Note

[1] 'It must be in this process of usage that the equipmentality of the equipment actually confronts us. But on the contrary, as long as we only imagine a pair of shoes in general, or merely look at the shoes as they stand there in the picture, empty and unused, we will never learn what the equipmental being of equipment in truth is' (Heidegger 2002, 13).

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Artefacts in quarantine? *Carl Knappett*

Encountering affordances

As the authors situate the discussion in their offices, let me also begin in mine. On my way home from the office there will be many things around me. They will mostly be familiar and go largely unnoticed. I will take my keys off the desk and lock the door behind me. I will walk along the corridor, through the swing doors, down the stairs, unlock my bike, and so on. Desk, keys, door, carpet, windows, stairs, lock, bike – these are all objects with which I interact. But do I necessarily notice them? As long as there is 'smooth coping', as long as these objects are ready to hand (Wheeler 2005, 129), then they remain in the background. These are not objects that hold me in their gaze; I do not 'encounter' them, in the sense of encountering, meeting or bumping into a person.

But in some, perhaps relatively rare, circumstances we do 'encounter' artefacts. This might occur in a museum, an art gallery, a shop or even in an archaeological excavation. We might look, touch, smell, listen or even taste – attempting to make an object of a thing (on transformations of 'things' into 'objects', and on 'thing theory', see Brown 2001; 2003; and Sev Fowles's website http://www.columbia.edu/~sf2220/TT2007/web-content/index.html). We might be faced with something unfamiliar, and struggle to make sense of it in isolation, or the thing might be familiar but in an unlikely setting. These are encounters. In Heidegger's terms they would be classed as 'present at hand'.

What Duncan Garrow and Elizabeth Shove have set up is a series of encounters. On the one hand they have selected an unfamiliar artefact category (unfinished Neolithic axe) and set it up for viewing; on the other a familiar artefact category (toothbrush) is chosen, albeit placed in an unlikely location on an office desk. Their experiments are thus not designed in such a way that they might explore the phenomena of smooth coping or readiness to hand. This is not to say that their endeavour is irrelevant or invalid, simply that it can only speak to a limited register, that of the encounter. I say limited, because I imagine that most human interaction with material culture takes the form of smooth coping, such that artefacts are experienced not 'as aggregates of natural physical mass, but rather as a range of *functions* or *effects* that we rely upon' (Harman 2002, 18; original emphasis).

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Let me elaborate a little further, employing the concept of affordances. It is relatively rare to interact with an artefact in an isolated, decontextualized way. My stapler sits on my desk in front of me, ready to hand, full of staples (usually), and makes sense in my paper-bound office, through which drafts blow when I open the window, and where I do not wish to get papers mixed up. The stapler has its own particular material affordances – weight, flexibility, staple size and so on – but just as importantly the overall *situation* has affordances too (see also Knappett 2004). If affordances for skilled, directed action are to a large extent contextual and relational, then it will clearly be difficult to understand an object's identity when its relations are removed or obfuscated. Furthermore, to understand an artefact we often draw upon both 'first-hand' and 'second-hand' experience (Windsor 2004). Given the considerable range of second-hand or 'indirect' experience available to most adults, there must presumably be some prompts in the situation to hint at which might be most relevant. Remove those situational prompts, and it is difficult then to find the appropriate second-hand experience for the situation.

I think it is everyday settings of these kinds that are truly challenging when it comes to trying to understand material culture. I therefore find it a little disappointing that the experiment here simply cannot begin to access these registers. Nonetheless, there is considerable interest to be found in the register of the encounter. We should just not be surprised that, when confronted with any artefact ripped away from its relationships, whether a toothbrush or an axe, we struggle to make much sense of it. And this isolation and displacement intrinsic to Garrow and Shove's exercise reminds me of the work of some of the surrealists.

Surreal objects

Garrow selects a 'strange' object that he, as an archaeologist, is able to make 'ordinary', but which to a non-archaeologist, such as Shove, seems destined to remain strange. Shove takes a familiar object, but this becomes strange to Garrow in the unfamiliar context of this exercise and his (archaeological) office. This represents in microcosm what each author says about their respective disciplines: the need in archaeology to make the strange ordinary, and in sociology vice versa. We should not omit anthropology from this, as a similar experiment has recently been conducted within the pages of *Archaeological dialogues* by anthropologist Tim Ingold (Ingold 2007). He places a wet stone on his office desk, and urges readers to do the same. Over time the stone changes as it dries; Ingold seeks to show how material surfaces are affected not only by substance but also by the medium in which the substance is immersed. Is this playful displacement of an artefact – which Garrow and Shove reprise in uncanny fashion – a step towards a 'surrealist' methodology in the social sciences?

This desire to transform the strange or ordinary status of artefacts reprises the surrealist practice of taking familiar objects and making them unreal and fantastical. One need only think of Oppenheim's 'Objet' (a fur-covered teacup, saucer and spoon), Duchamp's Bottle Rack or Dali's Lobster Telephone. In the encounter with these startling objects we not only look at them, but they project their gaze back on us (Elkins 1997; Mitchell 2005).

