virilocal residence situation in which the women who are 'marrying in' alter their pottery-making and other styles to conform to those of their mothers-in-law and sisters-in-law! The question is, will a woman in this situation abandon the kinds of style elements she learned in her natal household and adopt new ones to conform to those of her new household?

(Hill 1970: 41)

So, whatever a woman may feel she really is, she can outwardly express different identities, and there is rarely any ambiguity about which identity she is overtly expressing at any one time.

(Hodder 1982a: 21)

In Britain, the decisive move away from organic and functionalist models of culture arose from the vacuum left behind by the demise of the 'culture concept'. Neither Clarke's purely 'archaeological' reformulation of culture systems, nor the agenda concerned with stylistic interaction and information exchange, appeared able to account satisfactorily for the entities which formed the backbone of European prehistory. The rootedness of archaeological thought in a notion of geographical areas characterized by co-variant material culture traits rebelled against these formalizations, yet a return to a normative conception of culture was impossible. The sense of unease which this situation produced is well captured in Ian Hodder's 1978 collection of essays, *The Spatial Organisation of Culture* (Hodder 1978a). The volume contained articles qualifying or expressing grave doubts concerning both the traditional archaeological culture (Shennan 1978) and the Deetz/Hill/Longacre model of stylistic learning mechanisms (Stanislawski and Stanislawski 1978). Perhaps most interesting of all are Hodder's own contributions, which review 'simple correlations between material culture and society', concluding that some material traits form bounded spatial entities equivalent to the Childean culture, but that others do not. Compounding this uncertainty was the observation by Hodder and Orton (1976) that 'random association groups' of traits might produce entirely arbitrary 'cultures' of no empirical validity whatsoever. Hodder's initial response to this state of affairs was to invoke a closer scrutiny of the social processes which lie behind the distribution and mutual association of artefact types. The first results were speculative rather than conclusive (Hodder 1978b).

It was this concern for the status of the material culture as a heuristic entity which led Hodder to undertake a series of ethnoarchaeological studies in East Africa, eventually reported as *Symbols in Action* (Hodder 1982a). The most sustained example within the book concerns the Pokot, Njemps and Tugen tribes of the Lake Baringo area of Kenya. Questionnaire survey and itineraries of artefacts within hut compounds demonstrated both that the three groups were very aware of their separate identities (Fig. 11.6), and that various types of item showed quite abrupt breaks of distribution at tribal borders (Fig. 11.7). Identification with the tribe was clearly demonstrated in dress, and in particular in the wearing of pendant ear decoration by the women. Particular kinds of pottery, wooden stools, and even the positions of hearths within huts, were also specific to particular tribes. Moreover, verbal testimony made it clear that these preferences were not merely the consequence of unconsidered action, but that these items were perceived as bound up with tribal identity.

