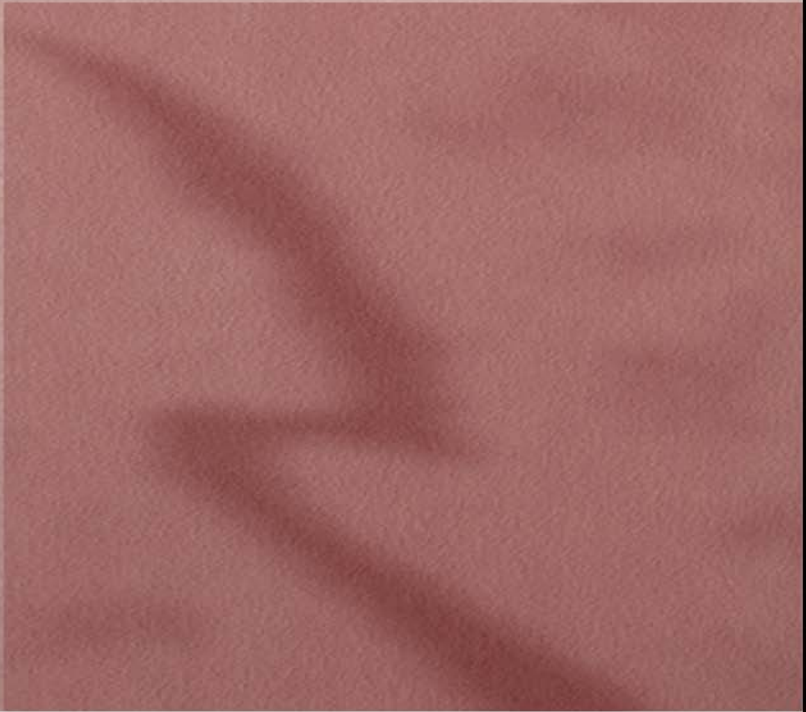
The Archaeology of Ethnicity

Constructing identities in the past and present

Siân Jones



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The study of ethnicity is a highly controversial area in contemporary archaeology. The identification of ‘cultures’ from archaeological remains and their association with past ethnic groups is now seen by many as hopelessly inadequate. Yet such an approach continues to play a significant role in archaeological enquiry, and in the legitimation of modern ethnic and national claims.

Siân Jones responds to the need for a radical reassessment of the ways in which past cultural groups are reconstructed from archaeological evidence with a comprehensive and critical synthesis of recent theories of ethnicity in the human sciences. In doing so, she develops a new framework for the analysis of ethnicity in archaeology which takes into account the dynamic and situational nature of ethnic identification.

Opening up the important issues of ethnicity and identity, this book addresses important methodological, interpretive and political issues. It will provide invaluable reading for the student of archaeology and other disciplines in the human sciences.

Siân Jones is Parkes Fellow at the University of Southampton, where she is undertaking research on ethnicity in ancient Palestine. She is co-editor of *Cultural Identity and Archaeology: The Construction of European Communities* (Routledge, 1996).

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For P.J.U.

and for my mother and father

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Chapter 6

Ethnicity and material culture

Towards a theoretical basis for the interpretation of ethnicity in archaeology

PROBLEMS WITH THE IDEA OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL CULTURES AS ETHNIC ENTITIES

As we saw in Chapter 1, the identification of past cultures and peoples in archaeology has, for the most part, been dependent on the assumption that bounded, monolithic cultural entities ('archaeological cultures') correlate with past peoples, ethnic groups, tribes and/or races. This assumption has been subjected to a number of important critiques both within the framework of culture-historical archaeology, and subsequently within various processual and post-processual archaeologies. Taken collectively these critiques can be divided into three main categories. The first is concerned with the straightforward correlation of archaeological cultures with ethnic groups, the second with the nature of archaeological distributions and the status of archaeological cultures as classificatory entities, and the third with the nature of ethnicity and the very existence of bounded homogeneous ethnic and cultural entities.

(1) The question of the equivalence of archaeological cultures and past peoples was raised within the framework of culture-history. Doubts concerning the possibility of identifying prehistoric peoples on the basis of archaeological evidence alone were periodically expressed, for instance, by Tallgren (1937), and by Jacob-Friesen and Wahle in the 1920s and the 1940s (Veit 1989:41). Moreover, a desire to distinguish between archaeological cultures and culture in the ethnological sense was frequently expressed, for instance by Braidwood and MacKern in the 1930s and 1940s, alongside a demand for the development of alternative archaeological terminology (Daniel 1978 [1950]:319). However, critiques generally consisted of cautionary tales focusing on the apparent poverty of the archaeological record, rather than a questioning of the principal assumptions underlying culture-history (Tallgren 1937 was an exception). That is, it was argued that archaeological evidence might not provide access to the ideational norms of past cultures or to ethnic groups due to technical problems with the data, rather than the interpretive principles themselves. The general response in

the face of such problems, as in reaction against racist and nationalistic uses of ethnic reconstructions of the past, was a retreat into the study of chronology and typology as ends in themselves. Within this empiricist, typological framework, debates largely focused on the meaning of archaeological types, and in particular whether such types represent artificial (etic) categories imposed by the archaeologist, or whether they represent the mental (emic) categories of their makers (e.g. Ford 1954a, 1954b; Spaulding 1953, 1954).

A more fundamental critique of culture-historical epistemology rested on the recognition that archaeological distributions may reflect a diverse range of past activities and processes in addition to the ideational norms of past ethnic groups. Although this claim had been made by a number of archaeologists prior to the 1960s (e.g. Childe 1956; Daniel 1978 [1950]; Tallgren 1937; Taylor 1948), it was only with the emergence of the 'new archaeology' that it became widely accepted as a critique of culture-history, and provided the basis of a new framework for archaeological analysis. For instance, Binford claimed that, in contrast with the undifferentiated view of culture perpetuated by normative archaeology,

> culture is not necessarily shared; it is participated in. And it is participated in differentially. A basic characteristic of cultural systems is the integration of individuals and social units performing different tasks, frequently at different locations; these individuals and social units are articulated by means of various institutions into broader units that have different levels of corporate inclusiveness.
>
> (Binford 1965:205)

On the basis of this argument it was suggested that the single explanatory frame of reference provided by culture-history is inadequate and that it is necessary to undertake an analysis of the structure of archaeological assemblages in terms of their function within a differentiated social system (e.g. Binford 1962:219; Clarke 1978 [1968]; Renfrew 1972). Archaeological distributions, it was argued, could not be equated in a simplistic manner with ethnic groups, because within such a framework functional variations in archaeological assemblages could be mistakenly interpreted as ethnic differences. For instance, the question of whether variation in Mousterian assemblages was derived from the organization of different activities in space and time, or was a product of past ethnic differentiation, was central to the debate between the Binfords (1966; see also Binford 1973) and Bordes and de Sonneville-Bordes (1970; see also Bordes 1973).

