Reviews

Archaeologies of Materiality, edited by Lynn Meskell, 2005. Malden (MA): Blackwell; ISBN 1-4051-3617-0 (978-1-4051-3617-4) hardback £60 & US$84.95; ISBN 1-4051-3616-2 (978-1-4051-3616-7) paperback £19.99 & US$34.95; ix+229 pp., 13 figs., 1 table

Susan Kus

Asking the question (as does Meskell, the editor of this volume): 'What is it to know a people by their things?' (p. 11) becomes an exhilarating challenge across the contributing authors' engaged senses and theoretical perspective(s) on 'materiality'. One would think that, by 'default', archaeologists are *the* materialists *par excellence* up to the challenge of handling the question. However, this volume forces us to bring into focus our supposedly transparent 'materialism' and recognize that the 'things' we use to 'know a people' elude our classic taxonomies (of material, morphology and technique: see Ammann for fuller elaboration of this point) and trouble our social theoretical categories (e.g. utilitarian, symbolic, political). Calling into question a simple dichotomy of objects as 'purely functional or deeply symbolic' (Meskell p. 2), this volume helps us understand how 'materiality' is problematic not only for our classical versions of material determinism but equally for many of our 'new' and 'post' theories of signification. One of the authors, Holmberg, reformulates the challenge before us: 'The critical examination of what we consider visible, material, and thinkable in the recursive and ongoing lived human experience forms the crux of the archaeological challenge' (p. 208).

To address this challenge, the authors explore a range of magical, monumental and mundane 'things' within the context of the 'underpinning philosophies of materiality for [their] specific cultural moments across time and space' (p. 1). These 'things' include contemporary 'traditional' crafts in South Africa, apotropaic (to ward off evil) figurines in Neo-Assyria, early rock-art sites in colonial and contemporary political and cultural landscapes of South Africa, toothbrushes in the borderlands of the modern world of nineteenth-century Bogotá, Native American crafts in the 1911 American Missionary exposition in Boston ('The World in Boston'), lithics and ceramics across the landscape of Northwest Argentina in the formative period (first millennium AD), electricity in Annapolis, Maryland, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and petroglyphs in the Chiriquí province of Panama.

The volume is the result of a School of American Research Seminar on materiality in archaeology, involving students and colleagues of Meskell, and the volume has benefited from this origin in the editorial crafting of the individual contributions and in the shared theoretical focus. As a consequence, it is beneficial for the reader new to the topic to be able to hear multiple and relatively harmonious voices exploring 'materiality' across a wide range of materials in substantive case studies, and further to hear individual voices articulate particular views on the theoretical fund of arguments, vocabulary and authors that help express and explore 'the paradox of materiality' (Miller p. 212).

In making our (cultural and historical) worlds, we shape ourselves. This is the key proposition that articulates and inter-relates the individual projects of this volume. The exploration of the 'mutual constitution of social and material worlds' has a long and noble genealogy in philosophy and the social sciences running through Vico, Marx, Lukács, Simmel, Lefebvre, Merleau-Ponty *et al*. (Lazzari p. 134) and, as this volume demonstrates, has engendered highly viable archaeological offspring, many of whom also trace their genealogy to anthropology (e.g. Nakamura p. 21; Weiss, p. 49), a point not to be overlooked. If 'materiality is thus a recursive relationship between people and things' (Lazzari p. 128), several additional points of theoretical exploration follow, and are followed in the various contributions.

The relationship of people and things is situated in a lived 'context' and this is why the authors rightfully insist that *a priori* taxonomies of function, form and technology are insufficient to their studies (e.g. Meskell pp. 6–7). Studies of material culture, it is argued, begin not from objects (e.g. figurines, lithics, toothbrushes) but rather at 'sites of materiality' (Weiss p. 49). The vocabulary of 'praxis' and 'material *habitus*'

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are obviously useful in speaking of such 'sites', however, Lazzari (p. 151) makes a case for the use of the term 'lifeworld'. Quoting from the work of Jackson, she argues that this concept admits 'the inseparability of real and imagined, subjective and objective aspects of human existence'. Thus Nakamura can speak of 'magic' as well as Neo-Assyrian ritual artefacts and Weiss of San shamanism as well as San rock art. This nexus of 'context' and 'practice' is further melded with the 'sensuous' *via* various routes that include Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology (Nakamura p. 26; Holmberg p. 194) and Bakhtin's arguments on the bodily and temporal presence of objects (Lazzari p. 129).

