

AFTER INTERPRETATION: REMEMBERING ARCHAEOLOGY

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In the light of some significant anniversaries, this paper discusses the fate of archaeological theory after the heyday of postprocessualism. While once considered a radical and revolutionary alternative, post-processual or interpretative archaeology remarkably soon became normalized, mainstream and hegemonic, leading to the theoretical lull that has characterized its aftermath. Recently, however, this consensual pause has been disrupted by new materialist perspectives that radically depart from the postprocessual orthodoxy. Some outcomes of these perspectives are proposed and discussed, the most significant being a *return to archaeology* – an archaeology that sacrifices the imperatives of historical narratives, sociologies, and hermeneutics in favour of a trust in the soiled and ruined things themselves and the memories they afford.

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We are haunted by anniversaries. Each year there is something from the past which we can celebrate, mourn about or which otherwise is regarded as sufficiently significant to be remembered. And this year, of course, is no exception. Even when we limit the scope to archaeology, and even more eccentrically to theoretical archaeology, there is actually still quite a lot that comes to mind. For example, this year marks the fiftieth anniversary of Lewis Binford's groundbreaking "Archaeol-

ogy as Anthropology”, probably the single most famous paper in our discipline, while forty years have passed since the publication of influential volumes such as *An Archaeological Perspective* (Binford 1972) and *Models in Archaeology* (Clarke 1972) (though not quite matching the revolutionary impact of Binford and Binford's *New Perspectives* from 1968).

Neither should the second year of the following decade have much reason for theoretical archaeological embarrassment, by allowing us now to celebrate the thirtieth anniversary of Ian Hodder's postprocessual manifestos *Symbolic and Structural Archaeology* and *Symbols in Action* (see also Flannery 1982, Leone 1982, Renfrew *et al.* 1982 from that *annus mirabilis*). Younger decadal anniversaries are for several reasons more difficult to pinpoint, but Michael Shanks' perhaps less famous but impressively relevant *Experiencing the Past* (1992) deserves a mention. And if we refine our search to lustrums we may from the last decades extend the list with classics such as James Deetz's *In Small Things Forgotten* (1977) and, of course, Shanks and Tilley's guerrilla attacks *Reconstructing Archaeology* and *Social Theory and Archaeology* ten years later (Shanks and Tilley 1987a, 1987b).

As probably noted, the list is entirely Anglo-American, which probably reflects both past hegemony and academic strength (see however below), but an anniversary list from Nordic archaeology could also be made quite long (e.g. Tallgren 1937; Malmer 1962; Gjessing 1977; Johansen 1982; Bertelsen *et al.* 1987; Olsen 1987; Johnsen & Olsen 1992; Andrén 1997). (A note to those already agitated: this is not an exhaustive or well-researched list – even among those lucky enough to have published something relatively theoretically significant in a year ending with 2 or 7.) And if that wasn't enough reason to celebrate (the Maya calendar notwithstanding), this is the twentieth volume of *Current Swedish Archaeology*. Hurrah!

Anniversaries provide you with certain opportunities and excuses, also to look back and to put things into perspective – both past and present ones. Still, when asked by the editors of *CSA*, in light of these post-processual anniversaries and the coming of age of this journal, to reflect on where we stand today in terms of theoretical archaeology in Sweden and Scandinavia, I hesitated. My reluctance was not only grounded in the usual stress that accompanies work and a far too perfunctory use of the interjection “yes”, but also a number of doubts, uncertainties, and paradoxes. For example, and not entirely insignificant, what should count as theoretical archaeology? Why, for example, is Deetz's book, “an account of the archaeology of early American life”, included in the theoretical hit parade above? Does theory (and theorizing) have to be

explicit? Does it constitute an ontological realm distinct from practice (and *doing* archaeology)? Moreover, what happens with such concepts and associated divides when we stop believing in the conventional modernist hierarchy, where theory is the head and practice is the obedient acting body? Or even stop thinking that theory always intervenes and is indispensable to understanding, and instead admit that the things themselves have a say, and sometimes a very substantial one, for how meaning is arrived at (cf. Olsen 2010; Edgeworth 2012)? Finally, and in light of globalization and ever-expanding personal and institutional networks, are geo-political boundaries (e.g. Sweden, Scandinavia) still a pertinent framework to analyse and discuss current archaeological discourses – or do we end up “retrofitting” (Latour 1999) such entities as analytically meaningful to our inquiries?

Nevertheless, as you can see, I continued my slide down the perfunctory line and agreed to undertake this difficult and quite ungrateful task. To prepare my defence, it is important to state that this is not – NOT – a scrutinizing review of theoretical trends in Scandinavian archaeology or elsewhere. Rather it is more of a personal excursion into a disciplinary landscape of the recent past, to which are added some reflections on the current state of archaeology as well as some predictions, or measured guesses, about the future. Needless to say, all this is affected by what I have done and read, by my likes and dislikes, by whom I am talking to and collaborating with, and even if the space does not allow too much extravaganza a number of subjects will undoubtedly fall through my sieve due to such biases and preferences. Still I hopefully have a few things to say about the past and the future that may be interesting to discuss. And in the safe *oeuvre* of archaeology let us start with the past.

THEORETICAL ARCHAEOLOGY – THEN AND LATER

In 2007 a remarkable event took place in the world of archaeological publishing. The volume *Structural and Symbolic Archaeology (SSA)* (Hodder 1982), originating from papers presented at a theoretical fringe conference in Cambridge in 1980, was reprinted. And as a further marking of its 25th anniversary the *Cambridge Journal of Archaeology (CAJ)* ran a discussion of the significance of the volume under the heading “Revolution Fulfilled? *Symbolic and Structural Archaeology*, a Generation On” (*CAJ* 17(2):199–228). One of the participants, Stephen Shennan, made the following and seemingly quite common observation:

When it first appeared *Symbolic and Structural Archaeology* was seen, rightly, as a revolutionary volume setting out a new direction for the discipline, in a consciously challenging manner. On re-reading it 25 years later I found the most surprising thing to be how mild and normal it all seemed. This is clearly a measure of how successful the revolution has been in changing people's attitudes... (Shennan 2007:220).

Or as the *CAJ* editors state in their introduction, "the challenger has become the establishment; the once unthinkable has become normal science" (*CAJ* 2007:199). In other words, the once revolutionary manifesto of postprocessual archaeology has become everyone's archaeology. I made a similar assessment more than a decade ago in terms of the postprocessual influence on Norwegian and Swedish university archaeology (Olsen 1999:12; 2002), which already by the late 1990s had become so strong and normalized that it had lost its alternative, radical image. I furthermore claimed that this "normalization" diagnosed (and explained) what seemed to be another conspicuous trend at the turn of the century: A less polemical and more calm discursive climate but also, and probably not so desirable, a decline in debates, boldness, and enthusiasm. I shall start with some personal reflections on this shift in theoretical engagement and commitment.

Then

In 1981 the small environment of graduate students in Tromsø started to sense that something strange was going on "out there", more precisely in Britain. The here still so novel "new archaeology", the main challenger to the orthodoxy of "traditional" or culture-historical archaeology, was itself under fire from archaeologists armed with structuralist, critical, and neo-Marxist theory. Early in the spring term 1982 we encountered this new revolution face to face, so to speak. Ian Hodder came to lecture at the university, and one of his lectures being "Theoretical Archaeology – A Reactionary View", the paper introducing the *SSA* volume. I remember very well coming out of the lecture room with the feeling of having experienced something new and revolutionary; this was really something different! I also recall the excitement and enthusiasm that my fellow students and I felt in the coming years when discovering all things theoretically new: structuralism, post-structuralism, neo-Marxism, hermeneutics, etc. And this feeling of excitement reached new heights when I arrived at Cambridge in 1985 on a one-year scholarship. I probably was reasonably theoretically prepared and up-to-date after years of intense reading, but not for the completely different discursive environment I encountered (though being told, as always, that it had been even bet-

ter some years earlier). In contrast to the mostly calm and polite Scandinavian discussions, fierce debates were waged at the packed research seminars in Downing Street, not least during the memorable seminars when Christopher Tilley and Michael Shanks presented chapters from their forthcoming “red book” (Shanks and Tilley 1987b).

Why were we so excited? One reason was clearly the simple fact that we *were* discovering something theoretically new. Walls had collapsed, doors been opened, allowing long if not always very rewarding expeditions into new and alien territories. And the sheer fascination with the new, with the discovery itself, was clearly part of the thrill (Olsen 1999). However, an equally important reason was the feeling of making an impact, of being at a disciplinary turning point, pioneering change; in short, challenging tradition and establishment. Though some of the archaeological establishment in Sweden and Norway were positive and receptive to the new currents (e.g. Hyenstrand 1988; Myhre 1991), there was still a sufficient group of patriots who saw the new ideas as a dangerous threat to the Nordic tradition and who regarded us as beset by devilish tempters from outside (see Gräslund 1989; Näsman 1995; Olsen 1990; 2002:214–216). In other words, not much different from the reactions provoked by the new or processual archaeology some years earlier (cf. Kristiansen 1978; Becker 1979; Jensen 1993:10; Hedeager 1999:22). Operating in this entrenched archaeological landscape was not without risks. However, the divides were exposed and relatively predictable, and the heated reactions the postprocessual ideas caused in some environments were just fuelling the flame. As well expressed by Silvia Tomášková when recalling how she and her fellow graduate students reacted to the disparaging reviews Shanks and Tilley’s books received from American archaeologists:

Being told by an older generation of archaeologists that this was useless or even dangerous knowledge — something we students should avoid at all costs— made it all the more alluring. In retrospect the appeal of these volumes derived as much from the illicit aura surrounding them as the texts themselves. This served as the best form of advertising and encouragement to delve into post-processual theory (Tomášková 2007:214–215).

Later

Jumping to the first decade of the new millennium, the situation had become very different. At least in the Nordic countries, the UK, the Netherlands, and the USA (but probably also elsewhere), theory – including the once so “threatening and destructive” ideas of postprocessualism – was more than ever taught at universities, reflexivity and “criti-

cal thinking” were firmly anchored in courses and curricula. Probably never before had so many archaeologists known so much about theory. As Ian Hodder put it in a turn-of-the-century paper, “Archaeologists ... are more than ever aware of the theoretical underpinnings of all data recovery, description and sequencing, and ... they are more than ever aware of the diversity of theoretical approaches being explored” (Hodder 2002:77).

At the same time this decade saw a decline in explicit theoretical debate, which, for example (and to the extent that it matters), almost vanished from the pages of the two traditionally dominant archaeological journals, *American Antiquity* and *Antiquity* (though admittedly, not exactly an avant-garde journal). One may say that we had arrived at a situation where theory was taught rather than fought. One notable sign of this educational digestion of theory was the increasing number of readers, handbooks, and textbooks available that addressed theoretical issues in archaeology. This phenomenon, *en passant*, just seems to be accelerating with today’s handbook mania precipitated by publishing houses increasingly reluctant to take risks by producing books that cannot become textbooks. In fact, such “introductory” books serving us a gluttonous smorgasbord of varied theoretical perspectives seem now close to outnumbering those genuinely debating theory and proclaiming new perspectives.

To some commentators the development of the 2000s was taken to signal a calmer and less polemical level of debate. The edges were rounded and theory was “made concrete and contextualised”, it had become “an element of practice” (Hodder 2002:88), but also more mature and responsible, promising an “integrated archaeology, one that accepts both the dangers of constructivism and universalism, and recognizes the value of science within the framework of social and individual rights” (Hodder 2007:225). However, these proclaimed signs of a “maturing discipline”, of a “widening discourse”, in this first decade may also be judged very differently – as omens of an emerging new consensus (supported as well by the many claims in those days of reaching a “middle ground” based on “the best” from processual and postprocessual thinking) (e.g. Renfrew 2007). As we remember from Kuhn, an unmistakable sign of a paradigm becoming “normal science” is the calming of debates as the troops of scholars return back to business. Or, in the kindred conception of science studies, it may reflect networks in the process of being stabilized; consensus is arrived at by an increasing number of concepts, theories, methods and opinions being “blackboxed”; i.e. they are successfully internalized and taken for granted (Latour 1987, 1999).

Nearly ten years ago, in 2003, Michael Shanks, Christopher Witmore and I discussed these issues in a paper presented at the workshop series at Stanford Archaeology Center. Here we used the term “innocence regained” (rewriting Clarke 1973) to name what we saw as theoretical trivialization and lack of boldness in the archaeology of those days:

Coming from different perspectives and positions, the three of us share a feeling that the archaeological discourse has “watered out”, theory has become trivialized and lost some of its critical edge. In place of the general and bold concerns characterizing some of the new and early postprocessual archaeology, we are increasingly faced with an “issualism” – archaeologies made actual and relevant to whatever happens to be on the political and public agenda (Olsen, Shanks & Witmore, n.d.: 2).

To others again, all this represented a timely and longed for “death of theory” – seemingly confirming all their self-imposed prejudices.

ARCHAEOLOGY NOW AND TO COME

Back in the present. As part of my preparation for this paper I started rereading *SSA*. Indeed a remarkable and important volume. Important, however, mostly as an historical artefact whose significance is confined to its impact in the past; in other words, for what it inflicted as a perfectly timed statement rather than the substance of what was said. Thus, what strikes me when reading it today (and a few other classics at hand from the 1980s and 1990s) is not how “mild and normal” it all seems, but actually how amazingly dated much of its focus and themes are. Reading chapter after chapter about the individual and society, actor versus structure, about the search for symbols, about material culture being structured according to underlying principles, about other compulsories such as ideology and power (and especially how they are conceived), appeared almost like being exposed to a fossil record of extinct species.

And suddenly the differences between then and now are made explicit; the changes that have taken place during the last decade, and especially during the last few years, become impossible to ignore. Likewise, it became clearer than ever that the perspectives, scopes, topics, that now are emerging cannot be seen as a “natural” continuation and development of themes and positions initiated by postprocessual archaeology. They are rather posing a radical challenge to the very grounding of this archaeology. In other words, what my modest reading exercise helped me realize more clearly is how the presumed normalized post-processual agenda of the 1990s and 2000s is fragmenting. It is decaying

and withering, exposing a ruin landscape interspersed with cracking black boxes. And with a slight shiver of *déjà vu* running through my body, I started thinking the unthinkable: that a new revolution is underway; more silent perhaps, but also more radical and different than the previous ones.

The finds may be few and scattered and my intellectual narcissism might have blown their significance out of proportion, but they are still there. Such that new debates are coming up and that they seem to be of a different kind, revolving around different issues (e.g. Alberti *et al.* 2011; Solli *et al.* 2011; Harrison *et al.* 2011; Edgeworth *et al.* 2012); that new papers, books, and blogs with a different agenda, and a new way of thinking, presenting and doing archaeology, have started to emerge (e.g. Alberti and Bray 2009; Bailey *et al.* 2010; Andreassen *et al.* 2010; Högborg 2009; Normark 2010a; 2010b; Olsen 2010; González-Ruibal *et al.* 2011; Graves-Brown 2011; Olivier 2011; Olsen *et al.* 2012; Pétursdóttir 2012a; forthcoming; Webmoor 2012; Witmore 2012, forthcoming).

In the remaining part of this paper I shall contextualize these stray finds and use them to discuss a few trends which I find indicative of a new archaeology underway, which at the same time reflects both a radical departure from hegemonic archaeological ideas of the late twentieth century and a return to archaeology, the discipline of things par excellence; though a return, perhaps, to where we never have been (to borrow Alfredo González-Ruibal's wonderful phrase). Some of the trends have already become manifest while others should be classified as my predictions as to some of the probable outcomes of this new archaeology. Though most of the issues at the outset may be classified as theoretical, it still needs to be emphasized that this first and foremost is *about archaeology*, explaining the removal of the prefix to the subtitle above. Neither are these issues confined only to topics and thinking, but also involve the political economy of the disciplinary landscape. Thus the first trend is about the emergence of a new and perhaps less perspicuous geography of so-called international archaeology.

First trend: A new geography

Processualism and postprocessualism brought about changes not only in theoretical archaeology but also in the political economy of that archaeology. In the 1980s the theoretical hegemony which American archaeology took on during the regime of the new archaeology was lost and the centre of gravity moved back to Europe (read Britain). Or as formulated by Stephen Shennan in 1986, "the days when keen young undergraduates and research students eagerly awaited the next issue of *American Antiquity* are long gone" (Shennan 1986:327). Needless to

say, today the days when they eagerly awaited the next issue of *Antiquity* (in the unlikely case they ever did), *CAJ* or *Archaeological Review from Cambridge* are also gone. And who considers Cambridge, Southampton, or any other British academic residences as self-evident places to look for theoretical inspiration anymore?

Despite the fact that Anglo-American publishers hold an increasingly greater share of international archaeological publishing (both books and journals), and despite the fact that English is more dominant than ever before, what has been emerging – and increasingly will be emerging – is a less metropolized archaeological landscape (cf. Olsen 1991). The Anglo-American dominance is and will still be strong, but the empire is withering and *alternative* seeds are flourishing in its cracks. Thus, as we already have started to experience, the most exciting ideas are no longer “naturally” to be expected to arrive from sites such as London, Cambridge, Southampton, Stanford, New York, or Tucson but may equally well come from Pretoria, Santiago de Compostela, Poznan, Kyushu, Lubbock, Saint-Germain-en-Laye, Oulu, Reykjavik, Stockholm, Buenos Aires, and Tromsø. Thus, when rewriting this paper in fifty years from now my anniversary list will most probably be very different from the one introducing this edition.