The recognition that the maintenance of these boundaries was most marked in

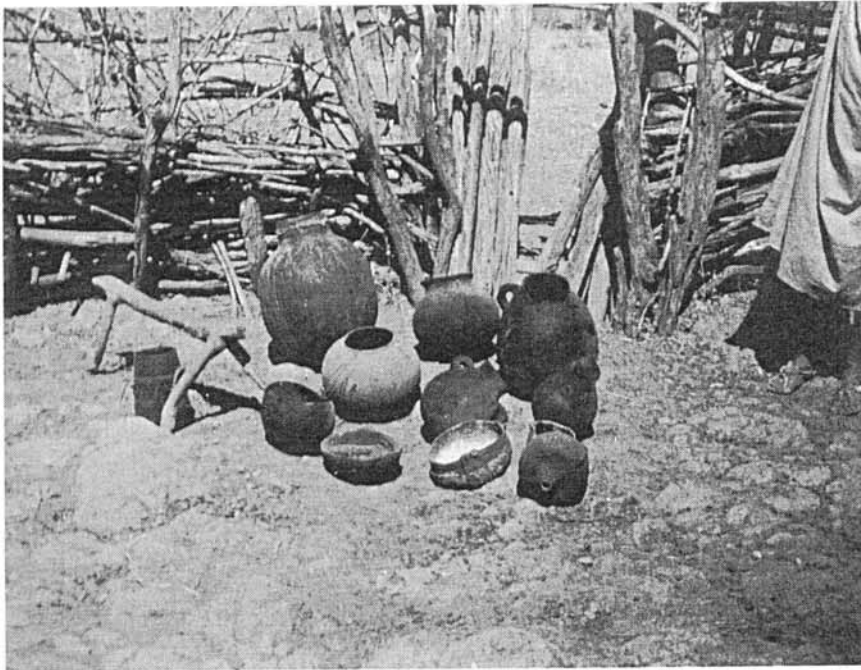


Figure 11.6 Artefacts from a Tugen compound, as recorded in Hodder's survey of material culture in the Lake Baringo area. Source: Hodder 1982.

locations where there was a particular stress on material resources led Hodder to formulate an initial interpretation of these phenomena in processual and adaptive terms (Hodder 1979). Thus boundary maintenance through material expression might be linked in a lawlike manner to the severity of resource competition. The rejection of this relatively formal and generalized explanation appears to have emerged from a combination of attention to the detail of the study material and a developing critique of functionalist models of culture. This latter Hodder (1981, 1982b) clearly saw as the prerequisite for the emergence of a mature social archaeology. Hodder advocated the adoption of a quasi-structuralist notion of deep structure, covering the rules and codes which underlie the surface phenomena of social life or of archaeological evidence (Hodder 1982b: 7). None the less, he recognized the lack of a concern with agency within structuralism, and derived from Giddens (1979) the understanding that active human agents transform generative cultural structures through their social practice (Hodder 1982b: 8).

In the light of these considerations, a more complex and context-specific account of boundary maintenance was possible. One significant factor was the comparative ease with which persons could move from one tribal area to another, adopting the dress and material culture of the local group and thereby becoming affiliated to that identity. Clearly, what was taking place was quite distinct from the culture-historic view that material culture passively reflected the accepted norms of a

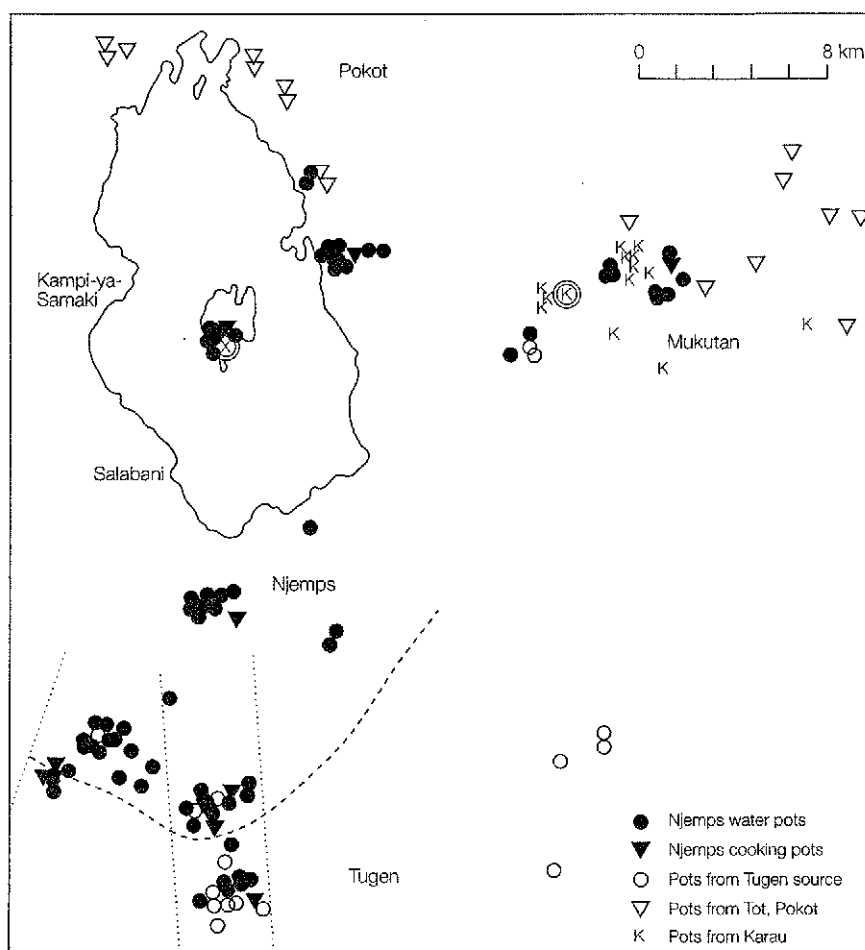


Figure 11.7 Distribution of pottery types in the Lake Baringo area; double circles enclose the potters at Karau (K) and Kokwa (X). Source: Hodder 1982.