The physical and sensual presence and possibilities of objects present a significant challenge to theoretical metaphors such as text, discourse, sign, symbol, and inscription that buy the introduction of 'meaning' into archaeological discussions at the high price of dissolving the materiality of the material signifiers as well as their 'significance'; see also Ammann p. 78). Lazzari (p. 126) quotes Halbwachs as saying that 'man is an animal that thinks with his fingers'. Many of the articles allow us to appreciate the embodied and sensual nature of consciousness; that 'certain ideas can only be grasped through our bodies and the sensory experience of matter' (Lazzari paraphrasing Merleau-Ponty, p. 128). Nakamura's discussion of apotropaic Neo-Assyrian figurines crafted in clay, crafted as hybrids in miniature, and buried in ritual, allows one to begin to appreciate magic as a 'way of making sense' (p. 21). Hasinoff uses the display of material crafts of American Indians by both early twentieth-century Protestant missionaries and professional anthropologists to demonstrate how these individuals thought and acted within a shared 'single object world' (p. 117). Palus uses the 'materialization of electricity' in the nineteenth century to explore Marcuse's notion of 'technological rationality'. I find one of the strengths of this volume is that it 'grounds' and renders 'thinkable' (to use Holmberg's vocabulary) archaeological discussions of meaning, ideology, world view, etc. in a home base of materiality, rather than leaving archaeology exclusively beholden to disciplinary borrowings farther afield.

To recognize that we create and are in turn created by our creations is to venture into dialectic. To appreciate material manifestations of the immaterial and to allow 'things' to become active in a recursive relationship (Lazarri, p. 127) requires vocabulary and expression up to the challenge of this theoretical direction. Occasionally, the reader may take pause, if not balk, at the miasma of vocabulary and at some of the efforts of expression. For instance, in the move to grant efficacy to the material in its dialectical relation with humans and society, some authors seem to accept granting 'things' status as 'full social members' and 'social beings' *á la* Gell and Latour (e.g. Lazarri pp. 133–4). The theoretical segue into anthropomorphism has both exciting and bothersome consequences. Object biography becomes a considerable tool for the archaeologist, especially when applied to both the precious and the trivial. In the hands and words/mouth of Ammann, a bone-handled nineteenth-century toothbrush from Paris becomes, through time and place, a great transcender of categories; a utilitarian toilette article, a class marker, a fetish, stolen property, a sacred offering to the Blessed Virgin, a broken discard, an ecofact, an artefact, and a national treasure. Yet, at the same time, this is an 'uncontrolled tooth brush' capable of 'breaching planned routes and hegemonic taxonomies' (p. 87) and capable of 'mocking its once better-off companions … the fine cologne water flask, and the blue rimmed porcelain soap case' in the display at the House Museum Quinta de Bolivar. In this volume, one can also find 'things' surviving 'by continual deferral and deference' (Nakamura p. 23) and other 'things' being 'stubborn participants in society, refusing to fully yield to (while instigating as well) the human imagination' (Lazzari p. 149). Rock art has a social life (Weiss p. 46) and stones have voices (Holmberg p. 190). On one hand, such 'things' are all worthy occupants of the enchanted castle Disney might provide for the belle and bête of our theories; but let me push that hand aside with the other that might argue that, given the fact that most archaeologists do not speak languages that include a 'circumstantial tense' and are thus limited to the active and the passive voices, these experiments in expression are worth the price of a theory that will allow us to come to know, so richly and provocatively, people from their things. Daniel Miller, in a sensitive 'afterword', offers a generous perspective on the expressive language of these contributions: 'It is the very attraction of theory as used in many of these chapters that the opacity of language can hint of a still more profound apprehension than that which can be conveyed in an academic work' (p. 219). Minimally, the variation in expressive style is much more engaging to read and provocative of thought than the lock-step vocabulary of allegiance that has sometimes characterized other theoretical positions that archaeologists have embraced (e.g. processualism, post-processualism, post-modernism). Let the reader be the final judge on this matter.