Another trend, perhaps more articulated in theorizing studies than elsewhere, will be the diminishing of national and regional frames for identifying archaeologies. Labels such as Swedish or Scandinavian archaeology will gradually lose their meaning as signifiers for ways of doing archaeology and even more clearly for how to approach its past. Even institutional brand naming will become less obvious as international research groups and networks (alongside mobile and partly independent researchers) will play increasingly more significant roles. This new archaeological geography is in itself, of course, no guarantee for change, nor does it provide any secure means to facilitate it. However, the new reality of simultaneous dispersal and interconnectivity provides a new and less controllable scene for archaeological reasoning.

The causes of this change are beyond the scope of this paper, but the new media reality enabling a very different presence and local-global interface clearly plays an essential role. The impact of the (relatively) new international archaeological societies, the European Association of Archaeologists (EAA) and the World Archaeological Congress (WAC), should also be taken into account by providing different venues and media for debate and publishing. And perhaps there is a certain stagnation, tiredness, and even smugness, in the once so dynamic and inspiring metropolises? Nevertheless, what is for sure is that there is no way back to the old two-party system.

Second trend: A turn to things themselves

Recently things – and thing theory – have become a fashionable subject in the cultural and social sciences. Thus, after a century of oblivion in most social and cultural research, and after decades of linguistic and textual turns, there is now much talk about a material twist: a (re)turn to things (e.g. Preda 1999; Brown 2001; Olsen 2003; Domanska 2006; Trentmann 2009). Some have even suggested a paradigm shift; a turn away from linguistic and humanist hegemony towards posthumanism and new materialisms (e.g. Coole & Frost 2010; Domanska 2010; Wolfe 2010; Bryant 2011; Bryant *et al.* 2011; Bogost 2012). This new intellectual climate clearly provides a major clue in accounting for the changes and debates that recently also have affected archaeology and disrupted the lull characterizing the postprocessual aftermath.

This requires some comments and clarifications raised by two anticipated objections. *First objection:* Isn't this just another version of the familiar old story of archaeologists as theory consumers, responding obediently to whatever happens in supposedly more vital intellectual settlements? The answer is no. Archaeologists themselves are actively and critically contributing to this redrawing of the intellectual landscape. The current situation actually constitutes a rare *archaeological moment*; for the first time since the late 19th century the intellectual currents are in favour of us, making this situation radically different from the two previous twists and turns. While they involved importing and adapting theory developed to study (contemporary) peoples, language and text, the current intellectual fashion is about what has always been our core subject matter: things. Despite the amusing fact that some of the new protagonists seem to think the study of things is a field of their own recent invention (cf. Olsen 2012a, 2012b), this new materialism actually puts archaeologists in a unique position not only to make their skills relevant and to contribute significantly on the intellectual scene, but also to realize the full potential of the archaeological project.

Second objection: Why should archaeology, aptly defined as the “discipline of things par excellence” (Olsen 2003), turn to things(!)? This objection is a bit trickier and thus needs some more comments. First one should note that although archaeology consistently and faithfully has been devoted to things, its relationship with these others has remained somewhat ambiguous, being seriously affected by the shifting and often negative conceptions of things and materiality both in academia and in society at large. Moreover, and most crucial, there is an addendum to the naming of this predicted turn: To the things *themselves*. Indeed, both we and the fast-growing hoards of new thing friends have during

the last decades assigned more importance to things; they've been let in from the cold and made actors and constitutive members of society, which increasingly is *normalized* as a heterogeneous assemblage of people, things and other non-humans (e.g. Gell 1998; Latour 1993, 2005). What seems less cared for in all these brave repatriation attempts is the otherness of things: What happens to their thingness and integrity when expected to feature in those currently popular anthropomorphized roles as actors, extended persons, delegates? Is it just accidental that their entry permit into society seems to prescribe a mode of being that complies surprisingly well with that of the former prime residents? In other words, to what extent has this sudden generosity actually contributed to their assimilation and domestication (Pétursdóttir 2012)? Thus there might be some unintentional irony to Latour's claim that "the more nonhumans share existence with humans, the more *humane* a collective is" (Latour 1999:18, emphasis modified). Though assigning things human qualities may be understood sympathetically as an initial strategic move in order to include them, not very different from early functionalist anthropology's rationalization of the others' exoticism by showing them basically as us (i.e. as rational and calculative actors) (Sahlins 1976:74–75), the next – and really radical step – involves the difficult task of recognizing things *as things*. And it is my conviction that archaeology and our heterogeneous portfolio of materials essentially can help facilitate such a turn to things, one more radical than much current thing theory seems to imply.

Unlike some of the new thing-friendly environments, archaeology is of course the discipline of all things, of *everything*, no matter how outdated, incomplete, unexciting, or repulsive. And if we think about it, what things could be better fit to articulate a thingly otherness than the messier of our archaeological objects? What things could more resolutely and effectively oppose the humanizing and interpretative exploitation than smashed pots, slag lumps, flint debris, caulking resins, burnt bones, fire-cracked rocks, broken slate tools, hammer stones, and sinkers; the bulky material redundancy of the past filling our museum cellars, storage rooms, and labs? Things discarded, lost, and forgotten but which stubbornly remain, things that object to that persistent image of the past as gone; things which in their assembly, gathering, and bonding resist temporal ordering and chronological sequencing; things which defy completeness and system and which constantly affect us by their sheer physiognomy and raw bulk. What a potent and powerful assemblage – though strangely enough not figuring very prominently on the new thing adherents' repatriation lists – compared to, for example, Boyle's air pump, the body, Henry James's novels about things, pros-

theses, and intelligent design (Olsen 2012a, 2012b). And perhaps the archaeologists shouldn't be too loud-mouthed either, not always being very generous with the ordinary and numerous, the messy and defiant, those *nothings* which often resist naming and classification.

Nevertheless, what *we* should do is to stop concealing and taming this otherness, which also means an end to our current obsession with turning mute things into storytellers or otherwise loading them with interpretative burdens they mostly are unfit to carry. Thus I suggest that a move towards things as things implies a farewell to current regimes of interpretation and intellectualization. This modest suggestion constitutes my next predicted trend.

Third trend: farewell to interpretation

Predicting a farewell to interpretation is not about abolishing interpretation in its modest and inevitable form, but an overdue objection to the constant intellectual urge to think that the immediate and directly perceived, the ordinary and everyday, is less interesting, less meaningful, than the hidden and abstracted. Reading recent books and papers on Scandinavian rock art, just to take a random example, one will find that a boat, an elk or a reindeer can be claimed to represent or signify almost everything – ancestors, rites of passage, borders, totems, gender, supernatural powers, etc. – apart, it seems, only from themselves. A boat is never a boat; a reindeer is never a reindeer; a river is always a “cosmic” river. Why, for example, does it seem more intellectually pleasing to suggest that the “shore connection” (the case that the rock carvings of northern Scandinavia and north-west Russia are mostly located in shore areas) is about cosmology, liminality and transcendence (Helskog 1999), rather than about the fact that the rocks along the shore themselves are attractive and inviting for such depicting practices by being polished by the sea and free of the soil and vegetation covering higher rocks? Why is the latter option, which gives the rock and the sea a say, less interesting than the cognitive reading?

There seems to have been a persistent assumption within material culture studies and postprocessual or interpretative archaeology that the sexiest significance of things always lies in their metaphorical, representative or embodied meanings. Intellectually satisfying meanings are rarely about the objects in question or about the immediate and directly perceived but always derivative, something embodied or inscribed by some human source, whereby interpretation inevitably becomes the tracing of this extra-material origin. Fortunately, as archaeologists rediscover that the habitual and everyday uses of things are not something of interest only to “folk” studies or to an archaeology long

past, this conflation of meaning with symbolic and metaphorical abstraction is increasingly challenged (e.g. Högberg 2009, Nordby 2012). Sharing conviction with the people we so eagerly have longed to reach, more and more archaeologists, even the most abstracted among us, will start to realize that such engagements with things, animals, and other natures are far from trivial, in the derogatory sense of the word, but imply knowledge, care, and attachment, and a respect for what things are in their own being.

Moreover, as the idealist and anthropocentric grip on our reasoning slowly loosens we will also start to accept more readily, and again, I guess, on a par with our ancestors, that things also may be the source of their own signification. That a boat, for example, is mostly significant for what it is – that is, being a boat. It is significant due to its material integrity and for what it offers of boat qualities. This relates to the knowledge, skill and materials it assembles; its persistency and reliability, the capacities it possesses in terms of speed, stability, mastering of winds and waves, for the activities it enables such as transport, fishing, hunting, fighting, as well as for its beauty and the joy and excitement it affords. In a similar way an axe is significant primarily due to its unique axe qualities; a reindeer due to its inherent and multiple reindeer qualities (Olsen 2010:155–157). This, of course, is not to dismiss that these entities also may act as symbolic or cognitive devices, but to argue that such qualities are themselves often connotative residues triggered by the primary significance of their own material being.

A new concern with the ordinary, everyday, and real, with things in themselves, will also facilitate a new turn to phenomenology; though one very different from the one attempted by (mostly) British archaeologists in the 1990s and 2000s. By pretending that phenomenology was just another interpretative device that could be applied to understand (of all things!) monumentalism (e.g. Tilley 1994, 2004; Thomas 1996; Hamilton *et al.* 2006; Bender *et al.* 2007), this attempt blatantly exemplifies the fallacies of clothing the past in an interpretative straitjacket. While phenomenology, more than anything, was about the ordinary and everyday, a bold attempt at “relearning to look at the world”, “a return to the world of active experience” unobscured by abstract philosophical concepts and theories, which also and essentially involved a return to “the things themselves” (cf. Heidegger 1962:58; Merleau-Ponty 1962:57–58; 1968:4), it was rather the opposite that became an issue of concern in its archaeological guise. Leaving us with a phenomenological archaeology strangely alienated from the everydayness of herding sheep, clearing fields, carrying water, cutting woods, building fences, cooking, and feeding. While apparently not exciting enough for the in-

terpretative archaeologists,¹ is precisely with regard to these archaeological matters that phenomenology, and in particular Heidegger's work, still has a lot to offer. Not least of all, it may help us unlearn the processual and postprocessual imperative of theory as indispensable to understanding and help us to trust in our own perception, in things themselves and what they articulate in their own and peculiar material manner. In other words, and seemingly somewhat paradoxical, phenomenological "theory" may help us realize the simple fact that there are other paths to archaeological knowledge besides theory.

A final note to this section: In the unlikely case that you suspect that this return to things themselves, to the everydayness of human life, will make your archaeological being dismal and intolerable, I suggest a diagnostic test – and cure: Use the previous postprocessual/interpretative standards (leaving little room for the immediate, for ready-at-hand things, for life and being as commonly lived and experienced, or for care, affection, or joy) to assess your own life. Given those airy requirements for meaning and significance, how many of us, truly speaking, live interesting and meaningful lives?

Fourth trend: archaeology as archaeology

Archaeology has by all means a great – and in an academic context largely unrivalled – legacy in caring for things; humble things, broken things. As archaeologists we work with the messy spoils of history; in fact, it can be claimed that the outdated, the fragmented, the discontinuous, and the silent is our lot. This constitutes a disciplinary difference of great significance, as Michel Foucault correctly, if somewhat superficially, realized. So far, however, the potential of this archaeological difference is a largely unredeemed capital. The constant urge to write cultural history, conduct social analysis, or to bring to life thoughts and cultures long past, has, as already noted, made it tempting to rush past the masses of trivial and broken things to aim at the more unusual, conspicuous, and alluring materialities which faithlessly promise easier access to the wished-for realms of "behind".

Indeed, the persistent attempts to make our messy archaeological portfolio comply with the ever-present imperatives of History and Society have rather emphasized its inferiority, and despite all middle-range

1 When finally realized by the interpretative archaeologists that phenomenology was about this mundaneness of the ready-to-hand, it was doomed "inadequate", a descriptive exercise which had to be fleshed out with a "hermeneutics of interpretations", exploiting "metaphoric and metonymic linkages between things" (Tilley 2004:224).

magic often made our histories and sociologies seem embarrassingly trivial and incomplete. The time thus seems overdue to give up these airy ambitions which in any case are doomed to render things (and archaeology) secondary and instead to aim at *archaeology* – an archaeology of the past and the present (see González-Ruibal forthcoming). Rather than seeing this as a retreat or a loss, giving up the brave processual and postprocessual ambitions, it is actually a far bolder move. It is the seizure of our disciplinary grounds – and an act of empowerment which challenges the almost ontologized confusion of the past with history as well as the equally taken-for-granted assumption of the present as non-archaeological territory. As noted by Þóra Pétursdóttir (2012), while archaeology has often been critical of history, we have still remained positive to deconstructing and rewriting it; in other words, to produce alternative histories rather than being an alternative *to* history (see Olivier 2011).

In order to start moving in this direction we need to stop seeing the archaeological record as a problem, as representing loss, failure, or defect, something we must correct by filling in the gaps in order to heal the material past as history. Such a release from the historical straitjacket involves trying out another and perhaps more viable option: to let this “record” be fragmented and incomplete, to let things also be trivial and banal, in short, to let them be things – and allow their otherness to affect and be part of the archaeology we produce. This is an archaeology that sacrifices historical narratives in favour of a trust in its own ruined things, things that emerge from and bring forth a different past: one which accumulates and disrupts, being “at once scattered and preserved” (Benjamin 1996:169). And if we need a model, an analogy, or a trope for such an archaeological engagement with the past, it is, as Laurent Olivier has argued, probably far better served by memory than history (Olivier 2011). In other words, as fragmentary, disorderly presences that disrupt the projected stream of historical time and the associated expectations of the “have been” and the becoming.

And one initial and obvious move by which to realize this archaeological otherness is to show how things in their very own positivistic manner object to the finitude and pace of history. Although ageing and transforming, these ingredients and residues of supposedly ended or replaced pasts stubbornly linger on and gather around us. Look out of your window or around you wherever you are – is the past gone? Does what you see date to the present; a purified and sliced now? Continue by considering what we as archaeologists encounter during an excavation and the way the past here is disclosed to us. Recall superimposed structures, artefacts and debris mixed together, different pasts and dif-

ferent dates compressed and flattened out; in short, materials that object to modernity and historicism's wished-for ideal of completeness, order, and purified time. Rather than seeing this hybridized material record as a distortion of an originally pure historical order existing beyond and prior to the entangled mess we excavate and which we thus need to restore, we should start taking it seriously as an expression of how the past actually gathers in the present, defying the temporal specificity, sequential order, and finitude that we have been obsessed with (Olsen 2010:126–128). In fact this gathering is as normal and true for the past sites we study as for the present ones we live in. As little as the Stockholm you encounter can be dated to a particular time without losing what constitutes its present being as a chronological hybrid formed by a constantly gathering past (enabled by the persistency of things), as little can we cleanse the sites we excavate without at the same time depriving them of the pasts that grounded their presents. In this sense, the palimpsestal archaeological record provides a far more realistic and accurate image of the past than any historical narrative.

Archaeology also differs from history by the way our work involves and necessitates direct encounters with the very material past we study. This in itself is a crucial difference and also involves very significant experiences and engagements that unfortunately are rarely allowed any presence in our analyses and disseminations. Aspects of these encounters are exemplified in the sensation felt by suddenly being exposed to (and yes, discovering) a chert blade not seen or touched by other humans for thousands of years, by finding a bundle of pipe cleaners in a turf-covered floor layer at a northern PoW camp, or the numerous and ineffable presence effects triggered when making your way through an abandoned herring factory. All these sensations are part of the archaeological thrill, of what makes archaeology different and attractive, also in public opinion (Holtorf 2004), but which often has been rendered trivial, extra-scientific, or even embarrassing in our endeavour to become real and respectable (social) scientists and culture historians. Fieldwork is rightly seen as imperative to our archaeological being, and the direct and often long engagements with sites, places, peoples, and landscapes are not just about “collecting data”. Working with heath, gravel, and stone, interacting with people and animals, with wasps, mosquitoes, and terns; being exposed to views, sounds, and smell from land and sea, to weather of all kinds, trying to accommodate your camp and everyday needs to what the place affords you, brings an experiential dimension to our archaeological reasoning that generally is far too underrated. Without much pretension to the usefulness of “reenactment”, I am still convinced that a rich archaeological and material engagement with a place

or a region also makes us manifest its past differently. It is after all very different from reading about a place in the comfort of our study (Olsen *et al.* 2012). As evocatively expressed by Colin Renfrew when recalling:

the parched days under a hot sun in Greece, the pouring rain and sustained wind on the day at Quanterness when, working together as a team, we had to backfill that west section in the course of a few hours, and never mind the weather. But also the sense of mystery and solitude when I was the first to enter, perhaps for thousands of years, one of the side chambers at Quanterness and stand up with the cold, damp sandstones all around me, and reach my hand above my head to touch the still complete corbelling of the ceiling. You don't find much about these moments in the printed excavation report, but they are an integral part of the reality (Renfrew 2003:39–40).