society. In the Baringo area, people were quite aware of the potential of things outwardly to express particular identities, irrespective of whatever ethnic group they might feel themselves to belong to (Hodder 1982a: 21). The explanation offered for these phenomena still concerned conflict and competition for resources, but the particular mechanisms involved were contingent ones. The positive adoption of the material trappings of an ethnic identity allowed people to be recognized as eligible for the support and protection of the *moran*, or young spear-carrying men, of a particular tribe. This support was at more of a premium in areas where disputes over property were most likely to occur, and hence it would be in these areas that group identity would be most unambiguous (Hodder 1982a: 31). That this process was not limited to the unconsidered action of making particular objects in particular ways is evident from the marked preferences which particular tribal groups showed for types of items acquired from a distance. Stools and pots of

particular patterns, although made by persons from different ethnic groups, were none the less held to symbolize particular attributes of affiliation to a given identity (Hodder 1982a: 54).

Another point at which the Baringo material challenged both normative and functionalist models of culture was found in the way that not all traits conformed to tribal boundaries in their distribution: these were not simply neutral or null traits without symbolic significance; on the contrary, they demonstrated that cultural entities could not be considered as undivided totalities. Two particular cases are of note. First, the *moran* in each tribe use spears which are quite similar in general style (Hodder 1982a: 65). The spear is not necessarily the most effective weapon either for hunting or for warfare, and at marriage it is replaced as a ubiquitous male item by a carved stick. Spears and sticks respectively are symbols of young and elder male status or identity, carrying connotations of sexual prowess or of the prerogative to speak in public. Since the spear symbolism works at a tangent to group affiliation, its variability is not distributed spatially in the same way. Indeed, the way in which the *moran* of the Tugen and the Njemps carry similar spears refers in an implicit and non-verbal way to a degree of solidarity between all young men, who consider themselves collectively to be exploited by the elders. The symbolism of spears is thus a means of expressing a degree of resistance against this state of affairs. In the same way, the calabashes which women use as containers for milk provide 'a medium for silent discourse between women' (Hodder 1982a: 69). In areas like the decoration of pottery and their own dress, Njemps and Tugen women conform closely to norms which have been set for them by a male-dominated society. Calabashes, however, represent a field for decorative traits controlled and executed entirely by women: they both comment on and express covert resistance against that society by referencing ties of birth and marriage which extend beyond ethnic borders.

Symbols in Action provided the stimulus for a rethinking of the archaeological understanding of culture, since its evidence would not accord with the precepts of either traditional culture history or the Binfordian model of culture as adaptive strategy. Most significantly, it killed off any lingering impression that a fixed relationship could obtain between social form and material expression. Rather, people knowledgeably constructed identities for themselves using material culture as a medium. Culture was not a superorganic intelligence, working 'behind the backs' of people to enable the adaptation of the group, but a set of affordances passed down by past generations with which people worked. Since these affordances were at any given point the result of a particular trajectory of development, and since they provided the context for human actions which could change the cultural heritage to be passed on to the next generation, the approach came to stress historicity. From a generalizing and law-seeking functionalism, archaeology had moved at a stroke to a (broadly) post-structuralist historical particularism.

POST-STRUCTURALIST AND HERMENEUTIC VIEWS OF CULTURE

What had effectively emerged by the middle of the 1980s was a conflict over the way in which the archaeological record was to be conceptualized. As Patrik (1985) indicates, processual archaeology had represented archaeological materials as being the equivalent of a fossil record, a physical imprint of past patterns of behaviour. By contrast, the emerging tradition of symbolic and structural archaeologies had come to think of material traces as encoded with meaning, and as part of the symbolic construction of personal and group identity. In consequence, the archaeological record was conceived of as being something like a text. Increasingly, the implications of this point of view began to be worked through, and a series of sources within the literary humanities started to be drawn upon in order to enrich the study of material culture. It is important to point out that these approaches were by no means homogeneous, and could lead in very different directions. In particular, we might point to the distinct influences which were exerted by post-structuralism and hermeneutics, and the resulting rather different ways in which the use of culture by human beings was considered.