Despite their critique of the idea that *all* variation in distributions of material culture can be understood in terms of the ideational norms of past ethnic groups, 'new archaeologists' continued to accept the idea that some bounded archaeological distributions, if only in the domain of stylistic

variation, correlate with such groups (Conkey 1991:10; Shennan 1989b: 18; and see below). However, more recently, the assumption that a one-to-one relationship exists between variation in *any* aspect of material culture, stylistic or otherwise, and the boundaries of ethnic groups has been questioned. Drawing on numerous anthropological and historical examples it has been shown that the relationship between variation in material culture and the expression of ethnic difference is complex (Hodder 1982a; Trigger 1978; Ucko 1969). Moreover, a number of archaeologists (e.g. Olsen and Kobylinski 1991; Renfrew 1987; Shennan 1989b, 1991) have followed recent anthropological and sociological theories of ethnicity in emphasizing that ethnic groups are rarely a reflection of the sum total of similarities and differences in 'objective' cultural traits. Rather, they are self-conscious/self-defining groups, which are based on the perception of real or assumed cultural difference.[1]

(2) Aside from problems concerning the relationship between archaeological cultures and ethnic entities, the actual existence of archaeological cultures has been questioned. Traditionally, higher level archaeological groupings, such as cultures or phases, were defined in monothetic terms on the basis of the presence or absence of a list of traits or types, which were often derived from the assemblages of a 'type site', or intuitively considered to be the most appropriate attributes in the definition of a particular culture. As Clarke observed,

> The intended nature of these groups was…transparently clear, they were solid and tangible defined entities like an artefact type or cultural assemblage, each possessed a necessary list of qualifying attributes and they could be handled like discrete and solid bricks.
>
> (Clarke 1978 [1968]:35)

However, as he goes on to point out, in practice 'no group of cultural assemblages from a single culture ever contains, nor ever did contain, all of the cultural artefacts' as the ideal monothetic concept implies (ibid.: 36). This problem was recognized by Childe (1956:33, 124), who emphasized that all the types assigned to a particular culture are unlikely to be present in every assemblage. Instead, he argued, it is the repeated association of a number of types which defines the group, and some of these types may be absent in some assemblages within the group, as well as present in assemblages belonging to other groups. However, Childe's (1956:124) response was to discard the untidy information by demoting it from the rank of 'diagnostic' types, thus preserving the ideal of a univariate cultural block. The result in Childe's work, as in others, was the operation of a two-tier system: 'A theoretical level of interpretation in terms of rigid monothetic

groupings and a practical level of groupings by broad affinity or similarity assessed on an intuitive basis' (Clarke 1978 [1968]:37).

Other archaeologists in addition to Clarke have criticized the intuitive, arbitrary and constructed nature of archaeological classification in general, and cultural entities in particular (e.g. Binford 1965; Hodder 1978b; Renfrew 1977; Shennan 1978). It has been argued that culture-historical classification was based on the degree to which cultural traits are shared, and this had the effect of 'masking differences and…lumping together phenomena which would be discrete under another taxonomic method' (Binford 1965:205). In a similar vein Hodder (1978b) and Shennan (1978) have shown that the traditional approach to the classification of cultural entities was too crude, and that a more sophisticated approach to the analysis of archaeological data reveals a much more complex structure. Moreover, it has been argued that archaeological cultures can be generated out of a continuum of change, and that in many instances such entities are purely constructs devised by archaeologists (Hodder 1982a:6; McGuire 1992:169; Renfrew 1977:94).

The conceptualization of culture as a differentiated system stimulated the development of new approaches to the analysis of archaeological distributions. More sophisticated conceptual devices have been developed in an attempt to accommodate the nature of archaeological distributions, such as Clarke's polythetic approach to the definition of culture. However, the fact that Clarke (1978 [1968]:368–9) still defined culture as an entity which could be equated with past ethnic groups served to obscure some of the problems involved. As Shennan points out, Clarke adopted a classificatory expedient:

> to remove the untidiness in the cross-cutting distributions, rather than taking the more radical step of recognizing that *this untidiness is, in fact, the essence of the situation,* arising from the fact that there are no such entities as 'cultures', simply the contingent interrelations of different distributions produced by different factors.
>
> (Shennan 1989b:13; my emphasis)

Such an understanding of archaeological distributions represents a significant shift in archaeological classification, which has been stimulated by attempts to analyse different aspects of past cultural systems. The idea that culture is a multivariate rather than a univariate phenomenon resulting from many different factors has been accepted by many archaeologists, and sophisticated methods of data analysis appropriate to such a theoretical stance have been developed (e.g. Doran and Hodson 1975; Hodder and Orton 1976; Shennan 1988).

(3) Finally, a small minority of archaeologists have questioned the very existence of ethnic groups as fixed bounded entities. As discussed in

Chapters 4 and 5, the recognition that ethnic groups are a dynamic and situational phenomenon has dominated research into ethnicity in anthropology and sociology since the late 1960s. Studies have revealed that the boundaries of ethnic groups and the identification of individuals may change through time and from place to place, often as a result of the strategic manipulation of identity with relation to economic and political relations. In the archaeological literature it has also been suggested that ethnicity is a dynamic and instrumental phenomenon and that material culture is actively used in the justification and manipulation of inter-group relations (e.g. Hodder 1982a; Shennan 1989b). Furthermore, it has been argued that the intensity of ethnic consciousness, and consequently material culture differentiation, may increase in times of economic and political stress (e.g. Hodder 1979a, 1982a; Kimes *et al.* 1982).

However, whilst the dynamic and situational nature of ethnicity has been accommodated by such research, the existence of ethnic groups as bounded socio-cultural entities is still accepted (e.g. Hodder 1979a, 1982a; Kimes *et al.* 1982). Very few archaeologists have recognized the more radical conclusions of some recent anthropological research which questions the very existence of ethnic groups in the form of bounded, monolithic territorial entities (although see Shennan 1989b:11–12), and suggests that such a conceptualization may itself be a legacy of nineteenth-century taxonomic systems (Renfrew 1987:288; Shennan 1989b:7–9).[2]

All of these critiques have fundamental implications for the analysis of ethnicity in archaeology. However, they have only been accommodated in a piecemeal fashion, and often as an unintended consequence of other developments in archaeological theory and practice. In what follows, the ways in which processual and post-processual archaeologies have approached ethnicity, whether explicitly or implicitly, will be explored, and a general theoretical approach for the analysis of ethnicity in archaeology will be developed.

THE DICHOTOMY BETWEEN STYLE AND FUNCTION: NEW ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE CONCEPTUALIZATION OF ETHNICITY

The conceptualization of culture as a system and the emphasis on functionalism in new archaeology led to the definition of different kinds of artefact and assemblage variation. For instance, Binford (1962:219) specified three different classes, 'technomic', 'socio-technic' and 'ideo-technic', relating to the kind of social domain in which artefacts have their primary function. Cross-cutting these functional categories, he distinguished formal stylistic attributes which are not directly explicable in functional terms; rather, he argued that such attributes are determined by the

enculturative milieu, and may play a secondary functional role in promoting group solidarity (ibid.: 220). In a later paper Binford (1965:206–9) went on to outline three sources of assemblage variability: 'tradition', that is spatio-temporal continuity in stylistic variability derived from received knowledge about ways of doing things; 'interaction sphere', that is the distribution of a particular artefact or group of artefacts derived from regular and institutionally maintained inter-societal articulation; and 'adaptive area', that is a distribution of common artefacts arising from their use in coping directly with the physical environment.