To aim for archaeology as archaeology is also to allow for this difference to become manifest, also outside the rare “special” or “artistic” publications, such as the one where Renfrew finally could articulate this truly “integral part” of the archaeological reality (Renfrew 2003). In order to do so archaeologists need to become more “descriptive” again (Pearson and Shanks 2001:64–65), even to let ourselves be inspired by the descriptive richness the antiquarians aimed at, which also is manifested in the accounts left us by explorers and “adventurers” such as Fridtjof Nansen, Knud Rasmussen, and Helge Ingstad. The challenge is to produce rich descriptive accounts that also understand, not by heading beyond things and the immediate world, or by leaving out what arises in the momentary presence of encounter, but by allowing them a rightful share. Living in a rapidly changing media reality the range of possibilities for such “descriptive” richness is of course potentially endless, but regardless of format, what we need is more creativity, more playfulness and less trade of ready-digested interpretations (Andreassen *et al.* 2010). Giving things and other beings a say also involves making their presence more immediate and weighty in our disseminations, allowing for extended and distributed presence effects and encounters, beyond those formerly reserved for the archaeologists.

Conclusion

Owing to the modern regime's effective impact during the last 200 years, it has been difficult to think of the past outside succession, replacement, temporal order, and causation; outside the imperative of history. It has been equally difficult to think of meaning and significance outside the human intentional realm, or of understanding as something that does not take us beyond the immediate and the everyday. The pivotal role assigned to the human subject still makes it hard to think of the world as

co-produced and ontologically relatively egalitarian. So-called postmodernism did little to alter that. Despite the programmatic decentring of the human subject we were left with a humanly constituted world where no power or significance could arrive from outside the human realm.

Thus, needless to say, the obstacles to a new archaeology are tough. Nevertheless, there are signs of more far-ranging changes and ruptures that will help us fight these obstacles. These changes, which are starting to make a strong impact across the disciplinary landscape (and which archaeologists also contribute to), are manifested under a number of labels such as posthumanism, new ecology, new empiricism, speculative empiricism, and, of course, a (re)turn to things/materialism. As already argued above, rather than seeing these potentially paradigmatic changes, which all somewhat superficially can be said to opt for a “return of the real”, as something alien and threatening to the archaeological project, they may actually provide the very conditions that enable us to fully realize its great potential.

Though there are of course quite a few archaeologists that support or are sympathetic to the change of course proposed here, the numbers relative to the profession as a whole are probably very small. This situation in and of itself, however, is not unique to this proposed turn; even in their heyday neither the processual nor the postprocessual camp could claim support from more than a small minority of the world's archaeologists. And unlike previous attempts at change, the current one can count among its strengths that it is not about sacrificing archaeology for something else (anthropology, philosophy, literary criticism, hard sciences, etc.), it is not about turning things into language or text (or “extrasomatic means of adaptations”). Rather it is about having trust in our own project and in what archaeologists hold dearest: Things. It should also provide further reassurance to a few that this is not about making archaeology more theoretical, abstract, and elitist but rather an acknowledgement that knowledge and understanding also emerge from practice and mindful engagements with ditches, layers, relic walls, hearths, slab-lined pits, abandoned mining towns or last week's rubbish. It thus even allows for the almost forgotten possibility that knowledge sometimes is revealed rather than produced.

A concern with things themselves, exploring their intrinsic qualities, is indispensable to any archaeology. This concern should not be restricted to how they affect and mix with humans, but should also include an interest in how they are among themselves; how they relate and act upon each other (an interaction so far mostly acknowledged in archaeological science and environmental and behavioural archaeology) (though see Hodder 2012, Nordby 2012). From this concern will also

develop a more general interest in the “co-production” of the past, both in terms of how humans have engaged in indeterminate hybrid relations with other beings *and* how these other beings themselves, independently of humans, have affected and constituted the world we share with them (Olsen 2012c). In short, we will see a release from the humanist imperative that humans are a fundamental ingredient in every relation of interest, which also will spark off a new and more diverse interest in ecological approaches in archaeology.

Since this move and much of what otherwise is said in this paper at the outset may be seen as complying with a posthumanist stance (Domancka 2010; Wolfe 2010), and clearly is challenging the taken-for-granted human primacy, it is easily doomed as *anti*-human, and thus may not appear very attractive to what traditionally is seen as a humanities discipline or a human science. Succinctly, and this needs to be stated, *a turn to things does not represent any disinterest in people*. However, it implies a change of focus from humans as the overarching objective, that “getting at people is the core activity in archaeology” (Gamble 2001:73), into a concern with more humble humans as democratized beings amongst other beings, with humans as a companion species, albeit a crucial one. What we increasingly will see are also new perspectives for how humans relate to these other beings. As new ethical concerns are emerging (Benso 2000; Introna 2009; Olsen *et al.* 2012; Pétursdóttir 2013), the focus will change from things, animals and natures as primarily beings-for-us (technology, resources, for consumption and use) into beings of concern and care, and even as beings-for-themselves (Heidegger 1966:46–55). In other words, we will see perspectives where issues of care and concern will play a more prominent role for how to conceive these relations, issues that also pertain to respecting the integrity and otherness of things and natures.

Whatever will happen we have to be prepared for surprises, disappointments, but hopefully mostly a new and more interesting archaeology. To be sure, studying how things are in themselves and among themselves may not comply well with our current interpretative ambitions and expectations. Things can be unruly and disorderly, behave in ways banal, trivial or downright boring, and they may well conspire against the wish image of a readable record providing smooth access to a past or present world behind. They may, in short, simply refuse to be useful and fiercely object to the ridiculously heavy interpretative burdens that have been placed on their shoulders. And this, of course, is their damned right. However, and to stay tuned with the anthropocentric vocabulary criticized (and now reintroduced), if we take the trouble to listen to what they actually do know something about, they may have a lot to reveal

about themselves, the present, and the past. Expect no grand narratives, of course, and not very much about History and Society, but do look forward to a lot of memories which have escaped historical consciousness, memories of that which is regarded as self-evident, as too ordinary or trivial, or too embarrassing or grim to be spoken and written about. Things after all are less inclined to discriminate, caring also for the outdated and stranded, the neglected and unwanted. And again, in the very unlikely case that you find this archaeology tedious, unrewarding, blatant, or repulsive, I have no other consolation than the prediction that what you will find most surprising in thirty years from now is how “normal and mild” this all sounds.

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KNOCKING AT FUTURE'S DOOR

Encouraging a Critique of Hegemonic Orders

Elisabeth Arwill-Nordbladh

Twenty-three years ago, Bjørnar Olsen (1989:18–21), together with a handful of colleagues, commented on Michael Shanks and Christopher Tilley's vision of "Archaeology into the 1990s" (Shanks & Tilley 1989:1–12, 42–54), a view that had its background in their books *Re-constructing Archaeology* and *Social Theory and Archaeology*. The set-up was slightly more limited than the broader scope of the current text. However, a reminder of the earlier debate may be of some interest, as Olsen and the other debaters of 1989 were placed in the centre of the vibrant research context that Olsen in his vivid and personal style captures in "After Interpretation: Remembering Archaeology".

Jointly, the two debates construe the formation of a research landscape, postprocessual archaeology – it may be worth noting that Ian Hodder (1989:15–18), who is one of the leading figures that Olsen relates to in the current text, was one of the scholars who was asked to treat and maybe counter Shanks and Tilley's red and blue books. Olsen's present text makes it clear that these two books of the 1980s certainly were important contributions, but that they were surpassed by maybe even more influential works from a general theoretical point of view. Nevertheless, the positive attitude towards the postprocessual archaeology that marked Olsen's own formative years, remains in 2012. It is inevitable, though, that even postprocessual archaeology changes and takes on other shapes over time. Olsen predicts four desirable trends for the future: *a new geography, a turn to things themselves, a farewell to*

interpretation and an attempt to make the archaeological disciplinary characteristics explicit by linking past to present, a trend to acknowledge *archaeology as archaeology*.

Olsen's text – the introductory sketches of the past fifty years of theoretical debate, the section with the four prospects for archaeological thought, and the conclusion – possesses many clear and well expressed arguments. Personally I appreciate the introductory questioning of the hegemonic position of theory in relation to practice, a view that can be traced back to a dualistic thinking of modernity, “where theory is the head and practice is the obedient acting body”. Likewise I agree on the summons to turn to and affirm the material aspects of things, something that ought to be particularly well suited to archaeology. Another important appeal is to elaborate the understanding of specific archaeological characteristics, such as field situations, with their close relations between the researcher as a subject, the growing and forming field material, the surrounding landscape with its flora, fauna and the elements of nature, and the local community. Another feature is the discipline's incipient attempts to explore the past as memory, or perhaps more rightly as memory work instead of just understanding the past as history.

However, Olsen's interesting and thought-provoking text lacks one perspective that was present in the comments of 1989. In the older text Olsen refers to Edward Said's critique of certain anthropological perspective from without and from above, and not reflecting on the social conditions of the production of knowledge. In Olsen's own words: “I think that a programme for the 1990s should include also [...] critical discussions of our own voices and objectives: why and for whom do we write?” (Olsen 1989:20–21). However, in the prospects for the future that Olsen now sketches, a discussion of the power position of the discipline and the researching subject is avoided, in that he fails to ask who formulates the questions and why they are asked. Who has an influence on research and what are the purposes of the production of knowledge? What does the financial framework look like?

This deficiency might have been avoided if Olsen had included yet another text in his exposé of works published in years ending with the number two or seven, namely Margaret W. Conkey and Joan Gero's article “Programme to Practice: Gender and Feminism in Archaeology” (1997). One of the issues explored in Conkey and Gero's text concerns the situated production of knowledge; what are the research questions, how are they formulated, what does the research practice look like, how and by whom is the research financed, and who are the subjects that conduct the research? An attendant question is, how do such factors affect the result of the research (see also Tuhiwai Smith 1999)? Such ques-

tions, which concern situated knowledge, are to some extent already observed in the archaeological research process – Olsen's introductory section where he recalls his own archaeological scholarly journey is an obvious example of highlighting the situated researching subject. It is less common, though, to follow this perspective further, by acknowledging and making explicit that the situated subjects, as individuals or as groups, are placed in specific positions in various orders of power. Yet another step further in such a process of argumentation is to clarify how such positions intersect with other positions on various axes of power, affecting the knowledge-producing subject. Still such a quest was opened, albeit modestly, in the two decades old discussion, for example in the section where Olsen reflects on the importance of the academic research geography in relation to the spread of research achievements (Olsen 1989:21). By clarifying the knowledge-producing subject's various positions in different orders of power, a power perspective would be easier to include in research that would promote an emancipating knowledge production.

Discussions which include a power perspective could be carried on in many contexts, but such a theme might be more significant in some connections than in others. One such area is the one that Olsen labels *a new geography*. Here attention is focused on break-ups; metaphorically, away from a few hegemonic disciplinary schools and in particular some which have their origin in the English-speaking scholarly world, and literally from predominant academic core areas towards smaller research milieus, forming nodes linked up in networks over the globe. This creates pluralism and different “archaeologies”, making a centre/periphery perspective irrelevant.

Such a process is facilitated by the digital development and by new, less prestigious scientific meeting places like the EAA and WAC. However, Olsen characterizes such a process as an *internationalization* of archaeology. This term rather implies cooperation which is connected to the nation and the state. It might be more suitable for discussions of, for example, heritage organizations connected to UNESCO treaties and the like, which are also important and necessary for archaeology. I have the feeling, though, that the academic geographical reorganization which Olsen describes and sees as a desirable scenario for the future should rather be understood in terms of *transnational* archaeological practices. This implies flexible and action-oriented joint practices which can be understood by analogy with transnational feminism, acknowledging local differences and allowing various articulations within overriding cooperation projects to be performed in a dialogical manner (Mohanty 2003). Archaeology in particular seems to be appropriate for

transnational projects, as the kind of remains that now constitute the archaeological record often have local settings that cross geographical-national hegemonies and therefore evoke border-crossing networking. Transnational practices can also be highly relevant in our time and during decades to come, showing increasing migration mobility. At least in Sweden such events might feed a xenophobia that in some ways is linked to nationalistic notions of the past, legitimating such ideas with the archaeological record. In this context, the emancipating practices that signify transnational movements could be of importance.

In his text Olsen emphasizes the distinct characteristics of material phenomena. I agree that today's intellectual "material turn to thing theory" constitutes what could be "an *archaeological moment*", and that archaeology in this respect could give considerable contributions to the intellectual scene. However, Olsen seems to be critical of notions of the agency of material things, ideas that have been and still are important issues in the archaeological debate. Olsen questions the eagerness to ascribe material things an "anthropomorphized role" such as *actors* or *delegates*. Concerning the active position of material phenomena, Olsen seems to be somewhat inconsistent, as he also admits. In the passage that advocates an archaeology that liberates itself from the norm of history's narrative sequences, it is the material things that are connected to these active and emancipating verbs; they are unruly, behave in banal ways, refuse, object, conspire and defy. This can hardly be understood as anything but an object-related agency, but according to Olsen, this is only in respect of the things' "very own positivistic manner". While pleading for an archaeological understanding and "repatriation" of the material's "otherness" – with a romantic formulation described as "not tamed or concealed", this approach may mystify the material phenomena. But to mystify such agential dynamics of which material things may be part, is too obscuring a perspective from my point of view. Also concerning object-related agency, feminist research can contribute and demonstrate social dynamics where material phenomena play a vital role, for example about ethic materiality (Alaimo & Hekman 2008:7–8, Arwill-Nordbladh in press) or agential realism (Barad 2003). And through this "material turn" archaeologists too can make important contributions to feminist scholarship (Spencer-Wood in press).

In Olsen's opinion, the archaeologists' approach to understanding things merely as things would incite a trend that implies a *farewell to (over)interpretation*. Here I have some difficulties following Olsen's argumentation. As I understand the text, Olsen thinks that this approach would encourage an understanding of things as a "source of their own signification. That a boat, for example, is mostly significant for what it

is – that is, being a boat”. According to Olsen, such a “thingly” significant would not be meaningful in interpretations connected to cultural or symbolic issues (something on which I can't agree, but leave aside in this discussion). Instead they would be relevant for “ordinary, everyday, and real”, phenomenological perceptions. Focusing on this latter issue, in my opinion, phenomenological perceptions would not only invite everyday sensations, but encourage several more dimensions of interpretation. On one hand, the acting subject would interpret his or her perceptions based on his/her cultural, social, and gendered experiences, to mention just a few of all possible situated positions – any pre-discursive perception is hardly likely. Thus a situated interpretation also appears in everyday phenomenological perceptions. Moreover, the perception puts the acting subject on a specific spot in an order of power connected to body normativity and bodily variations related to abilities and disabilities. In this manner we must include the physically and corporally situated subject in discussions of phenomenological perceptions (Arwill-Nordbladh 2012a). A phenomenological perspective, which is highly relevant when the material values of things are recognized, does not reduce the dimension of interpretation, but guides the interpretations to various levels. And for such discussions of phenomenological perceptions that include notions of a hegemonic body normativity, a perspective that include power issues is self-evident.

Here and there Olsen's text is somewhat contradictory, but for that reason it is also challenging in an interesting way. At the same time as it lacks an attempt to shed light on the production of knowledge in relation to the situated researcher, in spite of the presentation of his own disciplinary background, Olsen evokes the emancipating force of archaeology's distinctive mark *par excellence*, things. It seems as if the things are inciting to their own liberation, a liberation that is of an ontological or epistemological character. This drive can be understood as a critique of modernity, which has shaped the scholarly discipline of archaeology and thus also archaeology's normative treatment of material phenomena. With this interpretation, the absence of a critique of hegemonies that I have pointed out may still be understood in a progressive way; studies of the history of archaeology can demonstrate how archaeological practice, through the enactment *per se*, has the possibility to create a qualitative and emancipating difference (see for example Arwill-Nordbladh 2012b).

The kind of archaeological practice that is supposed to be performed in Olsen's land of future prospects could not be carved out in an ontological and epistemological void. To be successful, it would be working in a world full of practices that both form and are formed by inter-

actions and mutual agency that are connected to the emancipation of things and the emancipation of social understanding.

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IF WE ARE QUIET, WILL THINGS CRY OUT?

Mats Burström

As I read Bjørnar Olsen's retrospect of theoretical trends within Scandinavian archaeology and his prediction for the future development, two associations spontaneously spring to mind. By coincidence, both references are of religious character. The first one is an old Zen Buddhist word of wisdom that goes:

When I was young and knew nothing, a tree was simply a tree, a mountain simply a mountain, and a lake simply a lake. When I had studied and learned some, a tree was much more than a tree, a mountain much more than a mountain, and a lake much more than a lake. When I became enlightened, a tree was once again just a tree, a mountain just a mountain, and a lake just a lake.

The second comes from the Bible (Luke 19:40), where Jesus replies to a demand that he should rebuke his disciples (who had blessed him as a king, coming in the name of the Lord). This quote reads:

I tell you, he replied, if they are quiet, the stones will cry out.

These two references are my starting point for some reflections about the revolutionary character of the future that Olsen predicts for archaeology, as well as about some possibilities and possible difficulties associated with it.