Hermeneutic approaches stress the way in which meaning is unfolded out of a text through a gradual process of interpretation, and have a lineage which stretches back through German historiography and biblical exegesis. It is central to the hermeneutic standpoint that symbols require interpretation: the reader actively produces a meaning from a text by engaging with it in an act of reading (Moore 1990; Warnke 1987). It is not the case that one simply extracts a meaning which is locked within a text: the reader actively constructs an interpretation for himself/herself (Outhwaite 1985). There is consequently no guarantee that the reader's meaning will correspond with that which was intended by the author. The text escapes the author, and things can be read into it which he or she never intended. The attempt to understand what the author intended in writing cannot come from the text alone, but from a 'fusion of horizons', a recognition of the author's context and attitude (Gadamer 1975). Even then, the interpretation can scarcely correspond entirely with the author's meaning, and interpretation comes to be seen as an endless work of refinement and checking: the 'hermeneutic circle'. Ricoeur (1981) has suggested that the distinguishing feature of a text is that it takes discourse and fixes it, giving it a stable form which can be interrogated in the absence of the author. None the less, he also indicates that the methodology of text-interpretation can be applied in a wider variety of contexts within the human sciences, where purposeful human action is regarded as the equivalent of a text. The potential of this proposition was perhaps demonstrated most strikingly by Moore in her study of the contemporary Marakwet of Kenya (1986). Moore presents a picture in which human existence can be compared to a continuous process of reading and writing, where bodily movement through culturally encoded spaces both draws on and

recreates their meaning, a meaning which is nevertheless created by the agent and which as a result may vary from person to person.

It was a not dissimilar notion of culture as text which Hodder adopted in the mid-1980s and combined with a stress on the active human subject in order to develop a post-processual, contextual archaeology (Hodder 1985, 1986). If the meaning of material culture was not fixed, and was open to interpretation, then in order for communication to take place at all the significance of symbols would have to be negotiated between persons (Hodder 1988). By 'reading' the meaning of artefacts and at the same time 'rewriting' their significance, human beings were depicted as constantly redefining their position in the world. Cultural meaning is therefore based in interpretation, although Hodder was at pains to stress that the significance of objects is not entirely arbitrary. Material things always have a context of use and an everyday significance, upon which secondary and connotative meanings may be built up (Hodder 1989). Moreover, the attribution of significance to a symbol was held to be contextual, so that how an object was interpreted might depend upon the other items with which it was associated: Hodder gives the example of a safety pin, which 'means' different things when attached to a baby's nappy or a punk's leather jacket (Hodder 1985).

This emphasis on the role of agents as building culture through interpretation is one which fits with a growing awareness of ethnicity as not so much an objective fact as a subjective attribution (Shennan 1989b). The implications of a more fluid conception of ethnicity are brought out by the plight of the Mashpee Wampanoag, a Native American group whose status of an identifiable bounded community had evidently waxed and waned historically (Clifford 1988: 336). Yet in order to claim ancestral lands in court, the Wampanoag had been required to demonstrate an authentic and constant identity since pre-colonial times. But beyond this, a concern with the ways in which human subjects are differentially positioned culturally articulates with a growing archaeological interest in gender issues (Gero and Conkey 1991). This is an area too vast and important to be done justice here, but we might mention Judith Butler's (1993) discussion of the way in which sexed identities are created and continually reinforced through bodily performance, a process in which material culture might be expected to be implicated (and see also the discussion of gender in Chapter 12). On the basis of Hodder's arguments, the task of the archaeologist now came to be redefined as one of 'reading the past', building up patterns of association and contextual location which to an extent parallel the process of reading on the part of the native. Here again there is a parallel with Gadamer's hermeneutics, in the attempt to work towards an interpretation which approximates to that of people in the past.