Basically these different classes of artefact and sources of variation are founded on a distinction between the 'functional' characteristics of artefacts, whether these are utilitarian or non-utilitarian, and 'stylistic' characteristics which cross-cut functional categories and are regarded as residual formal variation, a frequently quoted example being decoration on pottery vessels. It is clear from Binford's (1962, 1965, 1972) discussion of these different classes of variation that he regarded stylistic variation in terms of normative variation and ultimately ethnic differences. For instance, he stated that 'stylistic variables are most fruitfully studied when questions of ethnic origin, migration, and interaction between groups are the subject of explication' (Binford 1962:220). Although he attributed a functional role to such variation in terms of promoting group solidarity, stylistic variation is essentially regarded as a passive product of the enculturative milieu. Moreover, Binford (1965:208) defined spatially and temporally discrete traditions on the basis of similarities and differences in stylistic attributes in much the same way as archaeologists working within a culture-historical framework.

Thus, with respect to stylistic variation, ethnic entities, although rarely an explicit focus of analysis in processual archaeology, are still equated with received normative tradition (Conkey 1991:10; Shennan 1989b:18). The main distinction being that, in contrast with most culture-historical archaeology, such normative tradition is assumed to be located in only certain dimensions of artefact variability.[3] On the basis of these assumptions research concerning the organization of past groups has focused on particular aspects of material culture, such as stylistic variation in pottery decoration (e.g. Whallon 1968). In short, such studies assume that ceramic form is determined by utilitarian function whereas decoration constitutes additional non-functional variation, and that it is in the domain of such variation that social information such as 'ethnic iconography' will be expressed (Sackett 1977:377).

In a series of articles, Sackett (1977, 1982, 1985, 1986, 1991) has subjected the dichotomy between function and style to a cogent critique. He adopted a similar basic premise concerning normative processes and style to other processual archaeologists, and indeed proponents of traditional culture-history. That is, that stylistic variation, referred to by Sackett as

'isochrestic variation', is derived from variation in culturally prescribed ways of doing things. Similarity in the isochrestic dimensions of material culture is assumed to be a product of acculturation within a given social group, and therefore also an index of ethnic similarity and difference (Sackett 1977:371).

However, in contrast to Binford, Sackett argued that style does not occupy a discrete realm of formal artefact variation distinct from function. On the contrary, he suggested that these two dimensions of artefact variability are embedded in one another (Sackett 1977:371; 1986:630). Whereas it has been assumed by some archaeologists that style is something that is additional to the basic functional form of the object it occupies (e.g. Binford 1962, 1965; Whallon 1968), Sackett (1982:75; 1986:630) sees style as inherent in the choices made by people from a broad spectrum of equally viable alternative means of achieving the same functional ends. Style, or isochrestic variation, therefore resides in all aspects of artefact variability, even those dimensions which appear to be explicitly functional, and it follows on the basis of Sackett's argument that 'in isochrestic perspective, a butchering technique may potentially convey as much ethnically stylistic variation as a pottery decoration' (Sackett 1986:630).

The dichotomy between style and function in the new archaeology was created by a desire to identify the different processes involved in the creation of variation in the archaeological record. However, this led to an artificial distinction between style and function, as if such dimensions of material culture constitute discrete components which can be measured in some way, and contributed to ambiguity concerning the relationship between normative processes and variation in material culture. It has been stressed that there may be considerable variation in ideational norms within a given socio-cultural system (e.g. Binford 1965:205), whilst at the same time spatial and temporal continuity in stylistic attributes has continued to be explained in terms of cultural tradition and regarded as a passive product of ethnicity. Some research has usefully indicated that normative traditions and associated stylistic patterns are more complex than assumed in traditional culture-historical archaeology, as learning patterns may vary at individual or household levels, and at community and regional levels, as a result of a range of variables (e.g. see contributions to Flannery 1976; Plog 1978, 1983). However, style was still predominantly regarded as an essentially passive reflection of normative rules, until the emergence of a different conceptualization of style in terms of active communication and information exchange.

STYLISTIC COMMUNICATION AND ETHNICITY

Despite the important realization that the manifestation of material culture in any particular context is a product of a variety of processes and not solely

a reflection of ideational norms, new archaeology failed to address the relationship between normative variation in material culture and ethnicity. In effect, the problems engendered by equating ethnicity with culture were merely transposed to the peripheral domain of stylistic variation, where spatially and temporally discrete distributions were interpreted as a passive reflection of past ethnic groups. However, as we have seen, it has been widely recognized in anthropology and sociology that a one-to-one relationship between ethnic identity and cultural similarities and differences cannot be assumed, and ethnic groups have been conceptualized as self-defining entities. Moreover, a large body of recent research has suggested that the communication of ethnicity is an active process involved in the manipulation of economic and political resources.

Although only a few archaeologists have been directly influenced by recent anthropological and sociological theories of ethnicity, similar trends are evident in a particular archaeological approach to style as active communication which emerged in the late 1970s and early 1980s.[4] Style was redefined as more than a passive product of the enculturative milieu, it came to be viewed as a form of communication and social marking in certain, usually highly visible, artefacts, and in certain social contexts (Conkey 1991:10). In this respect, style was regarded as both functional and adaptive in that it facilitates the exchange of information concerning social and religious identification, group affiliation, status, and so on, in periods of environmental and social stress (e.g. Gamble 1982; Jochim 1983).

Wiessner (1983, 1984, 1985, 1989) has developed these ideas concerning style as active communication in her ethno-archaeological analysis of stylistic variation and the expression of social identity amongst the Kalahari San. Drawing on psychological theory concerning social identity (e.g. Tajfel 1982), she has suggested that both individual and group identity is ultimately based on a universal human cognitive process of comparison ‘through which the self is differentiated from others and the ingroup from the outgroup’ (Wiessner 1983:191–2, 257). Style, she argued, is one of the many channels through which identity can be projected to others, and consequently it will be affected by the processes of social comparison, and determined by the outcome of that comparison in terms of the expression of similarity and difference. Moreover, with relation to social identity, style may be actively used in the disruption, alteration and creation of social relationships (Wiessner 1984:194; 1985:161).

Style then, in Wiessner’s terms, refers to the active symbolic role of particular characteristics of material culture in mediating social relations and social strategies. She has argued that there are at least two distinct aspects of style, which have different referents, contain different kinds of information, are generated by different conditions and produce different kinds of variation:

> *emblemic style,* that is, formal variation in material culture that has a distinct referent and transmits a clear message to a defined target population about conscious affiliation and identity…[and]…*assertive style,* [that] is formal variation in material culture which is personally based and which carries information supporting individual identity.
>
> (Wiessner 1983:257–8)

Wiessner (ibid.) went on to argue that emblemic style usually refers to a social group and the norms and values associated with that group, whereas assertive style does not have a distinctive referent as it supports, but does not directly symbolize, individual identity. Moreover, unlike assertive style, emblemic style does not reflect degrees of interaction across group boundaries, because it carries information about such boundaries and as a result it is likely to have a distinct and discrete distribution, in contrast to the random or clinal distribution of assertive style (ibid.: 259).

Hodder (1979a, 1982a) has elaborated on this point, drawing on a number of ethno-archaeological studies conducted in Kenya, Zambia and Sudan. In his study of ethnic boundaries in the Baringo District of Kenya he showed that, despite interaction across tribal boundaries, clear material culture distinctions were being maintained in a wide range of artefact categories, whilst other material culture types crossed tribal boundaries (Hodder 1982a:58). He argued that material culture distinctions are in part maintained in order to justify between-group competition and negative reciprocity, and that such patterning may increase in times of economic stress (see especially Hodder 1979a, but also 1982a:55). However, he also stressed that different groups may adopt different adaptive strategies in the face of economic and political stress, and that 'the explanation of these strategies and the way in which material culture is involved in them depend on internally generated symbolic schemes' (Hodder 1982a:186).