LEVELS OF UNDERSTANDING

According to Olsen we may now be witnessing a development towards a new archaeology where archaeology is – just archaeology! Archaeology is no more to be considered as anthropology, or to be primarily concerned with a linguistic or textual understanding of the material record. Nor should we continue our quest for History and Society. Olsen describes this development as possibly representing the unthinkable, that: “a new revolution is underway; more silent perhaps, but also more radical and different than the previous ones”.

The core in Olsen's revolutionary new archaeology is an urge to see things as just things, to avoid (over)interpretation, and to accept that, for example, a boat is a boat is a boat (although we are also supposed to recognize all the connotations that follow from the boat's basic function). Olsen's claim should not be understood as a reduction of the importance of things, quite the contrary. By stressing that things have the right to an existence in their own right, not just as things representing something else, Olsen challenges our ability to think beyond the framework of Modernity.

So, according to Olsen we may now be at a turning point where we have learned the lessons from previous theoretical movements and thus are ready to meet things on new and equal terms. He argues that this should not be understood as just another theoretical turn but as an insight that concerns and has consequences for all of archaeology. Recognizing the fundamental importance that the direct encounter with the material past has for our archaeological understanding also makes the delimiting of a specific “theoretical” archaeology less relevant. What Olsen suggests is not a return to an empirical archaeology most concerned with the archaeological record and with less or no concern for its theoretical foundations. I believe, however, that there may be a pedagogical problem here, and that is what brings the words of the Zen Buddhist referred to above to mind.

There is a delusive similarity between the initial and the final level of understanding in the wisdom; to the uninitiated they may indeed appear identical. In both cases a tree, a mountain and a lake are seen as just a tree, a mountain, and a lake (or a thing just as a thing). What separates the different levels of understanding is the intellectual process that has been taking place between the first and last step; a process necessary to reach the deeper insight at the higher level of understanding.

For the theoretically uninterested and therefore uninitiated archaeologist who never jumped on the postprocessual (perhaps not even the processual) bandwagon, Olsen's new archaeology runs the risk of being mistaken for a longed-for return to “real” archaeology; that is, to a straightforward

empirical archaeology that does not bother with anything else than the archaeological record and with what that record supposedly “tells us”. This would be to confuse the first and the last levels of understanding referred to by the Zen Buddhist. There is, of course, a vast difference between the theoretically uninitiated wish for a return to a “real” archaeology and the theoretically well-founded new archaeology advocated by Olsen, but some arguments in the latter may be kidnapped and (mis)used as arguments in favour of the former, i.e. for an old-fashioned empirical archaeology.

Applied to archaeology, the Zen Buddhist wisdom implies a sort of cumulative effect in the theoretical debate. Even though it may be more exciting to focus on revolutions and shifts of paradigms, we should acknowledge that were it not for the explorations done within preceding theoretical frameworks, we would not have discovered their weaknesses and thereby been enabled to formulate new lines of argument and investigation. On this ground I would argue, in contrast to Olsen, that the new archaeology we now see emerging is in fact a kind of continuation and development of postprocessual archaeology, just as the latter is a “natural” successor of processual archaeology. Every new step in the intellectual process is to some extent dependent on the previous ones, even when the new ideas explicitly contradict the old ones.

GIVING THINGS THEMSELVES A SAY

Bjørnar Olsen wants us do liberate things from the interpretative burdens we as archaeologists have laid upon them; he wants the things themselves to have a say. Things should also have the right to remain things (well, probably also the right to remain silent, I suppose). This is presumably the greatest challenge brought forward by the suggested new archaeology: how are we to give things themselves a say, and how will we be able to understand things on their own terms? The old phrase “It is like talking to a brick wall” gives us a somewhat pessimistic view of the prospects of letting things themselves have a say.

Language is essential for our understanding of the world we live in; language both enables and restricts our knowledge. Language is also essential for our communication; within the humanities language is actually such a crucial part of interpretation that the two are hardly separable. But what language(s) do things themselves speak? And how are we to hear what they say? These fundamental issues brought that biblical quotation to my mind; will things really cry out if we – the archaeologists – are quiet?

Within the proposed new archaeology we are also supposed to oppose the anthropomorphized understanding of things that dominates

current archaeology; Olsen requests us to stop the “humanizing and interpretative exploitation” of things. The question is, however, whether it is possible to formulate an understanding of things that reaches beyond our human experience of the world and our language. The difficulties of this task are clearly evidenced, as Olsen himself comments upon, by his own use of anthropomorphized metaphors in his final conclusions.

I believe, however, that Bjørnar Olsen is on to something important in stating that, in our quest for understanding things as things, we should be prepared for the possibility that they may “behave in ways banal, trivial or downright boring”. You may, of course, ask how intellectually stimulating this realization is, but it indeed represents an alternative to what Olsen describes as “our current obsession with turning mute things into storytellers or otherwise loading them with interpretative burdens”.

In order to explore what things may be able to mediate if we approach them as just things, we need to look outside the conventional academic rules of archaeological writing or thinking. I agree with Olsen’s call for a higher degree of trust in the archaeological project and its potential, but I also believe that we may find some inspiration outside our own discipline. One example of a congenial expression of an imagined non-human testimony of a material existence is the poem “Grey Rock Song” (Sw. *Gråbergssång*) by the Swedish poet Gustaf Fröding (1860–1911). The poem is one of Fröding’s “subhuman songs” where he tries to imagine how trees, animals and other “things” would express themselves in carefully managed words. “Grey rock” is the popular name for the most common kind of bedrock, indeed such a natural element in the everyday Scandinavian life-world that we hardly notice its existence and even more seldom listen to what it may have to say. In the poem, Fröding uses a most decorticated idiom in order to express the essence of a non-human existence. The “subhuman song” reads (translation by Martin Allwood):

Stay
 grey,
 stay
 grey,
 stay
 grey,
 stay
 grey,
 stay
 gre-e-e-y.
 That’s the grey rock song,
 very l-o-o-o-o-o-ng.

In the coming years I believe there is good reason to reconsider not only our way of thinking about things, but also the way in which we express ourselves as archaeologists, including our use of images. An enlightened archaeology, where things are allowed to be just things, may demand different modes of expression than the ones we presently associate with a theoretically well-founded archaeology. I look forward to this development with curiosity and confidence; let us have an open mind and strive to give things themselves a say.

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FROM ONTOLOGY TO ONTOGENY: A NEW, UNDISCIPLINED DISCIPLINE

Yannis Hamilakis

Something interesting is happening in archaeology right now. After many years of “normal science” (to follow the Kuhnian term), discussions are becoming bolder and more interesting. This forum is one such example. Unsurprisingly, Olsen offers us a thoughtful and daring piece which serves as an excellent springboard for a debate on the state of archaeological thinking today, and by implication, on the nature of archaeology as a whole. There are several interesting points in the essay, especially in his programmatic statements, which I would wholeheartedly endorse. But there are also some, especially with regard to his retrospective view and the assessment of today’s situation, which I found somehow unsatisfactory. I will briefly try to bring up some concerns, but more importantly and more positively, I will try to expand on some of his programmatic principles, which are inspiring and hopeful but do not seem to go far enough.

ONWARDS AND UPWARDS? A HERETICAL HISTORIOGRAPHY

Olsen’s historiographic attempt seems to follow a scheme which has become canonical in the literature on the history of archaeological thinking: a seamless transition from culture-history to new archaeology, to post-processual archaeology and on to the current situation of diversity and

fragmentation. As he himself admits, this is an Anglo-American view, and a rather neat, linear and progressive, almost cultural-evolutionist one, as we move from the more problematic theoretical paradigms to more appropriate and useful ones. There are several objections and concerns one could raise here.

For a start, this is a floating narrative, an account of intellectual developments that take place in a social and political vacuum. What were the conditions that gave rise to the apparatus we call archaeology? Why do we still insist that the discursive and practical operation we academics today (mostly in the west) are engaged with is the only archaeology that there is, the only game in town? Why do we find it so difficult to qualify our operation as a modernist, western archaeology, a qualification which could perhaps encourage us to critically analyse that modernist heritage, and find ways to overcome it? It seems that the challenges to that modernist archaeology by trends and movements such as indigenous archaeologies, or by critical genealogical projects that exposed its colonialist and nationalist roots, are still not taken as seriously as they should be. In the same vein, I have tried to show elsewhere (e.g. Hamilakis 2011a) that prior to the establishment of modernist archaeology in conditions that were shaped by colonialist and nationalist imaginings, there existed other archaeologies, indigenous, local archaeologies which may have lacked the disciplinary apparatus of modernist archaeology but which were based on their own distinctive discourses and practices on material things. After all, this is what archaeology is at its very core: the discursive and practical engagement with things from another time. Local people, peasants and farmers (and not only antiquarians and scholars as we often assume) took a keen interest in material things from another time, constructed interesting discourses about their origin, character and agentic qualities, and engaged with them in meaningful ways: resculpturing classical columns and reliefs into Muslim tombstones (some of which can be still seen, dumped on the cliff of the Athenian Acropolis, for example), embedding ancient inscriptions and other artefacts in churches and mosques or even above the doorways of their houses, making sure that their worked part was visibly exhibited, worshipping ancient statues with dung offerings and burning lamps placed in front of them, and so on. To call these practices archaeological, as opposed to say, archaeo-folklore, is to valorize them as valuable, multi-sensorial material engagements worthy of reflection and study. This valorization is not simply a matter of archaeological historiography but can also contribute to our attempts to reflect on and historicize our own current archaeology, which emerged partly out of the sensorial-cum-political clash with these pre-modern archaeologies: sculptures, artefacts and

other objects were removed, at times violently, from their social, contextual and multi-sensorial fabric; they were reclassified by archaeologists as art or as important archaeological objects, in need of protection and exhibition in special places where they could be appreciated almost exclusively through the sense of autonomous vision. We can learn much from these “pre-modern” material engagements, and from conceptions of temporality very different from the linearity and cumulative developmentalism that shape our own temporal imagination. In other words, such an exercise can contribute to our attempts to construct the future, counter-modern or alter-modern archaeologies, which is what I think Olsen proposes to do in the second part of his paper.

Such an exploration of the socio-political entanglements of past archaeological thinking could also allow us to trace continuities and breaks, to interrogate neocolonial regimes of truth in current intellectual production and in contemporary archaeological practices. Both the emergence of what we call new archaeology and several strands of the heterogeneous developments we call post-processual archaeology owe much to the radicalism and the overtly political discourses of the 1960s, 1970s, and early 1980s, in the USA, in the UK, and a few other countries. Olsen, along with several others, tends to forget that such political critique was a major strand in these developments. This was a critique that addressed the persecution of indigenous groups, gender inequality, and the labour and employment injustices in archaeology as a whole. In fact, one volume which deserves much more credit than it has received and which has transformed our thinking is *The Socio-politics of Archaeology* (Gero *et al.* 1983). Critical archaeology was a major movement in these early years, as was the radical interrogation of colonialism and racism by historical archaeologists in the USA and in other, non-European countries, fuelled partly by the echoes of the civil rights movement. One aspect of the political economy of archaeological thinking that deserves discussion is the mode and style of its production. Olsen refers to the various centres of such production, but perhaps it may be worth mentioning also another, peripheral hub, Lampeter in the 1990s, where amongst other things, we experimented with collective forms of producing and engaging with archaeological thinking, including collective authorship (e.g. Lampeter Archaeology Workshop 1997).

Outside the UK, some other countries especially in Scandinavia, and some academic pockets in the USA, things seemed to have been more diverse, although not much can be said, given the linguistic barriers and the lack of systematic historical survey work, especially of a comparative nature. It seems that, far from being passive consumers of the latest theoretical offerings from the metropolitan centres of the north,

our colleagues were engaging in lively debates and in intense, original theoretical production, following at the same time some of the developments in these centres in the north and reading Anglo-American writings, whereas their own writings were (and still are) mostly ignored by those writers based in Anglo-American contexts. Why is it, for example, that we know very little about the Marxist traditions of archaeology in South America and in the European south? Olsen notes that the current theoretical production is geographically fragmented and diverse, but was this not perhaps always the case, and it was we archaeologists in the north (and, of course, the publishing industry) who were not paying any attention?

To return to the Anglo-American tradition, leaving aside the important and undervalued strand that emphasized the socio-politics of archaeology, how radical was the rift that took place in the early-mid-1980s? There is no doubt that it did indeed allow for diverse interpretative attempts to be tried out and to flourish, but I would suggest that, in fact, the continuities with the 1960s and 1970s are more than the raptures. Both new archaeology and the dominant trends within post-post-processual archaeology were interventions addressing the epistemology of archaeology, not its ontology. In other words, they avoided a radical redefinition of the very nature and purpose of archaeology, in favour of what they considered as the most appropriate interpretative schemes and strategies. The question was not what archaeology is and how was it constituted, but what were the most appropriate theoretical and methodological principles to be followed, how we can arrive at richer and more interesting interpretations of the material past. Subsistence was replaced by symbol, economy by ideology, the physical record by the “textual” record. Binary schemes survived this seemingly radical shift, and they even resurface in some contemporary phenomenological writings, especially the ones to do with British landscape archaeology, which is at times reminiscent of good-old structuralism with a moderate dose of Merleau-Ponty. Things did change indeed in the 1980s, but can we talk of a radical paradigmatic shift? I am not certain that we can.

And what about our present moment? And just to remind us, this is a moment when according to an academic study, more than a million people have died in the 1990s in Eastern Europe as a result of ruthless mass privatization (e.g. Stuckler *et al.* 2009), a moment when capitalism faces one of the worst crises in its history, a crisis which is being used by the financial elites as an opportunity for a frontal attack on labour and on the global commons. This is a moment when the wandering poor, the economic immigrants who, once they have survived, by the skin of their teeth, drowning in the waters of the Mediterranean or

getting shot by militias in Arizona, are continually persecuted by state authorities and right-wing extremists. So at this very moment, what kind of archaeological thinking is being produced and what kind of archaeological practices are we engaging with? Olsen rightly points out the lack of boldness in many current writings, and the sense of complicity, but he does not elaborate on the phenomenon. I would go even further to say that the politicization of archaeological thinking of the 1980s and part of the 1990s has given way to bureaucratized ethics, while unholy alliances have been formed with the worst representatives of corporate capitalism such as the oil industry, and with the western military engaging in neo-colonial wars, as in Iraq (cf. Hamilakis 2007; 2009). Archaeological theory readers and textbooks are still filled almost exclusively with contributions by scholars based in Anglo-American contexts (save for a token participant from elsewhere), and are being marketed as “the global” and thus authoritative voice on the matter. The political economy of archaeology, the inequities in our own profession, such as the ones suffered by the thousands of our colleagues exploited by archaeological companies and consultancies, are rarely addressed, especially by the most prominent academic archaeologists (cf. Everill 2009; Zorzin 2011). Our own contemporary social movements, the movement against neoliberal capitalism, the “occupy” movement, the solidarity campaigns for immigrants, do not seem to inspire archaeologies as much as the 1960s and 1970s movements did. Even the World Archaeological Congress, which according to Olsen is a positive example of the globalization and diversification of archaeological thinking (a feeling that I would partly endorse) has been trying to ally itself with ruthless mining companies such as Rio Tinto, and is seeking to become a professionalized organization on a global scale, a future platform for global archaeological businesses, rather than for social justice, which was its founding principle (cf. Shepherd & Haber 2011; and *Public Archaeology* 10(4) for a response). In the present and coming clashes, revolts and insurrections, many archaeological thinkers, and especially the ones who were instrumental in shaping the field in the 1980s, seem to have already taken sides.

Yet not all is negative. New south-south conversations are taking place, partly facilitated by global media technologies. Theoretical writings from outside the Anglo-American tradition emerge and gain prominence. Philosophical and theoretical inspiration is sought not only in the usual suspects such as the early French post-structuralist thinkers but also in contemporary political philosophers who challenge neo-liberal capitalism in its various guises, from Žižek to Agamben, and in South American thinkers such as the de-colonial school (e.g. Escobar 2007).

Neutralized professionalization and the alliances with corporate capitalism are being challenged in the theoretical literature as well within organisations such as WAC. New groupings are being formed, often outside Anglo-American academia, and in some cases around journals, adopting an explicitly critical stance and trying to reconnect with the political and radical thread of the 1980s (see for example the new online journal, *Forum Kritische Archäologie* – <http://www.kritischearchaeologie.de/fka>). Theoretically innovative and empirically daring projects are being launched, whether to record the material culture of undocumented immigrants on the Mexico-USA border (De Leon 2012), or to address the homeless in the streets of UK cities (Kiddey & Schofield 2011). A new, more edgy, more political, and more theoretically interesting archaeology is being born; thankfully, this one is not in need of “great synthesizers”, sages and gurus.

FROM ONTOLOGY TO ONTOGENY

In this hopeful climate, Olsen's ideas on the need to produce an ontology of things and to return to the archaeological, are certainly worthwhile and valuable. Yet my feeling is that such moves do not go far enough, they fall short of the radical paradigmatic shift that the current moment needs. The welcome ontological turn in archaeology certainly takes us further and prepares the ground for such a shift, especially after thirty years of not-always-fruitful debates on epistemology. But it is my conviction that what we need is not only a new ontology but also a new ontogeny, not only a new discourse on what we are and where we are going as a discipline, but a practical reconstitution, a genesis of a new discipline, albeit an undisciplined one. Space limitations do not allow me to outline in full my preliminary ideas on this, and in any case such an operation should be a collective and not an individual effort. But it will suffice to mention briefly a couple of points, for the sake of the current and future debates.