It is perhaps more difficult adequately to express the content of post-structuralist theories of culture, so diverse are the approaches which might be grouped under that rubric. If we confine ourselves to the notion of text, quite a different way of

thinking about material culture can be derived from the approaches to signs taken by the likes of Jacques Derrida and Roland Barthes. Derrida, for instance, elaborated upon Saussure's argument that a language or sign-system is structured not by relationships between things and signifiers (words, symbols) but by relationships internal to language itself, to argue that the circulation of signs endlessly delays any direct encounter with the signified concept or object (Derrida 1986). Language is slippery and impossible to pin down, so each signifier does not lead us to a full grasp of what is being said, but to other signifiers which explode out endlessly. Language is therefore not a set of labels which relate to things in a straightforward, one-to-one way, but is composed of limitless chains of signification. Similarly, Barthes points out that endless meanings can be drawn out of a single text, since any set of words is networked in innumerable ways to other texts, concepts and events. A text is a site of production where a reader labours to produce a meaning for him or herself, *working* the language in order to bring about signification (Barthes 1981). These perspectives would deny the existence of any founding meaning hovering in the shadows behind any text, which one has to uncover through analysis. While an author may have assembled a set of signifiers in a particular way, there is no reason to suspect that he or she had a more perfect understanding of what (s)he was trying to say (but failing) than does the reader. No deeper truth is locked inside the text, and no empathy with the author will lead us to a 'correct' reading.

Applied to material culture, these ideas produce a strikingly different understanding. Material things are seen as having a symbolic content which signifies, which can be worked like language to produce meaning. Like language, material symbols are networked to each other, by connotation and metaphor. As Hodder suggests, context is of central importance, but juxtaposition does not so much tie down the meaning of an object as allow new meanings to be elicited from it. Meaning is potentially limitless, and culture as a whole can be conceived as a vast web of interconnected signifiers (Shanks and Tilley 1987). Moreover, it is not merely the case that human beings make use of material things to negotiate their social position. Neither persons nor things spring into the world fully formed and without precedent. Rather, both people and material culture are the products of the continuous process by which society renews itself (Barrett 1987; Shanks and Tilley 1987). Society is reproduced by people carrying forward the order and values of past generations, and the production, maintenance, and persistence of objects is central to this: a society exists *through* material culture (Miller 1987). Moreover, human beings do not simply take up culture in order strategically to alter or maintain their position within society. It is impossible for any human subject to gain a sense of identity without first inserting himself/herself into culture and language (Lacan 1977).

In several respects, a perspective informed by both hermeneutics *and* post-structuralism requires a radical rethinking of the practice of archaeology. First, the

degree to which society, personal identity, and material culture are inextricably bound up makes the whole notion of an 'archaeological record' difficult to sustain. It is not the case that societies or people move through time spewing out material culture like a trail behind them. Rather, the whole material world, natural and cultural, represents a set of resources which are constantly encountered, interpreted, encoded and transformed by human beings. Thus, as Barrett (1988) suggests, archaeological traces are not so much a 'record', a blueprint of past social relations, as *evidence for* past processes of social reproduction. The web of signification and meaning was one within which people gained their identities as human subjects and struggled through their existence. Second, if we come to recognize that our reading of these traces is most unlikely to map directly onto a past understanding of the world, and that it represents a labour in itself, the emphasis shifts from *reading* to *writing* the past. This is not a case of passively allowing the remains to 'speak' to us of the past: it is an active production which is of and for the present.

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SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

As this chapter has hoped to demonstrate, archaeological understandings of culture have been varied and contradictory, so that some breadth of reading is needed to gain a sense of the diversity. Trigger (1989) can be recommended as an overview of the issues concerned, while Harris (1969) provides a wide-ranging if partisan introduction to the anthropological background. Childe (1950), Binford (1962, 1965), Hodder (1978a, 1986) and Barrett (1988) can be taken as statements characteristic of different stages in the development of the debate. The contemporary political significance of ethnic interpretations of past identities is well covered by papers in Shennan (1989b), Graves-Brown *et al.* (1995) and Champion and Diaz-Andreu (1995). The implications of the arguments for gender identities have barely been touched on here, and the reader is referred to Gero and Conkey (1991) as a first step in this direction.