Such research has major implications for assumptions concerning the relationship between degrees of similarity in material culture and social difference. Archaeologists have tended to assume that the transmission of material culture is a function of social interaction and proximity. However, as Hodder has pointed out, there is no straightforward relationship between degrees of interaction or scales of production and material culture patterning:

> the extent to which cultural similarity relates, for example to interaction depends on the strategies and intentions of the interacting groups and on how they use, manipulate and negotiate material symbols as part of these strategies.
>
> (Ibid.: 185)

Like Wiessner, Hodder (ibid.: 186–7) suggested that the use of material culture in distinguishing between self-conscious ethnic groups will lead to

discontinuities in certain material culture distributions which may enable the archaeologist to identify such groups (see also Haaland 1977). However, he also emphasized that some groups may choose strategies of assimilation in the context of regular interaction, and others may retain distinct identities without reference to material culture with the result that their boundaries will be invisible to archaeologists, as in the case of the Lozi in Zambia.

In contrast to some functionalist approaches to style (e.g. Wobst 1977; Binford 1973), Hodder (1982a:55) argued that ethnic identity may be expressed in mundane utilitarian items as well as in decorative items, and that such objects are not necessarily highly visible. Moreover, unlike Wiessner he illustrated that the form that between-group relations take is usually related to the internal organization of social relations, and that the expression of ethnicity must be understood in terms of symbolic schemes of meaning generated within the group (ibid.: 187–8). For instance, he argued that in the Baringo District of Kenya, between-group differentiation and hostility is linked to the internal differentiation of age sets and the domination of women and younger men by older men. Larick's (1986, 1991) ethno-archaeological research amongst the Loikop in Kenya also supports this argument, illustrating that items of material culture that are significant in terms of ethnicity, such as spears, are constantly appropriated in the signification of age differentiation amongst the male population. At the most exclusive level owning a spear constitutes being Loikop, but in this case the intensity of competition between age cohorts, and the expression of differentiation between age grades in terms of stylistic variation in spears, is greater than between ethnic groupings (Larick 1991:317–18).

Such research is part of a significant trend in the analysis of style in archaeology which emphasizes its active role in symbolizing identity and negotiating social relations. In contrast to normative or isochrestic theories, stylistic variation is not regarded as merely a passive reflection of enculturation within ethnically bounded contexts; rather it is actively produced, maintained and manipulated in the process of communication, and the mediation of social relationships. Such strategic manipulation of material culture is likely to result in discontinuous non-random distributions of material culture (see Hodder and Orton 1976), which are often the foci of interaction rather than relative social isolation and distance. *Thus archaeologists cannot then assume that degrees of similarity and difference in material culture provide a straightforward index of interaction.*

The research discussed here also represents a number of important developments in the analysis of ethnic identity in archaeology (e.g. Hodder 1979a, 1982a; Larick 1986, 1991; Kimes *et al.* 1982; Wiessner 1983, 1984, 1985). Although the nature of ethnicity is not explicitly discussed in detail in any of these studies, ethnic groups are conceptualized as self-conscious identity groups constructed through the process of social and cultural comparison *vis-à-vis* others, rather than as a passive reflection of cultural

tradition as in normative archaeology. It is also recognized that the expression of ethnicity may be confined to a limited range of stylistic attributes which have become associated with an ethnic referent, and these attributes may be actively maintained and manipulated in the negotiation of social relations; an observation that is backed up by a large body of anthropological literature.

However, none of these approaches provides an account of how ethnic identity is produced, reproduced and transformed. Why is there apparently a relationship between symbolic structures concerning intra-group relations and the form and expression of ethnic relations? How do particular stylistic attributes become attached to the active conscious expression of identity, ethnic or otherwise; that is, what are the processes involved in the objectification of ethnicity? What is missing from these studies is an 'adequate account of the social production of style' (Shanks and Tilley 1992 [1987]: 146). Hodder (1982a:204–5) is, to some extent, an exception, in that he emphasizes the importance of the symbolic structures permeating *all* aspects of cultural practice and social relations in the differentiation of ethnic groups (and see pp. 120–2 below). However, functionalist explanations of style as communication, such as that of Wobst (1977), fall into the teleological trap of suggesting that distinctive styles come into existence in order to serve certain ends, such as the communication of ethnic difference in times of economic stress. Moreover, the relationship between such functional styles and other supposedly passive forms of stylistic variation remains unclear.

MATERIAL CULTURE, HUMAN AGENCY AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE

Proponents of the new archaeology reacted against traditional culture-history and the idea that material culture merely reflected social norms, but in doing so they imposed a functionalist conceptualization of culture, including material culture, as an epiphenomenal adaptive mechanism (Hodder 1982b:4–5; Shanks and Tilley 1987:94). Moreover, although the normative dimension of culture was not altogether dismissed, it was considered irrelevant in terms of the function of culture in most contexts of analysis, except in the case of style. The result is a pervasive dichotomy between functional utility and normative culture. However, there are problems with both a functionalist conceptualization of culture as an adaptive mechanism, and a normative or structuralist conceptualization of culture as a set of ideational rules determining behaviour.[5]

On the one hand, functionalist approaches fail to take into account the way in which cultural schemes structure social reality. As Hodder (1982b:4) argues, 'all actions take place within cultural frameworks and their functional value is assessed in terms of the concepts and orientations which

surround them'. Law-like models based on abstract notions of efficiency and adaptation (e.g. Torrence 1989) cannot account for the cultural diversity so clearly manifest in the varied responses of particular societies to similar environmental and social conditions (see McBryde 1984). Moreover, a functionalist approach is reductive in that human action is assumed to be primarily determined by specific environmental factors, with the exception of supposedly expedient stylistic peculiarities which are regarded as the product of normative processes.

On the other hand, normative and structuralist approaches fail to provide an adequate account of the generation of social structure in the course of social action, and as a result people are represented as culturally determined dupes mechanistically obeying normative rules or structures. As in functionalist approaches, where human agency is often subordinated to environmental determinism, the role of human agency is also curtailed in structuralist approaches, where it is determined by abstract structures that lie outside the domain of individual and group history (Bourdieu 1977:72; Hodder 1982b:8–9). Moreover, as normative and structuralist approaches tend to disregard adaptive processes, and fail to develop an account of the generation of norms or social structures with relation to human agency, they do not provide an adequate framework for the analysis of processes of social change (Hodder 1982b:8).

All social practices and social relations are structured by cultural schemes of meaning which mediate social relations and social action. However, as discussed in Chapter 5, such structuring principles are not abstract mental rules, but rather durable dispositions towards certain perceptions and practices. Such dispositions become part of an individual's sense of self at an early age, and operate largely in the domain of practical consciousness—that is, these cultural dispositions structure people's decisions and actions, but often lie beyond their ability to describe, and thus formalize, their behaviour in the realm of discursive consciousness. The structural orientations making up the *habitus* are essentially dialectical in that they both structure, and are structured by, social practice—they are both the medium and the outcome of practice. Moreover, such structural orientations do not have an existence of their own outside of human action, but rather are only manifested in the context of social practice where they are reproduced and transformed. Such an approach provides a theoretical framework which resolves the dichotomy between functionalism and structuralism. Human behaviour can still be considered to achieve certain functional ends, to provide for basic needs, desires and goals; however, such needs and interests are defined and negotiated by people within a culturally structured situation, as are the functions that particular practices perform (Bourdieu 1977:76).