A new relationship with materiality

As with modernist archaeology, materiality will continue to be at the centre of attention in the new discipline, but this will be a radically re-configured sense of materiality. This is not a materiality which forgets the material, the physicality of things, and the embodied nature of labour and skill that went into their production, and continuous maintenance and reworking. It is a carnal materiality which recognizes that a unifying element of bodies, organisms, things, environments and landscapes

is their “flesh” in the sense of Merleau-Ponty (1968[1964]:139–140), their sensorial character and nature which becomes animated through trans-corporeal, affective entanglements and engagements. This is an ontology not of things, but of sensorial flows and movements; not of bodies, but of corporeal landscapes; not of single actions but of continuous inter-animation. The new discipline is multi-sensorial, synaesthetic, and kinaesthetic (cf. Hamilakis 2011b; forthcoming). In such a way, we can avoid the dangers of fetishizing things, and of creating an artificial separation between things and bodies (human or other), between things and environments, and amongst things, the environment and landscape, the atmosphere and the weather (cf. Ingold 2010a).

A new relationship with temporality

The new discipline needs to forge a novel relationship with time and temporality by getting rid of the “archaeo-” in its title (cf. Ingold 2010b). By making as its central concern not ancient nor past things, but all materiality irrespective of its conventional temporal attribution. Furthermore, and more importantly, the new discipline needs to demonstrate, following a Bergsonian philosophy (Bergson 1991), that a fundamental property of matter is its ability to last, its duration. As such, by virtue of its participation in multiple temporal moments, matter is multi-temporal, it cannot be contained and imprisoned within a single chronological bracket. A task of the new discipline is not to fix things into a certain moment in the past, not to prioritize their initial genesis, as happens at present with the use of archaeological dating techniques (despite the usefulness of such an exercise), but to engage with their multi-temporal character, to show how they continued living and interacting with humans, through constant “reuse” and reworkings which have created their temporal patina and their eventful, mnemonic biography. I have attempted to outline such a multi-temporal perspective in a number of writings elsewhere (e.g. Hamilakis 2011c).

A new engagement with politics

If such a reconfigured relationship with materiality and temporality is to be engendered, then a new engagement with politics will follow. This is not simply a matter of disciplinary politics, the political economy of knowledge and practice, not simply the politics of the past and the politics of heritage. It is rather a deeper and more fundamental relationship which connects the material, the (multi-)temporal, and the political. Rancière (2004) has noted that aesthetics, as lived sensorial experience and practice (and not as an abstract, philosophical reflection on judgement and beauty) and politics share the same ground, they

are both about the *distribution of the sensible*: what is allowed to be sensed and experienced and what not. The sensorial properties and affordances of materiality are thus by definition political, they have political implications and effects. Temporality is also implicated with the political, especially the durational temporalities activated by the material. Such temporal-material politics can find diverse expressions, from the materialization of the national time, the time of seamless continuity with its political connotations of homogeneity and exclusion, to the time of cultural evolutionism, the progressive march of “civilization” with its colonialist/racist associations. A multi-temporal materiality, however, can also engender and activate a different politics, the politics that can leave behind temporal compartmentalization and fragmentation, and refuse to resort to escapism by finding refuge in a remote or not-so-remote era in the past. This is a politics that recognizes that all temporal moments can be continually and simultaneously present and active through materiality, and can have thus various political implications and effects. This multi-temporal discipline engenders and enacts presence not representation, material and social life, movement and flow, not static, almost “dead” and mummified objecthood.

Naturally, these “bare bones” will need to be fleshed out in much more detail, something that cannot be done here. The fact that it was Olsen’s thoughts that encouraged the articulation of such reflections here is an indication of the power of his own writing.

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NO FAREWELL TO INTERPRETATION

Cornelius Holtorf

As Bjørnar Olsen knows very well, the task he has been given is in equal measure difficult and thankless. His discussion paper is inevitably personal, characterized both by “intellectual narcissism” in assessing the present and by a fair degree of wishful thinking in predicting the future. He hopes that what he has to say “may be interesting to discuss”. Alas, I find quite a bit in this paper valid but unspectacular and not particularly interesting to discuss at all. However, there are also a few things in the paper which I find interesting to disagree with.

I for one am an archaeologist who does not hold things “dearest” or considers them the “core subject matter” of archaeology. Neither do I agree that “a concern with things themselves, exploring their intrinsic qualities, is indispensable to any archaeology.” In fact, I have never been very interested in things at all. Rather than archaeology being “the discipline of things par excellence”, I insist that archaeology is mainly the study of the past and its remains in the present. The difference may not sound enormous but to me interpretations of the past are a crucial spice in the archaeological soup without which even the most ecologically produced, thingly ingredients remain tasteless. I therefore have some reservations when Olsen energetically advocates here, as elsewhere, a (re)turn to things as the next big hope for archaeology as a discipline (Olsen 2010).

It strikes me that another Norwegian archaeologist, Brit Solli (2011), has recently argued along similar lines, although more related to heritage issues. Her rejection of constructivism, which is partly motivated by a nostalgic desire for universal values and principles, leads her to sub-

scribe to a “mitigated essentialism” (2011:47). She insists upon the existence of essential values and qualities of material things and environmental processes that somehow become independent agents in human history, overdetermining the work of archaeologists. As I argued in an earlier discussion with her (Holtorf 2011), I cannot see how any such assertions can advance our discipline, which surely needs to use living human beings rather than essentialized objects or climate curves as its main point of reference. It is the human factor that continues to bring about and shape things and processes, making them meaningful and significant in each present (Holtorf 2002).

Whereas the definition of the core of archaeology may be a matter of friendly debate and emphasis, more serious are Olsen’s programmatic statements concerning the way in which archaeologists are supposed to work. Despite the intellectual vibrancy of his own past contributions to the theory of archaeological interpretation (e.g. Olsen 1990), he is not now very fond of what he calls “our current obsession with turning mute things into storytellers or otherwise loading them with interpretative burdens they mostly are unfit to carry.” He therefore seeks an alternative to what he considers are the “current regimes of interpretation and intellectualization”. In this spirit, Olsen claims, things need to be recognized “as things” and they may be “the source of their own signification”: a boat, he suggests, is significant for being a boat and nothing else. Such a truism surely invites an analysis and indeed interpretation of what Olsen actually means, for every sentence is not only a sentence but also a transmitter of meaning. Contrary, I suspect, to his intentions, Olsen’s tautological reasoning is a form of anti-theory that seemingly makes do without the high-flying interpretive approaches he so much wants to leave behind him. But by asserting for his claims the status of an alternative to conventional interpretations, Olsen pursues a risky intellectual strategy. His ambition to remove his own interpretive approach from the general archaeological playing field of competing theories and “intellectualizations” is anything but hidden and indeed easy to see through. It makes little sense that the ideas of Bjørnar Olsen, of all archaeologists, should be somehow separate from other archaeologists’ ideas. The chances are therefore that in due course we will not be witnessing a general “farewell to interpretation” but possibly more likely a farewell to Olsen’s farewell to interpretation – soon to be superseded by other intellectualizations, thus becoming a thing of the past, and then perhaps worth being studied as such.

In the end I expect that Olsen (and for that matter Solli) will agree with me that although it may be true that over the past couple of decades the previously dominant style of archaeological theorizing has changed

and a more pragmatic and eclectic way of archaeological reasoning has been spreading, this does not mean that archaeological theory and intellectual reasoning as such are dead (cf. Bintliff & Pearce 2011). I consider Olsen's own paper to be a good manifestation of this realization, not because he offers something profoundly new and different but precisely because he offers a variation on some of the themes of archaeological interpretation and intellectualism that have been with us for decades.

Archaeological theory is about ideas and about thoughtful practice. To the extent that Olsen's suggestions contribute to archaeological theory defined in this way, they are more than welcome. For example, his recent co-authored work on a recently deserted mining town in Svalbard is highly original and stimulates archaeological practice in many interesting ways (Andreassen, Bjerck & Olsen 2010). It has to be said, however, that the most compelling sections of the book are not those about the deserted town and all its splendid things but Hein Bjerck's personal account of the group's fieldwork, joined up with his reminiscences from when the town was still inhabited by people. I therefore have my doubts that some of Bjørnar Olsen's rather more radical claims about "a new and more interesting archaeology" turning to "things themselves" – things that are intended to be liberated from human story-telling and interpretation and instead to be recognized "as things" – will ever come to sound "mild and normal".

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A PLEA FOR CRITIQUE

Anna Källén

Reading Bjørnar Olsen's article makes me sad. I am sad about the lack of will and passion, and the gloomy disillusionment that took its place. I am sad to witness such an arrogant dismissal of archaeology in Sweden in general, and *Current Swedish Archaeology* in particular, with only eleven of the hundred works in the bibliography by archaeologists with affiliations in Sweden (which could be compared with the fourteen listed works by Olsen himself), and zero references to CSA in an article that was meant to mark the occasion of its twentieth anniversary. This makes me sad, not because Swedish archaeology, or CSA, necessarily deserves to be described as cutting-edge for archaeological theory development on a global scale, but because such a dismissal by means of silence is the enemy of critical conversation. On the same note, it is sad to see someone who was not so very long ago a voice of importance in Scandinavian archaeology, talking with axes and reindeers, and referring to himself for answers. I sincerely hope that this is not what is written in the stars for the future of archaeology.

I can discern one theme that I really like and that seems reasonable among Olsen's four proposed ways for the future. It has to do with the acknowledgement (of *alternative*, hitherto silent, or at least not so loud voices outside of the immediate radar of Anglo-Saxon archaeology), and resurrection (of the fragments and dirty small pieces of materiality that are at the heart of archaeological practice) of people and things at, or off, the margins of mainstream, well-funded, tourist-magnetic and award-winning archaeology. All very well, so far. But how this is going to be done without theory and without critique, I simply cannot understand.

In my life as an archaeologist (which has mainly been connected to Southeast Asia), theory has been like a really good friend, offering al-

ternative ways to see and appreciate new, unexpected, complementary qualities of the materials at my hands. Theory has been my saviour in moments of delirious omnipotence, when I thought I saw and knew it all. At such moments theory has intervened, like an honest friend, with its complicating, annoying, enriching insistency, reminding me of other views, other perspectives. I have now and then seen theory being used in straightjacket interpretations suffocating archaeological materials (and this, of course, deserves profound criticism), but these occasions are by far outnumbered by the instances where theory has opened up and relieved archaeological material from the narrow vision and monophonic voice of *The Archaeologist* (some examples from the recent history of Swedish archaeology and CSA are Burström 1990; Hjørungdal 1994; Ojala 2006; Fernstål 2008). Without theory there will be no challenges to claims of knowledge from those who are already in the safe centre of the discourse and discipline of archaeology. For all these reasons, I cannot see any sense in Olsen's portrayal of theory as something entirely aloof and elitist, only creating unfortunate hierarchies. On the contrary, theory can still do wonderful things if you are interested in marginal perspectives and are up for a challenge.

The material turn, at least since the place-the-stone-on-your-desk article by Tim Ingold in *Archaeological Dialogues* (2007), has been embraced more widely as a golden opportunity for archaeologists, and a future way forward for a meaningful archaeology. The (re)turn to things proposed here by Olsen stands out from the crowd by his claim that the archaeologist's relation to the thing is direct and emancipated from theory. Put simply, that the way forward is to "trust in our own perception". An "axe is significant primarily due to its unique axe qualities; a reindeer due to its inherent and multiple reindeer qualities". And here follows a reference – not to the axe or the reindeer itself, but to Olsen 2010. To me, this is a pretty strong indication that, no matter how much we hope for the stone to speak, there is no other way to express our knowledge about the axe and the reindeer than via our own situated bodies. It is now twenty-four years since Donna Haraway wrote her *Situated Knowledges*, and it seems as topical as ever. Haraway says that the common notion of the scientist's infinite vision is "an illusion, a god-trick". It is a "false vision promising transcendence of all limits and responsibility". A scientist who pursues the god-trick of seeing everything without taking responsibility for his or her own partial perspective, fails to create responsible knowledge (Haraway 1988:582f). "The knowing self is partial in all its guises, never finished, whole, simply there and original; it is always constructed and stitched together imperfectly, and *therefore* able to join with another, to see together without claiming to be another" (*ibid.*, 586, italics in original).

I cannot see how Olsen's (re)turn to things would revolutionize archaeology. More than anything it reminds me of nineteenth- and pre-criticism twentieth-century (white middle-age middle-class male) archaeologists mediating like magicians true stories about things from the past. Here I recall Gayatri Spivak's warnings about representations of subaltern people (i.e. extremely marginalized people without autonomous voice or even space in official discourse). Spivak warns against claims from intellectuals to fully represent (i.e. speak for) the subaltern, which she says is a claim for control that will primarily benefit the intellectual at the expense of the subaltern (Spivak 1988). The god-trick approach in the (re)turn to things similarly allows the archaeologist to claim full control of the artefact. It reduces and closes the thing into the realm of the archaeologist himself, rather than opening it up to the world and letting it be appreciated as the complicated indefinable assemblage or "gathering" that Bruno Latour and others talk about. I then find Donna Haraway's 24-year-old plea for the partial perspective more hopeful for the future, with its understanding of the knowing archaeologist as partial, never finished, imperfect, and *therefore* able to join with another (such as a thing, or indeed a reindeer, which I hesitate to talk about as a thing). To be able to talk about things as assemblages or gatherings of innumerable aspects that reach far beyond the restricted knowledge and partial perspective of a single archaeologist, there is no doubt need for both theory and critique (Latour 2004).

Haraway's *Situated Knowledges* and Spivak's *Can the Subaltern Speak?* are two key texts in critical theory. Its main two branches, critical gender theory and postcolonial theory, have not been included at all in Olsen's résumé of the past and premonitions for the future of Scandinavian archaeology. I find his exclusion of gender studies almost offensive, considering the great impact it has had on archaeology and society in general over the past decades, and how much of importance still remains to be done in that field. The omission of postcolonial theory is perhaps less serious, because it has not had much impact on Scandinavian archaeology so far. But I think there are good reasons to keep it in mind for the future.

Compared with other academic disciplines, archaeology has been hesitant about embracing postcolonial theory (although it was considered already by Shanks & Tilley in *Social Theory in Archaeology*), which has now been around and been very influential for 35 years. Generally, postcolonial theory is about revealing invisible structures of power and inequality in our mundane discourses, and offering concepts and tools to create alternative images. It is characterized by its passionate criticism, and some key concepts are Orientalism, the Other, Hybridity, Third

Space, and the Subaltern. Swedish archaeologists have so far mainly used these concepts to create alternative interpretations of prehistoric materials (e.g. Fahlander & Cornell 2007; Peterson 2011). Internationally it has also been used in discussions that relate more to archaeological heritage (e.g. Meskell 2009). In such discussions you find also more of the burning will to reveal, and make better, the critical frenzy that is characteristic of postcolonialism (e.g. González-Ruibal, in Meskell 2009).

Contrary to Olsen, to me the idea of international homogenization and a diminished role for nation states in the wake of globalization seems but a chimera. Only a couple of years ago, the French government issued a new heritage law claiming rightful ownership and repatriation of artefacts that have at some point been removed from the patria. On a global scale, repatriation claims from France and other nations or communities are more common than ever before. In Scandinavia, the attraction of extreme nationalist politics to narratives of archaeology and national heritage is difficult to ignore. Both Sweden and Denmark currently have strong (but not necessarily welcome) parliamentary support for heritage issues. And in Norway, a man of claimed Viking descent recently pursued a horrendous crusade against what he saw as a multicultural socialist society. So there is every reason for Scandinavian archaeology to take questions of heritage and contemporary culture seriously, to work with constant criticism against resilient images of cultural purity, essence and development, and to work passionately for the possibilities of alternative understandings of things and people of the past.

I can see two main ways that that future archaeology in Sweden can benefit from critical perspectives such as critical gender theory and postcolonial theory. In archaeological research that aims to say something about sites, things, and people from the distant past, such perspectives can contribute critical analyses of the narratives and deep structures of archaeological knowledge, with the aim of finding hitherto silent groups and question unfortunate power imbalances (between men and women, between humans and reindeer, between evolved and primitive...). These perspectives also come with a toolkit of alternative concepts (such as queer, subaltern, the Other, hybridity, the uncanny, palimpsest, provenance...) which are useful in the creation of alternative conceptions of the past that work against the ideas of cultural essentialism and linear teleological development that have for so long been at the heart of traditional archaeological narratives and archaeology as popular culture. With such a critical engagement with materials, structures, and bodies of the past, archaeologists will also have a lot to offer to the material turn in the social sciences, with our tested and questioned methods for material analysis (such as typology, stratigraphy, reuse, and site formation).