By way of a brief summary, I would recommend this book to a number of audiences. For those who wish to educate themselves on this theoretical direc-

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tion in archaeology, the book can be read as a highly informative quasi-annotated bibliography. Much to its credit, it spares the reader from strident, time-consuming and over deconstructive critiques of alternative schools. For those already working in this theoretical and investigative direction, the book offers a range of vocabulary and expressive styles that should serve to push the crafting of theoretical discourse further. This work should also prove to be a valuable contribution beyond archaeology to material culture studies. Indeed, it should allow the non-archaeologist to appreciate archaeologists not as 'a vulgar and simple lot' of 'poor materialists' (Miller p. 219) but as scholars with impressive theoretical as well as 'multidisiciplinary maturity' (Pels as quoted on the back cover).

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Us and Them: Archaeology and Ethnicity in the Andes, edited by Richard Martin Reycraft, 2005. (Cotsen Institute of Archaeology, University of California, Los Angeles Monograph 53.) Los Angeles (LA): Cotsen Institute of Archaeology at University of California; ISBN 1-931745-17-X paperback £24 & US$40; v+242 pp., 136 figs., 33 tables

Penelope Dransart

In the light of recent debate on the four-fold configuration of anthropology in the USA, the monograph under review acquires great interest because it draws on theoretical and methodological work in spatial archaeology, textile and ceramic analysis and biological anthropology. Individual chapters deal with the northern part of Peru or the area, now intersected by national boundaries, comprising the south of Peru, part of highland Bolivia and northern Chile.

One of the authors contributes an assessment of the potential for using ancient DNA in order to address kinship as part of a broader project for approaching ethnicity in prehistory, taking into account genetic evidence and cultural traits. However, Sloan R. Williams's chapter represents a preliminary stage before such a project might be undertaken. It compares the effects of social organization on nuclear and mitochondrial genetic patterns in a non-Andean context, using blood samples taken by Chagnon and his colleagues from people in Yanomami villages in the 1960s and 1970s. Williams does not inform the reader of the sustained commentary and critique on Chagnon's research from within the four-fold discipline of anthropology (see Nugent 2001, 10; Borofsky 2005). Rena Lederman (2005) uses media reaction to the public interest aroused by the journalist Patrick Tierney's (2000) ethical challenge to Chagnon's research practices as an example of how public discourse affects academic anthropologists by invoking an expectation of researching human unity-in-diversity when, Lederman (2005, 59) argues, anthropologists would rather develop a disciplinary voice 'premised neither on fission nor on "holistic" fusion' of anthropology's four sub-fields.

Us and Them does not explore how field workers might gain the informed consent of the people amongst whom they study but it does offer a range of methodological and theoretical approaches to the phenomenon termed 'ethnicity' from within three of anthropology's sub-fields (archaeology, biological anthropology and cultural anthropology). The book is grouped into chapters based largely on ceramic analysis, followed by those largely on textile analysis and, finally, by those largely on biological anthropology. This arrangement has a methodological rationale but it does set up some geographical toing and froing which might be confusing to readers not well acquainted with the geography of the Andean countries concerned.

Three chapters deal with different aspects of social identity among the Moche of north coastal Peru. Bawden presents a historical trajectory in which elites and commoners deployed symbols differently in pottery and mortuary practices at the 'new town' of Galindo following economic decline at the end of the sixth century AD. He argues that elites used geometrical imagery in their pottery designs, borrowed from what he calls 'a foreign ideational system', and that commoners expressed a different cultural identity in their burial practices, in a process which resulted in the emergence of Chimú identity. He sees alienation as having occurred along with social fragmentation, but the emergence of new ethnic identities he describes conforms to archaeologists' long-established definitions based on the notion of archaeological cultures. It is not clear whether users of Chimú pottery saw themselves as ethnically different from those who previously used Moche pottery. In contrast, Rodman

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