Material culture is an active constitutive dimension of social practice in that it both structures human agency and is a product of that agency (Hodder 1986:74).[6] The social practices and social structures involved in the

production, use and consumption of material culture become embodied by it, because such processes occur within meaningful cultural contexts (see MacKenzie 1991:191–201; Miller 1985:11–12). Yet material culture may operate simultaneously in a number of social fields and its meaning is not fixed, but subject to reproduction and transformation in terms of both material curation and interpretation throughout its social life (see Kopytoff 1986; MacKenzie 1991:26–7; Thomas 1991:28–9). Thus, material culture is polysemous, and its meanings may vary through time depending upon its particular social history, the position of particular social agents, and the immediate context of its use. Moreover, material culture is not merely a repository of accumulated meaning inscribed in it by its production and use in different social contexts and by differentially situated social agents. It plays an active role in the structuring of cultural practices, because the culturally specific meanings with which material culture is endowed as a result of former practices influence successive practices and interpretations.

For instance, MacKenzie's (1991) detailed analysis of the cultural construction of Telefol string bags illustrates the dialectical relationship between the meaning of a particular item of material culture and the reproduction and transformation of social relations in the spheres of gender, age differentiation, ethnic identities, exchange, kinship relations, ritual and myth. Mackenzie has convincingly demonstrated that, through their use in everyday practice and in ritual symbolism, the meanings attributed to string bags play an active role in the construction of an individual's social and cultural identity. Moreover, through their role in the mediation and justification of social relations, such as between men and women, they are involved in the structuring of social practices and social interaction. For instance, the bird-feather *bilum* (string bag) worn by men is an expression of sexual differentiation, which signifies both opposition/separation and dependency/integration between genders (MacKenzie 1991:201). This particular *bilum* is introduced to boys at the beginning of male initiation and the ideas associated with it play a role in the internalization of notions of sexual differentiation and masculinity (ibid.: 204–5). The bird-feather *bilum* is polysemous, meaning different things to different people in different social contexts, and it is involved in the mediation and legitimation of social relations and the structuring of activities between genders, in different contexts, and at different stages in the life cycle of the Telefol (ibid.: 192–4, 204–5).

Miller's (1985) analysis of pottery from Dangwara village in the Malwa region of India, and Taylor's (1987) analysis of Kunwinjku bark paintings in western Arnhem Land, Australia, also provide compelling examples of the active, constitutive role of material culture in the mediation of social relations and the construction of identities. Such studies suggest that material culture cannot be regarded as a passive reflection of rule-governed activities as it has been within the so-called normative archaeology.

Moreover, any distinction between passive and active dimensions of material culture, such as between Sackett's isochrestic variation and Wiessner's communicative style, is undermined because *all* material culture is active in the processes of social production, reproduction and transformation (Conkey 1991:13; Shanks and Tilley 1992 [1987]:146). As Hodder (1982a:213; see also Miller 1985:205) has argued,

> Structures of meaning are present in all the daily trivia of life and in the major adaptive decisions of human groups. Material culture patterning is formed as part of these meaningful actions and it helps to constitute changing frameworks of action and belief.

Cultural change is generated by the intersection of the meanings embodied in the material and non-material worlds, and new contexts of interpretation and action in which agents act strategically on the basis of the structured dispositions of the *habitus*.

One of the main implications of this argument for archaeologists is that structure and function cannot be regarded as distinct domains—structure provides the framework through which function is defined. Moreover, the structured orientations of the *habitus* manifest themselves in different ways in different contexts with relation to various sets of social relations and cultural practices. It follows that it is necessary to adopt a contextual and historical approach to the analysis of archaeological remains in order to try to understand the social practices and social relations which extended beyond the structure and content of material culture distributions (Hodder 1982b; 1986).

ETHNICITY AND MATERIAL CULTURE

Having established a broad framework for the interpretation of material culture that avoids the problems associated with both functionalist and normative approaches, it is possible to reconsider the interpretation of ethnicity in archaeology. An overriding concern with the instrumental dynamics of ethnicity in anthropology and sociology since the late 1960s has resulted in a distinction between culture and ethnicity, the latter being framed in primarily socio-economic and political terms. The cultural dimensions of ethnicity, and to some extent the very existence of ethnic groups, have been taken for granted and research has tended to focus on the manipulation of cultural difference in the pursuit of individual and group interests. Culture, within this framework, is reduced to an epiphenomenal and arbitrary set of symbols randomly selected from existing practices and beliefs, or even brought into being in order to signify ethnicity and justify instrumental ends. A similar tendency can be identified in certain archaeological studies of the use of style in the communication of ethnicity

and other forms of social identity (e.g. Hodder 1979a; Wiessner 1983; Wobst 1977). Such approaches are both functionalist and reductionist; stylistic patterns in material culture are assumed to exist in order to achieve certain ends, such as the communication of identity.

Theories that focus exclusively on instrumental aspects of ethnicity fail to address a number of key issues. How are the commonalities of identity and interest associated with ethnicity generated? What is the nature of the relationship between ethnic identities and the cultural practices, or symbols associated with them? In short, what is the relationship between culture and ethnicity?[7] It was argued in Chapter 5 that sensations of ethnic affinity are based on the recognition, at both a conscious and subconscious level, of similar habitual dispositions which are embodied in the cultural practices and social relations in which people are engaged. Such structural dispositions provide the basis for the perception of ethnic similarity and difference when people from diverse cultural traditions come into interaction with one another, leading to forms of self-reflexive cultural comparison. It is in such contexts that particular cultural practices and beliefs, which to some extent embody the underlying structures of the *habitus,* become objectified and rationalized in the representation of ethnic difference. Ethnicity is not a direct reflection of the *habitus,* or of culture. The construction of ethnicity, and the objectification of cultural difference that this entails, is a product of the intersection of people's habitual dispositions with the concrete social conditions characterizing any given historical situation. These conditions include the nature of social interaction, and the relative distribution of the material and symbolic means necessary for the imposition of dominant regimes of ethnic categorization.

Material culture is frequently implicated in both the recognition and expression of ethnicity; it both contributes to the formulation of ethnicity and is structured by it. Certain aspects of material culture may become involved in the self-conscious signification of identity, and the justification and negotiation of ethnic relations. As a result, distinctive forms and styles of material culture may be actively maintained and withheld in the process of signalling ethnicity, whilst other forms and styles may cross-cut ethnic boundaries (see Earth 1969a; Hodder 1982a). However, in contrast to instrumentalist theories, the approach developed here suggests that the 'choice' of distinctive cultural forms and styles used in signalling ethnic boundaries is not arbitrary. Rather, the self-conscious expression of ethnicity through material culture is linked to the structural dispositions of the *habitus,* which infuse all aspects of the cultural practices and social relations characterizing a particular way of life (see Burley *et al.* 1992:6–7). This argument is supported by ethno-archaeological studies, such as those of Hodder (1982a) and Larick (1986; 1991), which have revealed that the manifestation of inter-ethnic relations, and the expression of ethnic difference, are linked to cultural practices and social differentiation within

the group. Furthermore, Hodder's (1982a:54–5) research indicated a correlation between dimensions of material culture that are not part of the overt signification of ethnicity, as in the case of the position of hearths within huts, and self-conscious ethnic signification in other dimensions of material culture, such as in items of dress. As Hodder (1982a:56) has observed, 'tribal distinctions become acceptable and "naturalized" by their continued repetition in both public and private', and there is 'a continual interplay between different spheres and types of material culture'.