Secondly, critical perspectives have much to offer to the research and practice of archaeological heritage management. Critical discourse analysis can here be used to question the normative ways of archaeological knowledge production that have for a very long time privileged the perspectives of white Anglo-Saxon, middle-aged, middle-class, heterosexual men. Its engaged criticism works to reveal that such predominance is not due to matters of fact, but is historically contingent and due to the strength and resilience of dominant discourses. The alternative concepts from gender theory and postcolonial theory can allow the material that we study to resist such narratives, and help us create alternative ones. Moreover, with their focus on discourse analysis, these critical perspectives allow us to see that normative narratives reside not only in readable texts, but just as much in the choreographies of visitors moving through sites and museums, in the expected communication between the archaeologists, the museum and its visitors, and in the very structure of the artefact collections that is maintained through standardized forms filled in at archaeological excavations and later becoming the foundations of archaeological museums. Such criticism has the potential to reach much further than add-women-(or immigrants, or LGBT-persons, or...)-and-stir, since it works against the very structure of hegemonic normative narratives in archaeological texts, heritage sites, and museums.

“Criticism is an act of love”, said Paul Bové in a remembrance volume for Edward Said, founding father of postcolonial theory and one of the most influential academics of the twentieth century. Edward Said had a passionate, sometimes political, always critical voice debating historical structures of thought as well as contemporary political conflicts. Paul Bové said that he had learned from Said that honest criticism is not about destruction and negative persecution, although it is sometimes conceived as such. Criticism that matters is about real engagement and desire to reveal, in order to make better (Bové 2005:39). Such real engagement and passion to reveal unfortunate structures in our language and discourse, linking past with present in order to create better ways ahead, is for me a great inspiration. It should be a great framework to use in work with people and things at, or off, the margins of mainstream, well-funded, tourist-magnetic and award-winning archaeology. It would in any case be an interesting and totally worthwhile way to go for the future of Scandinavian archaeology.

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IN DEFENCE OF THEORY AND THE PATIENCE OF THINGS

Brit Solli

Las Cosas

El bastón, las monedas, el llavero ... Cuántas cosas, limas, umbrales, atlas, copas, clavos, nos sirven como tácitos esclavos, ciegas y extrañamente sigilosas! Durarán más allá de nuestro olvido; no sabrán nunca que nos hemos ido (Jorge Luis Borges 1983:43).

Tingene

Spaserstokken, myntene, nøkkelknippet.... Så mange ting, filer, dørterskler, nakkevirvler, drikkebegre, nagler, de tjener oss som tause slaver, blinde og usedvanlig hemmelighetsfulle! De vil vare hinsides vår glemsel; de vil aldri vite at vi er borte (my translation into Norwegian).

Things

My walking-stick, small change, key-ring... Many things, files, sills, atlases, wine-glasses, nails, which serve us, like unspeaking slaves, so blind and so mysteriously secret! They'll long outlast our oblivion; and never know that we are gone (translation A.S. Kline, 2008).

First and foremost; I have truly enjoyed reading Bjørnar Olsen's personal passage through "a disciplinary landscape of the recent past" and his proposed four trends for the future. When the editors of *Current Swedish Archaeology* for the journal's twentieth anniversary invite established university archaeologists well over the age of fifty to comment on the recent past and trends for the future, a taste of individual experiences is

hard to avoid. Like Olsen, I realize that my comment may show a dint of “intellectual narcissism”.

Cultural events in Norway in the last decade seem indeed to be based on “anniversaries”: The 2005 jubilee marking the dissolution of the union with Sweden on 7 June 1905; in 2006 the writer Henrik Ibsen (1828–1906) was celebrated; in 2010 it was Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson's (1832–1910) year of commemoration; the Nobel laureate of 1920, Knut Hamsun (1859–1952), was not so much celebrated in 2009. He sided with the Nazis during the German occupation of Norway in the long years 1940–1945. And now we are in for another grand anniversary in 2014, celebrating the Norwegian Constitution of 17 May 1814, when Norway said farewell to 400 years of union with Denmark.

The year 1905 was also an important one for archaeology in Norway; the parliament passed the first Cultural Heritage Act (*Lov om Fredning og Bevaring af Fortidslevninger*, 13 July 1905). Through this law archaeological sites and monuments were protected and considered to be the property and heritage of the nation and not of individual landowners. Norwegian archaeology a hundred years ago was firmly grounded in the Scandinavian tradition of Oscar Montelius (e.g. 1885) and Sophus Müller (e.g. 1884). Archaeology was considered to be a cross-disciplinary field from the first kitchen-midden commission in 1848 onwards, and “what we now term ‘ecological’ perspectives were developed methodologically, and ‘ecofacts’ were studied both by natural scientists and archaeologists” (see Solli 2011:49–50 for references). Graham Clark knew the Scandinavian research tradition well, and in the preface to his book *The Mesolithic Settlement of Northern Europe* (1936) the acknowledgements demonstrate that Clark's eco-archaeological perspectives, further developed in the Star Carr investigations (Clark 1954), came from Scandinavia. The eco-archaeology presented by Lewis Binford and others in the 1960s were not new to Scandinavian archaeology, but the anthropological and system-theoretical framework were unfamiliar. The New Archaeology's (NA) insistence that archaeology should be classified as a Science following strict positivist hypothetical-deductive methods, with the goal of reaching scientific explanations with the ability to predict past human behaviour, were also of a kind and jargon different from the traditional Scandinavian eco-archaeology which aimed at writing the cultural history of the nation.

Binford's *Archaeology as Anthropology* (1962) certainly had an impact on Scandinavian archaeology but, in my opinion, before 1970 the impact was marginal. When Scandinavian archaeology students started to gather at the so-called “Kontaktseminar” the winds from the west augmented from a little breeze to a storm at some of the Scandinavian

archaeology departments, but as Olsen points out: "Operating in this entrenched archaeological landscape was not without risks." I consider that the trenches, constructed in defence against the invasion of both NA and postprocessual archaeology, turned out to be deeper in Denmark than elsewhere in Scandinavia, and this led to an exodus of talented archaeologists from Denmark.

Several of the younger generation of archaeologists all over Scandinavia were inspired by the positivist New Archaeology, and paradoxically also, in the vein of the times, Marxist theories (Solli 1992:101). When I started to study archaeology at the University of Bergen in autumn 1979, I quite soon became an enthusiastic fan of the New Archaeology and System Theory, and Binford eventually became a veritable hero of mine!

BACK TO THE EIGHTIES – WHAT HAPPENED IN OSLO?

In the autumn of 1983, after having studied Spanish and History, I began to read archaeology again at the University of Oslo under the supervision of Stig Welinder. I clearly remember a seminar, not very well attended by the magister students, where the 1982 volumes *Symbolic and Structural Archaeology* (Hodder 1982a) and *Symbols in Action* (1982b) were up for discussion. What was this? A return to descriptive particularism? Archaeology as History – or even worse – as Art? Empathetic understanding? An ideational concept of culture? A return to Childe's concept of culture? I was flabbergasted, but also determined to find out more about this "reactionary" cultural and contextual archaeology "that sees archaeology as an historical discipline" (Hodder 1982a:13).

Early in my studies I had stumbled over a piece of advice given by Karl Popper to young researchers: "Try to learn what people are discussing nowadays in Science. Find out where difficulties arise, and take an interest in disagreement. These are the questions you should take up" (Popper 1963:129). Now, over 30 years later, I still think it is good advice to live by. So back in 1983 I decided, after the first shock, to find out what the "coggies" were up to.

During the 1980s in Oslo we were about ten active magister students (not to be confused with today's master's students). Stig Welinder, and from the autumn semester 1985 also Bjørn Myhre, did their best to organize theory seminars, but it would be a lie to say that the discussions were vibrant. However, the "Universitetets Oldsaksamling", of which the teaching department was a part, had a very good library to explore. And both Stig and Bjørn encouraged us to participate in conferences

both at home and abroad, e.g. the first Nordic Tag in Helsingør in 1985 (a disappointment, not much explicit theory there) and the British Tag in London in 1986. We heard rumours that things were going on in Tromsø. Ian Hodder visited Oslo in autumn 1987, and as far as I remember the seminar room was not at all “packed”.

For most students and established archaeologists in Oslo during the 1980s it was archaeology as cultural history, and especially so among those doing Iron Age and medieval archaeology. A few of the established archaeologists working with earlier periods were somewhat inspired by the New Archaeology. The atmosphere cannot be described as open and innovative. If I came up with postprocessually inspired ideas the probability was high that some veteran over lunch told me that A. W. Brøgger had written something similar before World War II. Which of course was not true; Brøgger did not write postprocessual archaeology. Writing a *magister artium* thesis (Solli 1989a) and later a *doctor artium* dissertation (Solli 1996) working on Viking Age and medieval material, and being inspired by the postprocessual debates of the 1980s and early 1990s, was not exactly the safest track to tenure.

Although I never experienced the “fierce debates ... waged at the packed research seminars in Downing Street”, Cambridge, I think that the heat of the debates during the 1980s was, even at a distance from the academic metropolises, a fun read, and writing in 1993 (published in 1996) I expressed my enthusiasm, somewhat tongue-in-cheek, this way:

Never have so many French and German thinkers quite un-problematically co-habited on fewer pages. I refuse to call this eclectic; it was just a time of euphoria:

– Finally, archaeology is going to play along with disciplines such as philosophy, the history of ideas, and anthropology! Finally, we shall be part of the general ongoing cultural critique! And look! We have read them all, from Bakhtin to Derrida, and from Kristeva via Gadamer to Lévi-Strauss. Not to forget Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault. And we are now competent enough to comment on these great thinkers; we can use them in archaeology! (Solli 1996:19).

But now I have been rambling on about my own experiences, let's get back to Olsen's article.

WHAT'S THE USE OF THEORY?

Bjørnar Olsen is right in pointing out that, from around 2000, theoretical debates in archaeology were “taught rather than fought”. The

publishing industry found a curriculum market and started to produce handbooks, readers and textbooks offering the students various theoretical positions written by the proper academics from the right institutions to sum up the state of the art in the world of Anglo-American-influenced archaeology. The euphoria of the 1980s is now a faint memory.

Olsen asks what should count as theoretical archaeology. He does not really answer this question, and throughout the article it is not quite clear what he means by theory; his aim seems to be, as he puts it, to “stop thinking that theory always intervenes and is indispensable to understanding”, we should “instead admit that the things themselves have a say and sometimes a very substantial one, for how meaning is arrived at” (cf. Olsen 2010; Edgeworth 2012).

It would certainly have been easier to follow Olsen's line of reasoning if he had explained to us what he means by theory. He critically implies that theory often is seen as “the head and practice is the obedient acting body”. Such a view of theory is static and rather unproductive, so I suppose Olsen and I agree that “top-down” applications of theory may lead to conservative results, i.e. that archaeological material illustrates the theory. The way forward is to insist on a “from the ground-up” understanding where the “things” challenge the theoretical assumptions and maybe sometimes alter the theory altogether.

However, for me theory has never been the “head”, something aloft and abstract from practice; theory has to do with certain principles, ways of seeing the world.¹ New theoretical perspectives can open up new territories and produce ideas about other possible interpretations of both old finds and new discoveries. A theory may also be of firmer kind and constitute a general system of explicit, well-founded assumptions that can explain how observations and facts are interdependent. Below follows an analysis of an antiquarian observation without archaeological theory.

1 Predefined ideas about what we are going to observe, simply theory, helps us to interpret what we “see” and “observe”. The word/term “theory” has Greek roots: Theaomai – to watch, stare with some amazement/ wondering.

Theoreo – to watch, look at, look over, inspect, contemplate, think about, and even to consult an oracle.

Theorema – an object of contemplation, and “subject of investigation”.

Theoros – A spectator/ a person present at the theatre or at athletic games, i.e. sports. “The witness to sacred festivals (and a source of the later philosophic notion of theoria” (Richard J. Bernstein 1983:123).

Theatron – a place where one gathers to watch, see something.

Theoria – a mission to an oracle, contemplation and consideration.

HOW TO DISCOVER THE EXISTENCE OF CULTURAL LAYERS

Every archaeologist knows what he/she sees when uncovering cultural layers. It is just there, can't be missed. Who needs theory to interpret a cultural layer on an archaeological site? Cultural layers may contain remains of fire places, cracked stones, garbage, constructions, rather messy things, surely no theory should be necessary to understand that this messiness of things are the remains of human activity? The answer to this question is not at all straightforward. To illustrate this I shall again turn to the archaeological site that I know best; the small town on the island of Veøy in Romsdal.

In 1768 the parson Hans Peter Schnitler wrote about the remarkable soil conditions on Veøy: Schnitler observed that on the island of Veøy the soil is very black, deep and fat. He thinks that this soil is constituted by rotting wood, rotting organic material, firewood stemming from the old *Kaupstadir* (small town) He adds that even remains of animals and human bodies and manure have contributed to this fat soil, so different from the known soil conditions on the mainland.

Of course we now know what Schnitler described, namely archaeological cultural layers. Veøy was visited by many antiquarians throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries but not one made the same point as Schnitler, although the peculiar black and fat soil conditions on Veøy were well known in the region of Romsdal. Not until 1953, when the archaeologist Asbjørn Herteig (1954) conducted a small excavation on the island, was the black soil of Veøy interpreted as cultural layers with explicit reference to similar conditions in Hedeby (Die Schwartze Erde) and the Black Earth (Svarta Jorden) in Birka.

Why was this – for us now obvious – fact not stated earlier? Schnitler wrote in a pre-archaeological period; archaeology did not exist as an academic discipline in the eighteenth century (Svestad 1995). Antiquarianism yes, archaeology no. Schnitler's observations occurred outside the much later archaeological discourse, the observations did not belong inside a disciplinary discourse (Foucault 1972), [or space/field (Bourdieu 1977), paradigm (Kuhn 1962), vocabulary (Rorty 1989)], and they were understood by Schnitler's contemporaries. In fact, almost 200 years passed before the black soils of Veøy, which had been observed and remarked upon by many antiquarians and historians of the island for 200 years, were placed inside the archaeological discourse and labelled "cultural layers". Schnitler's *statement* was outside any archaeological discourse, and as a non-discursive statement it was not comprehensible to his contemporaries.

The predicament and awkward question is: If we need predefined ideas/theories to discover and understand new things, do we really ever discover new things? I do not think that this question has a definite answer; we discover new things and new archaeological find categories all the time. Yet such discoveries do not fall out of the blue skies, but are related to a certain discourse, field, vocabulary, in the Sciences a paradigm, and to previous discoveries.

What do I mean by discourse? A discourse can be defined as all kinds of authoritative statements, not only speech and text; for example Oscar Montelius' famous drawings of the typological development of the stagecoach into a car are discursive statements.

Michel Foucault's (1972) concept of discourse constitutes a building block in his "archaeology of knowledge" construction. And Foucault talks about discursive formations; formations guided by rules that encircle certain objects and problems that are transformed into discursive practices. What happens in the nineteenth century is that archaeology is established as a discursive practice. During Schnitler's time in the eighteenth century, archaeology was not established as a discursive formation or practice.

The existence of archaeological artefacts and structures which are so obvious that we don't even reflect upon their existence as such has a research history. Phenomena that we now observe but do not classify as archaeological may well turn out to be of the utmost archaeological significance in the future and be written into the archaeological discourse.

The breaking point of theory is that it opens your mind up; theories produce ideas that can be developed in a comparative context with hitherto unknown phenomena; theories can make you see the world with new eyes. The black soil of Veøy was interpreted correctly by Schnitler, for him the things themselves had a say, but for others the things had another say inside the discourse of agriculture not archaeology. This is because archaeology as a discipline was not yet established and the theoretical principles of archaeology were not known to Schnitler either. The things did speak for themselves, but the correct (!) interpretation required a theoretical context that was not yet invented. This is why theory intervenes and helps understanding.

However, old theories fiercely defended by a stubborn establishment may impede new discoveries and interpretations – especially the kind of theories which are implicit and under-communicated. David Clarke in his seminal paper "Archaeology: The Loss of Innocence", quoted the economist John Maynard Keynes who once said that "practical men who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influences are ... usually the unwitting slaves of some defunct theorist" (Clarke

1973:7). Olsen has not convinced me that a return to things makes theory more dispensable, and I still think that Keynes has a good point.

A NEW GEOGRAPHY?

Olsen proposes as his first trend that we in the future will see “a new geography” more dispersed than in the 1980s; “a less metropolized archaeological landscape”. He is right that new networks of collaborating archaeologists are now assembled through the Internet, and that the influence of the universities that was important in the 1980s has faded dramatically. But I think Olsen is too optimistic about the waning of the academic metropolises. Influential theoretical archaeological journals, e.g. *Archaeological Dialogues* (Cambridge University Press) and *Journal of Material Culture* (Sage, London), are issued by major publishing companies situated in academic metropolises, and consequently profiting from the academic networks existing there. The gravity of the Ivy League universities in the US is a major force and will be in the foreseeable future. Bjørnar Olsen himself has spent sabbatical years at Stanford, not at the University of Oulu. *In Defense of Things* was, according to the acknowledgements in the afterword, influenced by the intellectual environment at Stanford and partly written there, not in Stockholm. Olsen remarks that the SSA (Hodder 1982a) was a “perfectly timed statement rather than the substance of what was said”, and I would add it was a seminar report in English published at the Cambridge University Press, not in *Stensilserie B* at the University of Tromsø.