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Concocting new encounters, such that an uncontemplated physical thing becomes a dream object that turns its own desires onto us, forces us to realize that our perception of things is always incomplete – and Schwenger argues that this gives rise to melancholy (Schwenger 2006). Our authors may confess to a playful approach, but is there some sadness, frustration and melancholy too, at the incompleteness of their perception of axe and toothbrush, staring back at them from their desks?

Interdisciplinarity

This playful approach extends from the artefacts themselves to the nature of their interdisciplinary project as a whole. I believe it is a valuable, albeit risky, take on interdisciplinarity that can very easily provoke strong reactions: some see playful dialogues of this kind as 'extremely personalised and subjective meditations that ultimately reflect little upon ancient experience' (Meskell 2004, 1). Such accusations do hold some truth, but at the same time can seem a little dismissive in closing down our options for discussing material culture. The light touch adopted by Garrow and Shove may not appeal to the more self-consciously serious scholar, but they nonetheless succeed in conveying a number of important points about both materiality and interdisciplinarity that might not have emerged from a different kind of study.

Perhaps one victim of this light tough is the lack of discussion in their paper of the wider literature on the nature of interdisciplinarity. As has recently been highlighted by Isayev (2006), there have been a number of initiatives tackling this problem, from the 1996 Gulbenkian Commission through to the 2006 British Academy Workshop. Isayev refers to a distinction between two modes of collaborative research: 'Mode One' is long-term and is predicated on 'the framing of new questions through an integrated approach from the outset' (Isayev 2006, 600). Outcomes may be of a new kind unanticipated in either discipline, with the potential for paradigm shifts. 'Mode Two' research is short-term and addresses predetermined questions, with the disciplines keeping parallel trajectories. Considered in this context, the study of Garrow and Shove falls into the Mode Two category, which is evidently more limited than Mode One. However, there is no reason why an initial pilot project of Mode One type should not beget a Mode Two project. Were Garrow and Shove to develop a long-term project, with an integrated sociological–archaeological approach from the outset, then we might see the depth of fresh insight that can only really come from such concerted long-term projects. The difficulty of such projects, yet also their necessity, is underlined by Van der Leeuw and Redman (2002). The Archaeomedes research programme, which ran from 1992 to 2000 under Van der Leeuw's direction, focusing on land degradation in south European countries, brought together 65 researchers to develop an integrative perspective on socio-natural systems. This integrative, Mode One research is also seen in a subsequent EU project 'The Information Society as a Complex System' (ISCOM), running from 2002 to 2006 and integrating dozens of physical and social scientists (Lane *et al.* in press). The new insights emerging have demanded considerable time, investment and patience.

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To conclude, it seems that the 'artefacts between disciplines' contemplated by Garrow and Shove are artefacts that have been marooned between disciplines, as if held up in customs or quarantined. But with further work, more integrative in character, artefacts might actually be more successfully and smoothly transferred between disciplines than is currently the case.

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Of tribes and territories *Paul Graves-Brown*

Introduction

Do good fences make good neighbours? According to their account, Duncan Garrow and Elizabeth Shove each inhabit 'neighbouring territory' (p. 127) and are undertaking an exercise in 'intellectual tourism' (p. 127). In the process, they find that they live in 'substantially different worlds' (p. 128). It is not for me to cast doubt on the veracity of their personal experience, but I do not think it is representative of the state of 'interdisciplinary working'. Disciplines do inhabit different territories, some are quite distinct; physics and French probably share few boundaries. Others – archaeology, sociology and anthropology – constantly rub up against each other. Boundedness can be emphatic where disciplines are more 'urban', clustered tightly around specific methodologies and data; others are more 'rural', with a diversity of topics, methods and theories which are likely to overlap with other disciplines (Becher 1989). Archaeology falls into the latter category; there are wide differences of approach between prehistory, classical archaeology, Egyptology, historical archaeology or archaeological science. My impression is that sociology would also fit the rural description.

The problems arise when we try to define the boundaries of such territories, and situate ourselves within them. Do neighbours really inhabit different worlds where things, physical objects, have quite different meanings? Or is it more a matter of how academics construct their professional identities, how they define their tribal allegiances? Let us consider the toothbrush and the axe.

Having an axe to grind

From the outset, Garrow and Shove appear to have set up a straw man to exaggerate their differences. They play off the quotidian nature of the toothbrush and the oddness of the axe, despite the fact that both toothbrushes and axes exist in the modern world. By comparing a 'finished' toothbrush with a 'lump of rock' they are smuggling in a distinction which only serves to obscure the comparison of sociology and archaeology. Garrow could have provided a finished, hafted Neolithic axe. Shove could have provided a bag of PVC pellets (the raw ingredients of a toothbrush). Even a finished axe head would only be a component of a 'finished' artefact; what if Shove had only supplied the bristles of a toothbrush? Unfinished, raw materials are not the sole province of the past.

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