The practice theory of ethnicity advocated here provides the basis for a re-evaluation of the debate between Sackett (1985) and Wiessner (1983, 1984, 1985) about the nature of stylistic variation and the way in which ethnic markers are manifested in material culture. On the basis of her analysis of stylistic variation in San projectile points, and the ways in which such variation is articulated in terms of group differentiation by the San, Wiessner argued that emblemic style clearly marks differences between language groups and may function at the level of the dialect and/or band cluster:

> for the San, the emblemic style carries a clear message to members of a linguistic group as to whether arrows come from their own group or a foreign one. In the former case it signals that the maker also holds similar values. In the latter case, the stylistic difference may either signal another set of values or practices, if the two groups are known to one another, or if not, that its maker is foreign and his behaviour is unpredictable.
>
> (Wiessner 1983:269)

In his critique, Sackett (1985:156) disputed both Wiessner's theoretical approach and her interpretation of stylistic variation in San projectile points. He argued for a narrower view of active style, called iconological style, which he defined as conscious purposive signalling. According to Sackett, iconocism constitutes only a small dimension of ethnic style, most of which is inherent in isochrestic variation; that is passive variation which arises from enculturation within a bounded ethnic context. Moreover, he has argued that the formal variation that Wiessner has observed in San projectile points can be explained in terms of passive isochresticism rather than the active use of style to signal identity (Sackett 1985:157–8).

Within the terms of their debate it appears that there is little evidence to suggest that the San projectile points are produced in a certain form *in order to* actively signal self-conscious identity to a specific target group such as a different language group. San who do not live in the vicinity of linguistic boundaries are only vaguely conscious of linguistic differentiation, so it is difficult to attribute the production and maintenance of stylistic difference in projectile points to an intentional desire to signal linguistic boundaries. However, the question of intentionality in the production of particular styles

of projectile point is not a relevant issue; it is clear that in certain contexts, such as the ethnographic situation created by Wiessner's study, variation in projectile points underlies a consciousness of difference in a variety of spheres, and becomes implicated in the signification and structuring of social relations.

Thus, in many situations style in projectile points constitutes Sackett's so-called isochrestic variation, but in some contexts it becomes involved in the recognition of ethnic difference and may *become active* in signifying identity, a point that is recognized by Wiessner (1985:162; 1989:58) in her later work. The problem with Sackett's argument is that he assumes that his isochrestic variation can be correlated with ethnicity. On the contrary, isochrestic variation in material culture can be usefully compared with Bourdieu's concept of the *habitus,* although it constitutes a transformed and congealed representation of the generative structures of the *habitus*. As such, isochrestic variation 'provides the resources for ethnic identity, and indeed for emblemic and assertive uses of style in general' (Shennan 1989b:20), but neither isochresticism nor the *habitus* is equivalent to ethnicity. In the case of the San projectile points, habitual modes of arrow-head production provide the basis for the generation of ethnicity, or at least a 'we'/'they' consciousness, in contexts where the arbitrary nature of particular modes of arrow-head production has been exposed through processes of cultural comparison.

If such contexts of interaction and comparison occur repeatedly and social action and interaction are expressed and mediated in terms of categories of cultural difference, then these categories are likely to become increasingly institutionalized. In some situations, such as inter-group conflict or competition over scarce resources, such categories may be more fixed, whereas in others they may be very fluid; yet in all instances they will vary in different spatial and temporal contexts. Moreover, ethnic categories may persist, whilst the material culture involved in the conscious signification of these categories changes, and likewise the ethnic referent of particular styles of material culture may change, whilst the styles themselves remain the same. Thus, the relationship between material culture styles and the expression of ethnicity may be constantly shifting according to time and place. Material styles which in some social and historical contexts are actively taken up in the signification and negotiation of ethnicity may, in other contexts, only form part of the meaningful environment in which ethnicity is generated (e.g. see MacKenzie 1991:14; Praetzellis *et al.* 1987; Wiessner 1985:162).

This approach has a number of important implications for the analysis of ethnicity in archaeology. In contrast to the traditional culture concept, it has been suggested that whether or not spatially and temporally bounded distributions of material culture are the product of a similar enculturative milieu, or a common *habitus,* they *do not necessarily 'map' the extent and*

boundaries of self-conscious ethnic groups in the past. Ethnicity must be distinguished from mere spatial continuity and discontinuity in that it refers to self-conscious identification with a particular group of people (Shennan 1989b:19). Although it has been argued that ethnic consciousness is, in part, based on the recognition of commonalities of practice and historical experience, it is also a product of the conditions prevailing in particular social and historical contexts. Thus, the extent to which ethnicity is embedded in pre-existing cultural realities, or a shared *habitus,* is highly variable and contingent upon the cultural transformations engendered by processes of interaction, and the nature of the power relations between the interacting 'groups'.[8] From an archaeological point of view these processes may lead to a variety of different scenarios. In some instances, there may be a high degree of homology between the structuring principles of the *habitus* and the signification of ethnicity in both material and non-material culture (as in Hodder's (1982a) study of the Baringo District). In other instances, there may be a dislocation of such homologous relationships between the structuring principles of the *habitus* and the generation and expression of a common ethnic identity, resulting in the incorporation of a *bricolage* of different cultural traditions (cf. Rowlands 1982:164). The former situation will lead to a high degree of homology between so-called isochrestic style and the signification of ethnicity, and the latter to a much smaller degree of commensurability between the two.

Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that, even in situations characterized by a high degree of homology between the *habitus* and ethnicity, archaeologists may not be able to find 'ethnic entities' reflected in material culture distributions (cf. Miller 1985:202 in relation to caste). It is possible to question the very existence of bounded, homogeneous ethnic entities except at a conceptual level in the abstract cultural categories employed in people's discursive articulation of ethnicity. Such conceptual categories are based on the reification or objectification of transient cultural practices taking place at different times and in different contexts, and the 'group' only exists in the context of interpretation where it justifies and explains past practices and modes of interaction, and structures future ones (cf. Bourdieu 1977:20–2; Thomas 1996:75). In contrast, the praxis of ethnicity, and this is what is most likely to be represented in the archaeological record, results in a set of transient, but often repeated, realizations of ethnic difference in particular contexts. These realizations of ethnicity are both structured and structuring, involving, in many instances, the production and consumption of distinctive styles of material culture. However, they are a product of the intersection of the perceptual and practical dispositions of social agents and the interests and oppositions engendered in particular social contexts rather than abstract categories of difference.

Thus, configurations of ethnicity, and consequently the styles of material

culture involved in the signification and structuring of ethnic relations, may vary in different social contexts and with relation to different forms and scales of social interaction. The multidimensional nature of ethnicity may result in a complex pattern of overlapping material-culture distributions relating to the repeated realization and transformation of ethnicity in different social contexts, rather than a discrete monolithic cultural entity. Patterns in the production and consumption of material culture involved in the communication of the 'same' ethnic identity may vary qualitatively as well as quantitatively in different contexts. Furthermore, items of material culture that are widely distributed and used in a variety of social and historical contexts may be curated and consumed in different ways and become implicated in the generation and signification of a variety of expressions of ethnicity (see Thomas 1996:78–82, for a similar argument).