In spite of Asia's rising economic and cultural force, there is reason to believe that English for a long time in the future will be the lingua franca of academic disciplines. Although network building is facilitated by the Internet, I am quite certain that being associated with the academic metropolises will be an advantage in the future too. So, if Scandinavian Universities wish to compete in the game of international publishing, both young talents and established researchers should be granted sabbatical years and means to visit the academic metropolises of the world. Brilliant books like *In Defense of Things* may be written!

A TURN TO THINGS THEMSELVES?

According to Olsen, the time for our discipline is NOW; “the current situation actually constitutes a rare *archaeological moment*”. In both Humanities and Social Sciences the linguistic and humanist dominant

discourse of the last forty years is challenged by new materialist and post-human perspectives challenging the anthropocentric understanding of nearly everything in the humanities and social sciences; the relationship between humans and things, culture and nature must be scrutinized from wider theoretical (!) perspectives giving matter, animals and things a say. And since archaeology is par excellence the discipline of things, Olsen encourages us to seize the moment. He maintains that this new interest in things does not go deep enough; the things in focus are often monumental or spectacular either in size or technology. Considering technology, I think about things like Artificial Intelligence, nano-medicine, body implants, robots etc. Olsen contests the humanization of things; the moment that is up for grabs is to recognize things as *things* and describe them as things in *themselves*.

As other archaeologists have done before him, Olsen shuns any idealistic interpretation of matter and things:

We do not find “fossilised” ideas, we find the arrangements of material which derive from the operation of a system of adaptation culturally integrated at some level. I don't have to know how the participants thought about the system to investigate it as a system of adaptation in a knowable natural world (Binford 1982:162).

Olsen proclaims in his conclusion that “a release from the humanist imperative that humans are a fundamental ingredient in every relation of interest, which also will spark off a new and more diverse interest in ecological approaches in archaeology”. He emphasizes that a return to things does not mean that things be turned into text, or “extrasomatic means of adaptations”. However, I wonder if Olsen's defence of things isn't also a return to a kind of Binfordian eco-materialism?

As far as I understand Olsen, the main focus should not be on “the Indian behind the artifact” or “the System behind the artifact” but the assemblages of things themselves in all their messiness. He suggests that the messiness of “smashed pots, slag lumps, flint debris, caulking resins, burnt bones, fire-cracked rocks” etc. resist “humanizing and interpretative exploitation”.

In medieval urban archaeology, material gatherings like this have a name: mass material. According to Olsen, “their assembly, gathering and bonding resist temporal ordering and chronological sequencing”. This statement reminds me of a discussion in Scandinavian medieval archaeology in the late 1980s and early 1990s on the value of mass material in medieval archaeology. Anders Andrén (1985) suggested that the *manifest* remains such as consciously constructed monuments are primordial and create an interpretative framework inside of which the

randomly agglomerated *latent* mass material is secondary. The mass-material constitutes “cultural sludge filled with all kinds of rubbish and remains of human activity” (Andrén 1985:10, my translation). Andrén’s classification of mass material as *latent* and secondary was met with resistance (Nordeide 1989a and b, Solli 1989b)

It is certainly difficult to order mass material chronologically in the shape of messy remains from ordinary daily life; this material may “resist naming and classification”, but it is not impossible (Solli 1989a and b). The stratigraphic analysis of deep cultural layers is based on finding order in that which appears disorderly, e.g. by using the Harris matrix as a tool. Olsen seems to mean that we should stop doing this and “end our current obsession with turning mute things into storytellers”. However, in my opinion these mute and patient things are full of stories of e.g. garbage disposal; matter out of – and in – place etc. These enduring gatherings of things are quite fit to carry “interpretative burdens”, and by studying formation processes assemblages of things can “produce alternative histories”. But without chronology, taphonomic analysis, and sequencing these histories will be “thin” (cf. Geertz 1973) surface-like histories of messy matter, and how interesting is that?

To understand such assemblages it is important to make sequences, underpinning chronology and classification. I see no reason why these no-things should resist naming and classification. To write is to name; how are we going describe assemblages of things without naming and classifying?

A FAREWELL TO INTERPRETATION?

Perhaps the trademark of postprocessualism was abstract interpretations cut off from the very subsistence-economic everyday life and struggle to survive in the past. Olsen’s examples are quite amusing and I agree: a river is not always cosmic; a rock art depiction of a tree is not always the world-tree; a boat is useful as a floating and transport device for humans, namely as a boat; daily chores were not trivial and comprised knowledge now long forgotten. Archaeology can rediscover old tacit skills without the theoretical umbrellas of structuralism or post-structuralism. I concur with Olsen “that things may be the source of their own signification”. Things have special “affordances” (cf. Gibson 1986:138–139), but a boat can be used as something else than a floating device; upside down it can be used as a shelter, a big boat can be turned into a boat-house for smaller boats. The *boatness* of the boat contains many un-boatly affordances. I guess that Olsen would classify this as

not over-interpretation of the boat possibilities, but as sensible “everyday and real” handling of the original boat.

I side with Olsen’s statement that “such engagements with things, animals and other natures are far from trivial, in the derogatory sense of the word, but imply knowledge, care and attachment, and a respect for what things are in their own being.” Maybe the turn to things should also involve a renewal of experimental archaeology? Archaeologists are for the most part recruited from the urban middle classes; how many of us are able to live our daily lives without using running tap water, modern plumbing and electricity? Or cook food on a primitive stove? Till a field without modern technology (or till a field at all!) etc. etc.?

In 2006 I went to Iceland and met, among others, young archaeologists from New York. We visited the farmhouses in Þverá, Mývatnssveit, which were abandoned after World War II but leaving everything as it was then. In the kitchen there was an old iron stove, and I could tell the New Yorkers that I knew how to cook on such a stove, how to regulate the heat etc. “Why do you know this?” they asked. I told them about my childhood’s traditional Norwegian cottage life without electricity and bathrooms, and later how we often as archaeologists could live for months in primitive mountain dairy farms (Norwegian *setre* or *stølshus*) or forest cabins without electricity. They looked at me as if I were an alien.

ARCHAEOLOGY AS ARCHAEOLOGY?

In this section Olsen presents both his strengthened confidence that a renewed archaeology of things will not just be “an alternative to history” but produce “alternative histories”. However, he is also somewhat defeatist, showing a loss of confidence in the ability of the things themselves to contribute to History. Olsen seems to mean that archaeology can only imperfectly contribute to topics like social and political organization, socio-cultural structure, things as symbols in action etc. He does not believe in “middle-range magic”, and as far as I understand him, archaeology will be considered “inferior” if our ambitions continue to be too “airy”. He maintains that “we work with the messy spoils of history” and that this “otherness” of the archaeological record is not “a problem, representing loss, failure or defect”.

What I do not understand in Olsen’s line of reasoning is why these spoils are too inferior to contribute to the “History” of humankind. My failure to understand may stem from the fact that Olsen does not define what he means by “History”. Leo Klejn’s (1993) distinction between the

fields and goals of archaeology and prehistory comes to mind. However, Olsen does not, as Klejn did, see archaeology as a data-producing method for historians to process. But he requires (pre)history to be kept outside of an archaeology as archaeology. This is a trajectory for archaeology that I, as an archaeologist also working with written sources, for the moment do not find very constructive. But of course I might have missed a “deep” point here.

On the other hand, I'm all ears when Olsen describes the discoveries and thrills of fieldwork; the engagement with a place is “all very different from reading about” it. He exemplifies the thrills of discovery with “a chert blade not seen or touched by other humans for thousands of years...”. Here Olsen exposes an enthusiasm for age! Well, sequencing and chronology are still important...

Concerning the thrills and toils of fieldwork Olsen quotes a passage by Renfrew. I shall be utterly immodest and quote from my doctoral dissertation written in 1993:

The physical labour of fieldwork transforms the intellectual quest for knowledge of the past through material culture into a very personal, embodied experience. The physical toil is stored in your body, maybe for the rest of your life, inherent in defunct knees and elbows, and an aching back. On a long-term fieldwork project very “unscientific” ideas come to your mind. The very aspect of “being there”, learning to know the physical environment and people living in the landscape, and constantly trying to imagine *how* it could have been living there *then*, all these mentally and bodily experiences embrace you totally and drive you into a state of empathy. By living in the same place as the past “others” did, I feel that I can better understand how it was like *then*. This emotional and physical experience of empathy is maybe non-science, but it sure does not feel like non-sense. This experienced and embodied knowledge is used to *make sense* literally of the archaeological record. After a time of physical out-door work, the rhythm of day and night, sun, rain and showers, light and mist, and landscapes become part of you. You, the reader, might want to classify this line of thought less as a state of empathy and more like an overwrought state of nature-mysticism. But working on Veøy really felt like a total and emotional experience of body and soul. The theoretical was intrinsically personal and vice versa (Solli 1996:30–31).

Olsen makes a call for archaeology to become more descriptive and the aim should be to “produce rich descriptive accounts that also understand and interpret, not by heading beyond things and the immediate world, or by leaving out what arises in the momentary presence of encounter, but by allowing them a rightful share.”

What does he mean by rich descriptive accounts? Detailed descriptive accounts? Clifford Geertz divided descriptions into “thin” and “thick” (Geertz 1973). He exemplified this by describing a wink. A “thin description” of a wink describes it as a physical phenomenon, but a “thick description” of a wink contextualizes it and seeks to uncover the symbolic meaning behind the wink.

Since Olsen encourages us not to be so obsessed with finding the meaning behind e.g. the petroglyph of a boat but to focus on the material affordances of the boat, that it can be used as a floating and transport device for people, I suppose that by a rich description he does not mean thick description. He emphasizes that archaeologists describing things should “let us be inspired by the descriptive richness the antiquarians aimed at....”. The antiquarians of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries sometimes did not distinguish between cultural and natural phenomena; the descriptions could be anecdotal and cover several disciplines; disciplines which themselves were in the process of becoming, cf. above on Schnitler’s discovery. I’m not sure if the antiquarian more or less hybrid way of writing is the path to pursue when doing archaeology as archaeology. However, when Olsen suggests that we should compose more creative and playful descriptions, even telling of thrills of discovery and the life in the field, like adventurers and explorers have done, I entirely agree with him.

CONCLUSION

Bjørnar Olsen started his excursion pointing to the perhaps not so innovative phenomenon, that we are “haunted by anniversaries”. Perhaps the academically most wide-ranging 2012 anniversary is the following: Fifty years ago Thomas S. Kuhn published *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962). His notions of normal science, puzzle-solving, incommensurability and paradigm shifts are household concepts in any discussion of disciplinary change. Kuhn’s object of study was the natural Sciences but the concept of paradigm and paradigm shift are now widely applied both inside and outside Academia. The majority of people applying the concept have never read Kuhn and do not know in what context it was supposed to be employed. I have elsewhere maintained that I do not see archaeology as a paradigmatic science in the Kuhnian sense of the concept; in the humanities and social sciences there are traditions and schools, not paradigms (Solli 1989a:29). Neither the New Archaeology nor postprocessual archaeology represented paradigm shifts in accordance with Kuhn’s definition of the concept. Archaeological meth-

ods developed in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, such as typological analysis, classification, analysis of stratigraphy and excavation techniques, still constitute basic skills in archaeology.

The turn to a “rich description of things”, analysing gatherings of things as palimpsests in the present, and toning down the quest for meaning, is in my opinion not a paradigm shift in any Kuhnian sense of the concept. It may represent a praxis breaking with the linguistic and human-centred frame of interpretation, but not a total break. Language and writing (Olsen’s “rich description”) is nonetheless on the agenda, and human-made things are persistently at the core of archaeology. I do not see the turn to things movement as a return to Montelius or any of the older traditions of doing archaeology; a full U-turn backwards is impossible because of the insights learned from both the New Archaeology and postprocessual archaeology. The turn to things will, as far as I can see, be too enmeshed in traditional archaeological methods to be proclaimed a new paradigm. For example, if an archaeological record is to be profoundly (richly?) described as a palimpsest there has to be, in some form or other, a description of formation processes. However, the perspectives presented by Olsen in this keynote article can constitute an *archaeological moment* if enough of us critically take up the challenge.

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A BRITISH PERSPECTIVE ON BJØRNAR OLSEN'S "AFTER INTERPRETATION"

Julian Thomas

I have very much enjoyed Bjørnar Olsen's insightful reflections on the present condition of theory in archaeology, and have found much to agree with in his text. Convention demands, though, that I should take issue with his arguments, and there are certainly areas in which I would wish to qualify his account of developments in archaeological thought over the past three decades. Olsen contends that when it first emerged, post-processual archaeological thinking was perceived as transgressive, illicit, and dangerous. At some point during the 1990s, it lost its radical edge, and was normalized in such a way as to enable it to be incorporated into a new consensus. With the ending of the "theory wars" of the 1980s in a kind of truce, theoretical debate in archaeology has declined and become comparatively trivial in its content, to the extent that some authorities have felt entitled to identify a "death of theory" within the discipline. However, says Olsen, the moderate consensus is now beginning to fragment, and a newly radicalized archaeology is starting to emerge, based upon a return to things, a reining-in of interpretation, a revalorization of archaeology itself, and the emergence of a global discourse in place of the old "core areas" of archaeological thought.

Much of this I am in sympathy with, but it strikes me that what is missing from Olsen's picture of the loss of archaeological radicalism in the 1990s is the question of the discipline's progressive de-politicization. He notes that Britain has ceased to be a self-evident centre of philosophical debate in archaeology, but this leaves hanging the issue of why the

critique of the New Archaeology should have developed in the UK in the first place, rather than in the US. Now, Britain has a long history of antiquarian and archaeological research, had amassed large numbers of academic archaeologists as a consequence of the expansion of the university sector in the 1960s, and had seen an exponential growth in field archaeology as a result of post-war redevelopment. But none of these factors in itself explains why a distinctive tradition of archaeological thinking should have been sparked on a small island in the throes of post-imperial decline. One way of characterizing the post-processual era is to say that while the New Archaeology had sought to make the discipline more rigorous by introducing the epistemology of the natural sciences, the developments of the 1980s complemented this move by broadening the interpretive possibilities of archaeology, in opening the discipline to the social and cultural sciences in general. I suggest that this turn was facilitated (but by no means determined) by the specific political circumstances of Britain in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

This period saw the collapse of the “post-war consensus”, in which both ends of the conventional political spectrum agreed on the fundamentals of the way that the British state would be managed: full employment, a cradle-to-grave social security system, free education and health care, collective bargaining between trade unions and industrial management, and the nationalization of power, transport and key industries. From 1979 onwards, in reaction to the first shocks of globalization, the UK became a kind of laboratory for a radical free-market alternative: deregulation, de-industrialization, privatization, outsourcing, de-unionization. This sea change in policy led to a polarization of British society in general, and academia in particular. The actions of Margaret Thatcher’s government were resisted by a lively, if thoroughly disorganized left (something that is rather less in evidence in the present). The British universities had been affected by the waves of student militancy that had followed the events of 1968 in Paris and Chicago, and the social science departments were often home to debates on Western Marxism, feminism, and a range of other radical perspectives. Any university town in the 1970s and 1980s would have had a radical bookshop full of works by French and German thinkers. This was the backdrop to the emergence of post-processual thinking: a country locked in political struggle, where police and miners fought pitched battles, and where volumes of radical philosophy fell readily into the hands of any sceptical graduate student.

This is not to say that everyone who became interested in the critique of established modes of archaeological analysis during this time had any level of political commitment. Far from it. But one of the key notions that developed in the early 1980s was the understanding that as a form

of cultural practice, archaeology formed part of a “war of position” in which common conceptions of humanity and society were constructed and contested. Looking back now at the titles of TAG sessions and issues of the *Archaeological Review from Cambridge* from that long-ago era, it is striking how many address “The Politics of...” some aspect of archaeology, from heritage and museums to fieldwork, landscape and interpretation. This is obviously much less the case now. Indeed, I would suggest that it was the decline of a concern with archaeology as a subject that was potentially political in all of its aspects that was intimately connected with the loss of critical edge that Olsen notes. By the middle of the 1990s, British society had entered the “post-political” era of the neoliberal consensus. Left and right appeared to agree that mass unemployment and growing social inequality were the new facts of life, that the financial services industry should be completely deregulated and allowed to “create wealth”, and they only differed on whether this wealth should be taxed and used to compensate those out of work or on low wages, or allowed to “trickle down” from the tables of the affluent. Irony of ironies: the radical bookshop where had bought my volumes of Foucault and Althusser during the 1980s had by now become a Starbucks. I do not wish to imply too straightforward a “read across” between political reality and academic discourse, but it was certainly during this time that it began to be seen as vaguely embarrassing to talk about a critical or engaged archaeology, that issues of power and social inequality in the past started to be dismissed as a bit boring and *passé*, and feminist archaeology began to be eclipsed by the less contentious gender archaeology. The lesson that I take from all this is that archaeology is unlikely to ever be as exciting again as it was during the 1980s if it cloisters itself in the academy, and neglects the broader cultural implications of its practice.