The relationship between ethnicity and material culture thus appears to be intangible and fleeting, and particularly problematic for archaeologists. Not surprisingly, familiarity with recent anthropological theories of ethnicity has led some archaeologists to adopt an extremely sceptical stance and to suggest that ethnicity is not an appropriate or accessible phenomenon for archaeological enquiry (Trigger 1977:22–3; 1996:277; see also Buchignani 1987). This argument generally hinges on the time-worn issue of whether 'archaeologists can verifiably recover any ideas, as opposed to behaviour, of the groups they study' (Trigger 1977:23); archaeologists do not have *direct* access to people's ideas and perceptions.

The inaccessibility of individual motivations and understandings is usually dealt with in social archaeology through the analysis of the 'deep' processes and structures that underpinned individual actions (cf. Barrett: 1994:2–3). Variations on such an approach tend to be adopted by the few archaeologists who have defined ethnicity as an aspect of social process involved in the organization of human behaviour, and acknowledged that the relationship between material culture and a consciousness of ethnicity is not a fixed or intrinsic one (e.g. Haaland 1977; Hodder 1979a; Kimes *et al.* 1982). Research from this position is based on the argument that the systematization and rationalization of distinctive cultural styles in the process of the recognition, expression, and negotiation of ethnic identity in the past may have produced discontinuous, non-random distributions of material culture accessible to the archaeologist. In addition, it is often proposed that, as ethnicity is involved in the organization of behaviour, it is possible to predict that under certain past conditions, such as economic stress, ethnic boundaries are likely to have been invoked, and to have been more marked than in other situations (e.g. Hodder 1979a; Blackmore *et al.* 1979). Yet such research has tended to be undermined by the fact that ethnic symbolism is culture-specific and there is little evidence for any cross-cultural universals (although see Washburn 1989). In response, the use of independent evidence has been advocated in an attempt to establish the

kinds of identity and modes of behaviour that underlie particular distributions of material culture (e.g. Haaland 1977; Hodder 1979a; Wiessner 1989:58). For instance, Hodder (1979a:151–2) has argued that the localization of pottery styles evident in the French neolithic, was related to the symbolism of within-group solidarity and dependence, on the basis of positive evidence for environmental stress. He further strengthened his argument by arguing that localization of pottery styles cannot be otherwise explained in terms of a decrease in the scale of social interaction because there is also independent evidence for increased interaction and exchange between 'groups' at this time.

Despite the potential of such approaches, they have a tendency to fall into the functionalist mode of reasoning which has been criticized throughout this book. For instance, in her critique of the interpretation of Early Nubian tool types as ethnic idioms, Haaland (1977) argues that variation in these artefacts can be explained in terms of adaptive, socio-economic factors, thus ruling out an ethnic interpretation.[9] The problem with such an approach is that, as indicated in Wiessner's study of San projectile points, 'functional' or 'adaptive' variation may become involved in the recognition and articulation of ethnic difference. Furthermore, ethnicity may be actively involved in the mediation of social relations, including economic and political relationships. Thus, a functional or economic interpretation of a particular non-random distribution does not preclude an ethnic interpretation, because ethnicity may have been embedded in variation in subsistence and economy. In such circumstances it becomes very difficult to clearly 'rule out' ethnicity on the basis of other explanations for variation in material culture.

The theoretical approach developed here suggests an alternative to both an outright rejection of ethnicity as a valid subject of archaeological enquiry, and a functionalist approach to ethnicity in which culture is reduced to a seemingly arbitrary and secondary role. The analysis of contextual realizations of ethnicity is by no means entirely beyond the possibilities of archaeological interpretation if, as argued here, there is a relationship between the historically constituted dispositions and orientations that inform people's understandings and practices, and the recognition and expression of ethnicity. As such, the way in which particular styles of material culture are meaningfully involved in the articulation of ethnicity may be arbitrary across cultures, *but it is not random within particular socio-historical contexts*. Ethnic symbolism is generated, to varying degrees, from the existing cultural practices and modes of differentiation characterizing various social domains, such as gender and status differentiation, or the organization of space within households (see Eriksen 1991).[10]

Thus, a broad understanding of past cultural contexts derived from a variety of sources and classes of data is an essential part of any analysis of

ethnicity in archaeology. In particular, it is necessary to examine modes of social interaction and the distribution of material and symbolic power between groups of people, because, as argued above, ethnicity is a product of the intersection of similarities and differences in people's *habitus* and the conditions characterizing any given historical situation. An adequate knowledge of past social organization is also important, as ethnicity is both a transient construct of repeated acts of interaction and communication, and an aspect of social organization which becomes institutionalized to different degrees, and in different forms, in different societies. Moreover, an historical approach is crucial, given the role of historical process in the generation and expression of ethnicity (cf. Olsen and Kobylinski 1991). Within a diachronic contextual framework it may be possible to pick up the transformation of habitual material variation into active self-conscious ethnic symbolism, and vice versa, on the basis of changes in the nature and distribution of the styles involved (Wiessner 1989:58); to reveal something about the contexts in which ethnicity is generated, reproduced and transformed, and to examine 'the mobilization of group as process' (Conkey 1991:13).

The approach developed here requires a reconsideration not only of the interpretation of ethnicity, but also of the assumptions that underlie the explanation of variation in material culture more generally in archaeology. The recognition that material culture plays an active role in the generation and signification of ethnicity undermines the common assumption that degrees of similarity and difference in material culture provide a straightforward indicator of the intensity of interaction between past groups (see Hodder 1982a). Furthermore, research into the role of material culture in the generation and expression of ethnicity has revealed that it is not a passive reflection of socialization within bounded ethnic units. Rather, material culture is actively structured and structuring throughout its social life, and consequently its meaning is not fixed but constantly subject to reproduction and transformation. As Shanks and Tilley (1987:97) have indicated, a particular material form may remain the same, but its meaning will alter in different contexts; it will be 'consumed in different ways, appropriated and incorporated into various symbolic structures according to historical tradition and social context'. On this basis it cannot be assumed *a priori* that similarity in material culture reflects the presence of a particular group of people in the past, an index of social interaction, or a shared normative framework.

More fundamentally, the theoretical approach adopted here questions the very existence of ethnic groups as coherent, monolithic entities within which enculturation can be relied upon to have produced a uniform spread of culture which undergoes gradual change through time. As indicated in Chapter 2, such assumptions, although frequently challenged at an interpretive level, still underlie a great deal of archaeological classification. Thus, at a very fundamental level, questioning these taken-for-granted

notions about the inherent boundedness of groups or the inevitable transformations of social units through time should lead to a radical change not just in the way we conceptualize culture but in how we conceptualize description or representation.

(Conkey 1991:12)

Notes

1 INTRODUCTION

1. 'New archaeology' refers to the initial period of processual archaeology connected in particular with Lewis Binford (1962, 1965, 1972), although others include Clarke (1978 [1968]), Renfrew (1972), and contributors to Binford and Binford (1968). For critical perspectives of the new archaeology see, amongst others, Hodder (1982b, 1986) and Shanks and Tilley (1992 [1987]).
2. A considerable body of literature focusing on archaeology as a contemporary practice and its social and political contexts has been produced in the 1980s and 1990s; see, amongst others, Kristiansen (1992), Shanks and Tilley (1992 [1987]), Trigger (1984, 1989), Ucko (1983b; 1987), and contributions to Gathercole and Lowenthal (1990), Pinsky and Wylie (1989), Stone and MacKenzie (1990), Ucko (1995a).
3. For general discussions of the role of archaeology in the construction of communities of shared memory see, amongst others, Jones and Graves-Brown (1996), Kristiansen (1992), Layton (1989b), Rowlands (1994), Trigger (1984), Ucko (1995b). For detailed case studies, see Arnold (1990), Dietler (1994); Fleury-Ilett (1996), Kohl (1993b), Murray (1993), Olsen (1986), and contributions to Bond and Gilliam (1994a), Díaz-Andreu and Champion (1996b); Graves-Brown *et al.* (1996), Kohl and Fawcett (1995b), Layton (1989a), Ucko (1995a).
4. Even in recent books, the complexity of the relationship between archaeological enquiry and the construction of diverse forms of identity has been ignored or acknowledged only in passing. This tendency can facilitate the detailed analysis of particular areas such as the influence of the structures of the nation-state on the institutionalization of archaeology (e.g. see contributions to Díaz-Andreu and Champion 1996b). But it can also lead to an oversimplification of the issues and a preoccupation with the ills of extreme nationalism at the expense of a consideration of other forms of group identity, such as minority and indigenous identities (e.g. see contributions to Kohl and Fawcett 1995b).
5. It should be noted that the works of many so-called 'post-processual' archaeologists do not fit Kohl's (1993a) caricature. Post-processualists are often explicitly concerned with the political realities which Kohl refers to while at the same time engaging in abstract theoretical debates. Indeed, in later work, Kohl himself refers to some of the work of these post-processual archaeologists in a discussion of studies concerning the relationship between

(1993:7), Pardon (1987:177), Foster (1991:239), Handler and Linnekin (1984:288), Ranger (1983:252–9), Spencer (1990:288) and Williams (1989:423–6).

9 The ways in which 'anthropological' and 'native' concepts of ethnicity intersect with one another have been discussed by Clifford (1988:232–3), Pardon (1987:182), Foster (1991:236), Handler (1986:2; 1988:6–9), Spencer (1990:288) and Turner (1991:300–3).

6 ETHNICITY AND MATERIAL CULTURE: TOWARDS A THEORETICAL BASIS FOR THE INTERPRETATION OF ETHNICITY IN ARCHAEOLOGY

1 Although Hodder (1982a) and Wiessner (1983, 1984) do not explicitly define ethnic groups as self-defining systems, their ethno-archaeological studies suggest that they are also concerned with the role of material culture in expressing the boundaries of self-conscious groups.

2 Shanks and Tilley (1992 [1987]:120) question the notion of 'society' as a bounded, monolithic unit, and Rowlands (1982:163–4) argues that such a view of society is the product of nineteenth-century nationalism. Others such as Binford (1972) and Renfrew (1977:95–6; 1995:157) have questioned the existence of widespread, homogeneous ethnic groups or 'peoples' in early prehistory from an evolutionary perspective. However, they are concerned to define such groups as characteristic of particular stages of evolutionary development, and they do not question the existence of such groups in certain historical periods or in the present.

3 The distinction between function and style which is characteristic of new archaeology can also be identified in culture-historical archaeology. For instance, such a distinction underlies Childe's (1956:37–8) assertion that arbitrary stylistic and behavioural details were the most useful attributes for the purpose of defining cultures, and were of limited importance with relation to the analysis of culture as a functioning system. Nevertheless, these ideas were not central to culture-historical epistemology.

4 Some of the main proponents of such an approach, which was particularly prevalent in the analysis of palaeolithic art, as well as the signalling of ethnic and social identities generally, include Conkey (1978), Gamble (1982), Jochim (1983), Wiessner (1983) and Wobst (1977).

5 For a more general discussion of the problems associated with this dichotomy, see Hodder (1982b; 1986), Shanks and Tilley (1987, 1992 [1987]) and Tilley (1982).

6 A number of archaeologists and anthropologists have argued that the relationship between material culture and human agency is a recursive one, for example, see Barrett (1994:36–7), Conkey (1991:13), Hodder (1982a, 1982b:10), MacKenzie (1991), Miller (1985) and Shanks and Tilley (1987, 1992 [1987]).

7 In a review of anthropological and archaeological approaches to ethnicity Olsen and Kobylinski (1991:23; my emphasis) have also argued that the question of the relationship between culture and ethnicity represents one of the key issues for archaeologists: 'Before we start sticking ethnic labels to archaeologically distinguishable complexes of finds we have to understand the phenomenon of ethnicity itself *and particularly we have to develop a theory of relationships between ethnic consciousness and material culture*.'

8 It is this critical break between ethnicity and the *habitus* (see also Chapter 5) which distinguishes the theory adopted here from that of Burley *et al.* (1992) who argue for a much more direct relationship between ethnicity and the *habitus* following on from Bentley's (1987) work.

9 A similar argument is adopted by the Binfords (1966; see also Binford 1973) in their criticism of ethnic interpretations of Mousterian lithic assemblages, and by Peacock (1969, 1979) in his critique of ethnic interpretations of regional pottery styles in Iron Age Britain.

10 Olsen and Kobylinski (1991:16) have adopted a similar position, arguing that archaeologists should attempt to investigate the ways in which basic value orientations and their behavioural effects underlie the maintenance of ethnic boundaries. However, they do not provide a theoretical framework for exploring the relationship between such 'basic value orientations' and overt ethnic symbolism.

7 CONCLUSIONS: CONSTRUCTING IDENTITIES IN THE PAST AND THE PRESENT

1 See Webster (1996:8) for a similar argument in defence of comparative research based on the concept of colonialism in opposition to the recent trend towards historical particularism.

2 To give an example, even the absence of Rosette brooches from phase III assemblages at Skeleton Green has been interpreted as indicating a change in the character of the settlement (possibly a decline in occupation) between AD 25–40, because such brooches are present at the nearby sites of King Harry Lane and Camulodunum (Mackreth 1981:139). Such an interpretation makes direct use of the 'homogeneity principle', assuming that Skeleten Green *should* follow the same patterns of development, as represented by artefact types, as adjacent sites. No allowance is made for the possibility that such brooches may themselves have been actively used in the articulation of identities, therefore indicating heterogeneity within a given region.

3 Without historical or radiocarbon 'controls' at various points the typological method can lead to serious distortions largely produced by a priori assumptions about the nature and direction of change (see Renfrew 1972).

4 It is accepted that a certain selectivity is an inevitable product of the pragmatic limitations placed upon excavation; limitations of finance, storage, time and so on. However, problems are raised by the reasoning employed in the prioritization of certain classes of artefact, the methods used, and the implicit nature of the assumptions involved.

5 Similar arguments have been made in the recent literature emphasizing what Woolf (1992) has referred to as the 'unity and diversity of Romanization' (e.g. Haselgrove 1990; Hingley 1996; Meadows 1994; Willis 1994), and in recent publications on the late pre-Roman Iron Age (e.g. Hill 1995).

6 Furthermore, problems have arisen concerning attempts to set up 'culture houses', which are intended to form the locus of a local, dynamic ongoing involvement with the past, and active centres for community cultural activities in the present. Despite these initial aims, such cultural centres have been subject to control and intervention by national authorities which effectively alienates the local populations. For instance, at Murewa Culture House the traditional spirit mediums, *n'angas,* have been banned, because they are seen as a source of tension by the national authorities. Ironically, such tensions, and their

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