This is not to say that the recent developments that Olsen points to could not be a source of renewed archaeological radicalism. But I am sceptical that they represent a new “revolution” in the sense that the New Archaeology and post-processual archaeology were. Indeed, it may be that a new revolution isn't actually what we need at this point. What we may be seeing instead is the slow realization of some of the unfulfilled promise of the 1980s. One way in which Olsen's four trends differ from previous archaeological “revolutions” is that they do not involve the introduction of any new “isms” into the discipline. Post-processual archaeology in particular drew on Marxism, structuralism, post-structuralism, structuration theory and feminism. The classic format for an academic paper in the heyday of both processual and post-processual archaeology involved a preamble in which a new theoretical framework was introduced, an outline of an archaeological problem, and the ap-

plication of the theory to create a new analysis. There is nothing inherently wrong with this, and it did result in a series of stimulating new interpretations, but it sometimes meant that the theory involved was only partially digested. This is why I think that Olsen is mistaken in arguing that British archaeologists “pretended” that phenomenology was “just another interpretive device”. There was no pretence involved: of course this was how the tradition was initially apprehended, because that was how theoretical archaeology worked in the 1960s to 1990s: new ideas were there to be found in proliferation, and each could potentially deliver fresh perspectives on our evidence.

Now, however, things are different. There are fewer new philosophies left “out there” for archaeologists to investigate, and the option of flitting on to the “next big thing” no longer exists. The alternative is to turn back to the ideas that we have sometimes passed over in a cursory way, and to try to work with them with much greater commitment. Phenomenology is a case in point: if the initial engagement with this framework was all about monuments and landscapes, that is fine. The work of a thinker like Heidegger is rich and complex, and it takes a long time for its implications to be fully appreciated. After a quarter of a century, it is clear that this strand of thought is not leading us in the direction that we might initially have anticipated, and that is all to the good. Phenomenology is a special case, because it explicitly attempts to overcome the effects of an abstracted theorization of everyday life. But a related issue is that a weakness of much of the early post-processual archaeology was that it often attempted to apply bodies of complex theory to archaeological evidence without first recasting them in relation to material things. In this respect, it repeated some of the naivety of the early New Archaeology.

I suspect that the “revolution” that Olsen refers to does not actually represent a new development, but the long-term outcome of thinking hard about things. None of the tendencies that Olsen points to are really new. “Material culture studies” dates back to the 1980s, and there has been a *Journal of Material Culture* since 1996. But as Olsen implies, the perspectives on the material world that are now emerging are far removed from the Hegelian objectification theory of Miller’s *Material Culture and Mass Consumption* (1987), for example. Similarly, post-humanism is not exactly a recent development, and we can easily cite precedents like Donna Haraway’s “cyborg manifesto” (1991). In both cases, what we are seeing is the maturation of processes that have been underway for some time. Undoubtedly, the implication of these developments is that we should return to material things in a much more serious way. But I would want to resist the binary division that Olsen appears to make between the mundane, everyday significance of things and the

more "airy" interpretive meanings that he sees as foisted upon them. Equally, I think it is dubious to associate the former with Heidegger's category of the "ready-to-hand", implying that the latter fall into the "present-at-hand" realm of detached deliberation. For ethnography often demonstrates that what may seem to us to be the most recondite of spiritual or cosmological associations are often treated as unexceptional, matter-of-fact, and barely worthy of note. It may be the case that recent archaeologies have been too single-minded in the pursuit of deep symbolic meanings, passing over the rich texture of the evidence, but I think that it may be more fruitful to re-embed meaning in the densities of material substance and habitual practice than to declare it off limits.

Equally, I have reservations about Olsen's call for us to stop rushing past the material world in pursuit of history and society. In a curious way, his appeal to "archaeology as archaeology" recalls David Clarke's arguments of 1968. Where for Olsen, the fragmentary, superimposed traces of the past resist narrative order and purified time, Clarke rejected the "attempt to convey smooth historical narrative... in the total absence of the record appropriate to that art" (1978:11). Yet somehow, the desire to write a different kind of history does not seem to have declined at any point in the past 45 years. To some extent this is because, if we allow that history is something that can only be written by historians, who have written sources at their disposal, it means that the pre-literate eras are condemned to the abject condition of being without history. I am fully in agreement with Olsen that the fragmentary, incomplete and gathering nature of the archaeological past is something to be celebrated rather than regretted, but is this not equally true of the historical record? And if we are genuinely trying to adopt a post-humanist position, is it not self-contradictory to claim that we cannot write history if we have no people or texts, and only things at our disposal? Does this not concede the argument that history is an exclusively inter-subjective process? Olsen notes that it has by now become almost conventional to refer to societies as heterogeneous assemblages of people and things. When we are faced with the wrecked and overlapping remains of such an assemblage, are we limited to writing something like a memory? I would suggest that a more radical proposal, and one that we have barely begun to explore, is to consider what history might look like if it were written from the point of view of the things rather than the people.

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RETURN TO ACTION

Jes Wienberg

So we gotta get off our arses and stop just talking about it! Hear! Hear! I agree! It's action that counts, not words, and we need action now! You're right. We could sit around here all day, talking, passing resolutions, make clever speeches, it's not gonna shift one Roman soldier! So let's just stop gabbing on about it! It's completely pointless and it's getting us nowhere. I agree! This is a complete waste of time! They've arrested Brian! What? They've dragged him off! They're gonna crucify him! Right! This calls for immediate discussion! (Monty Python, *The Life of Brian*, movie 1979).

If you are haunted by anniversaries, the best thing is to ignore them! However, anniversaries as a periodical strategy of remembrance, sometimes of nostalgic feelings and mourning, may create an opportunity for applying new perspectives on both the past and the present, thereby creating new knowledge.

We are more haunted, I believe, by all the inaugural or keynote speakers, keynote lectures and keynote articles, where well-established scholars, flattered by the request, seriously point towards the future, trying to predict trends and to draw the lines for future research by others. This is an overestimated academic genre. It is a genre concerning power over the discourse in the present and at least attempts to exercise this power in the future as well, most often in vain.

However, and first of all, why in a multivocal world should we let anyone have a certain keynote status? Do they have a certain authority to lean back on? Or, as I would prefer, do they have good convincing examples to show? Secondly, are predictions about the future of any relevance to the community of teaching and research? Why not just wait and see what happens or clear your own path through the jungle of perspectives, methods and examples – free of authorities? Looking back on

past predictions, they can normally be evaluated as misleading, wrong or ridiculous. Predictions in the present are defeated by the butterfly effect, by the unpredictable actions and events in years to come. And fortunately, new generations form their own destiny.

In the beginning Bjørnar Olsen shows ironic distance and hesitation about the task given to him by *Current Swedish Archaeology* as a keynote writer on some anniversaries in theoretical archaeology, then he swallows the assignment with commitment. It becomes a text of great interest for its reflections on theoretical archaeology, mainly in Scandinavia, with a more or less conscious bias towards Tromsø and the author himself. However, as the text is declared to be “a personal excursion” my (re)action must unavoidably be to play with both the man and the ball.

The text mentions two revolutions: The past revolution of postprocessual archaeology, and the present or future revolution with a re-materialization of archaeology. And the text emphasizes four trends: a new geography, a turn to things themselves, a farewell to interpretation and archaeology as archaeology.

Revolution in an academic context is a rhetorical keyword evoking awe and greatness, probably borrowed from Thomas Kuhn's paradigmatic revolutions. Who does not want to be the leader or at least be part of a revolution, even when this concept is of doubtful relevance to subjects such as archaeology?

Olsen describes the coming of the revolution to Tromsø (and himself) and his later visit to its birthplace in Cambridge back in the 1980s, in language that arouses associations with religious experiences. Meeting the revolution “face to face”! The tone is also unreflectively nostalgic. The discussions were bold and enthusiastic in the good old days. It was a period of new discoveries, opening of doors and new territories, according to Olsen. After this a decline followed, a less polemical climate, a trivialization and a watering down. However, he sees the coming of a new revolution. Let it be! What I find remarkable here is how he writes Tromsø and himself into both revolutions with plenty of references throughout the whole text. Two of his own works (Olsen 1987; Johnsen & Olsen 1992) is even mentioned as possible candidates for an anniversary in line with other publications of theoretical archaeology in Scandinavia.

First of all, regardless of the excellent merits of Tromsø and Olsen, I find these self-references strikingly unashamed. Secondly, they are a clear example of the genre of keynotes as a base for attempts to exercise power over the discourse, in this case over both the history and the future of theoretical archaeology. The keynote, as in so many other cases, is used to inscribe scholars with their favourite ideas, which happen to

be identical with the author and his or her ideas, into the history of archaeology. Look, we were part of the former revolution and we are still going strong since we also are part of the coming revolution! Thirdly, how about the credibility as revolutionaries at the barricades, when the new revolution in almost every respect is opposite to the old one?

Back to things! Right, it is happening in theoretical archaeology these years and maybe it will continue as a reaction to the former linguistic and symbolic turn. However, most archaeologists in the field, in the museums and also many at the universities, have been deep into things as things all the time. What I do not understand is why it should be necessary to apply the philosophy of Martin Heidegger, as Olsen proposes, as a strategy to get closer to things themselves. Is that not a theoretical detour just revealing the difficulties of leaving old habits of thinking?

The four trends presented are in my opinion reasonable observations of some of the trends today. Yes, there are as far as I know no real centres of archaeology, but a number of competitive or collaborating nodes in the web – splendid! There is a conjectural return to things, even though I am not convinced that things are able to act on their own without humans. The return has much in common with cultural history and cultural archaeology, e.g. what has been criticized and attacked since the introduction of processual archaeology. A farewell to what is called “ridiculously heavy interpretative burdens”? Well, there will always be overreactions in revolutions which make you either laugh or cry. Overreaction is probably what constitutes a revolution, but who is able to decide what is a reasonable interpretation? Even an elk or a boat has or gradually acquires multiple meanings, when cut into the rock. Instead I will reformulate the trend as a farewell to the heavy burdens of theorizing, not as a prediction, but as my aspiration. Finally, archaeology has always been inspired by other perspectives and other disciplines. But maybe a reification of archaeology or an introspection based on materiality might be a good thing as a way of exploring the potentials of the source material if new methods, borrowed from the natural sciences, are added.

I am sceptical, however, about to leave the ambitions of historic narrative, whether it is grand or small stories to be told, in order to become an alternative to history. Is the fragmented and incomplete character of the record, the “entangled mess we excavate”, of interest to anyone but archaeologists? Could we imagine historians contemplating over the character of their perishable parchment and the dust of the archive instead of using it as a source? Occasionally maybe, but not always!

I am not waiting for an authority to open my eyes or guide me to a brave new world. I am not waiting for more words about revolutions,

more gabbing or discussion. Let us have some action now, meaning good examples to be inspired or convinced by.

To confess, using a religious language, I am personally more curious about the (mostly) American trend of “action archaeology” putting the present-day questions of society into the core of archaeology. Archaeology with its long-time perspective and material knowledge tries here to contribute more directly to the big issues of today – a sustainable world, climate change, population growth, urbanization and peace. A publication from this new direction is by Jeremy A. Sabloff, “Archaeology Matters. Action Archaeology in the Modern World” (Sabloff 2008; also Little 2009; Stottman 2010). Allow me to mention a concrete example from this text of interest to me at least, namely the archaeological contributions to the present debate on “collapse” (Diamond 2005; cf. Sabloff 2008:33ff).

A consequence of promoting action archaeology would be to redirect theoretical debate on materiality to the backyard. Having the key questions of the present at the forefront of archaeological debate would probably mean that other perspectives, methods and sources are more relevant to explore.

Action archaeology could be called a re-politicization of archaeology, perhaps a return to a nostalgic 1970s, but this time from other starting points. Action archaeology is in the opposite direction of having the excavation as a theatre of experience and having Indiana Jones as a role model in an archaeology defined as a part of popular culture (cf. Holtorf 2005). Action archaeology definitely would mean serious (re)entanglement with Interpretation, History and Society!

Finally, as a double paradox I will give the last words to a wise chap, Brian: “Don’t let anyone tell you what to do!” (Monty Python, *The Life of Brian*, movie 1979)

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL THEORY, CHRISTMAS PORK AND RED HERRINGS

Reply to Comments

Bjørnar Olsen

Life is mostly a quite unspectacular exercise but now and then something unusual and thrilling happens – such as having to spend your Christmas reading comments on a paper on theoretical archaeology you submitted in September. Digesting these vivid contributions between plates of herring and pork, I was surprised to note how much energy some of the commentators spend on my personal retrospective account, treating it as an attempted in-depth study of the disciplinary past – and one which upon scrutiny sadly fails to properly address Global, British, Scandinavian, Swedish, Social, Gender, and Political perspectives, to mention but a few. Indeed, most of these perspectives *are* wanting, but my ambition was far more modest: “It is important to state that this is not – NOT – a scrutinizing review of theoretical trends in Scandinavian archaeology or elsewhere. Rather it is more of a personal excursion into a disciplinary landscape of the recent past”. Obviously there is a lot that does not fit into this format, though I understand the temptation to pretend very otherwise. For example, I totally agree with Yannis Hamilakis that the differences between processual and postprocessual archaeology are vastly overdramatized, and I have argued for the similarities between these positions, including their shared ontology, in a number of works. However, this was not on the agenda this time along with numerous other issues that my colleagues seem to think I either have – or should have – addressed.

Leaving that aside, I am impressed by many of their pertinent comments offered and I think they contribute significantly to the discussion currently taking shape in the discipline. Rather than going into each of them specifically, which would have required another volume of CSA, I shall use most of my reply to address what I regard as some recurrent and interesting issues in these remarks.

The *first* issue relates to political engagement, radicalism, and the “socio-political context” of archaeology, issues which several of my commentators think I have ignored. Elisabeth Arwill-Nordbladh, referring to an earlier statement from me regarding a “programme for the 1990s”, finds that a “discussion of the power position of the discipline and the researching subject is avoided” in my current prospects. Avoided? For various reasons I am less inclined to headline it today – and in this particular context also because my objective was to write about some *new* (future) trends, and I am not sure that a topic discussed rather intensively over the last thirty years (at least) belongs to that category. This reservation notwithstanding, my section on a new archaeological geography explicitly addresses at least some aspects of this discussion where I contended that what we are witnessing is the emergence of a new, less imperialist and less nationally confined, archaeological landscape. To what extent is admittedly always a matter of discussion and, as stated, I do share Brit Solli’s opinion on the increasing dominance of English as an academic language as well as that of British and American publishing houses (though their ownership may be less obviously confined). However, in terms of authorship and intellectual influence the situation is far more diverse. The Ivy League universities in the US may be rich and powerful, but does their power radiate to discourses on archaeological theory, making them contemporary centres of debate and influence? Hardly. And just to mention another “disturbing” fact, US archaeologists do actually spend their sabbaticals in Finland and Oulu, making the situation of academic exchange today far less predictable and self-confirming than Solli seems to suggest. Thus, I restate my assertion that the concept of archaeological metropolises is a dated and ruining concept.

I have great sympathy with Hamilakis’ rich and thoughtful line of argument regarding the “political nature” of archaeology, and also share many of his general concerns. However, I am troubled by the self-justifying claim that there is no way to understand archaeology and disciplinary changes outside the social and political conditions that “gave rise” to them. Given that perspective, how could one? Julian Thomas adopts a similar position and explicitly suggests that the decline in debate in the 1990s (or what he terms “the loss of archaeological radicalism”) was a

“question of the discipline’s progressive de-politicization”. There may be something to this argument, but I remain sceptical to the idea of explaining the states of archaeological affairs as something directly related to or even caused by “external” social and political conditions. Though issues such as the role of archaeology in society, questions about interests and objectivity, conceptions of knowledge, cultural values, etc., can be seen as more or less intimately related to wider socio-political discourses, to apply this to archaeological reasoning more generally would be an unproductive reductionist stance. For example, what are the specific interlocutors and connections between, on the one hand, archaeological debates on analogical reasoning, middle-range theory, style, or “material culture as text”, to mention but a few hot issues of the 1980s, and, on the other hand, leftist reactions towards Thatcherism? I am not saying that such connections necessarily are non-existent but without being specified and explained they seem quite enigmatic to me. More generally, I think the common trope of explaining archaeology and the disciplinary past by contextualizing it against a backdrop of supposedly self-explanatory socio-political conditions leaves most of it unexplained.

Regarding the changes and disciplinary issues addressed in my retrospective account, I am more convinced by the perspectives proposed by Kuhn, Foucault, and Latour, who all in different ways have argued that scientific changes and disciplinary trajectories cannot be satisfactorily understood without taking into account the internal dynamics and forces of research, such as rivalries, alliances and networks (Latour, Kuhn), disciplinary technologies, institutional frameworks, discursive formations and effective traditions (Foucault, Latour, Kuhn), as well as aesthetic judgements, personal well-being and security (Kuhn). Still, this enduring quest for something “more” to explain our disciplinary doings strikes me as very similar to the way we have approached things and the everydayness of life, where the immediate and obvious never seems enough and therefore either has to be justified by some bigger and more honourable humanistic, social or political project or, if not, has to be subjected to all kinds of suspicious hermeneutics. Thus, and with the obvious risk of sounding irresponsibly banal and dated, may it not be – sometimes at least – that what we do, debate and write about (also) is motivated by scholarly curiosity, engagement, and enthusiasm for the topics actually dealt with rather than by some grander political or strategic agendas, whether hidden or not?

Having said this, I would like to state that I do not at all find questions about politics uninteresting or irrelevant. However, as already stated, I remain unconvinced about the straightforward links that are proposed between political commitment and the archaeology we conduct. I also

find it difficult to pretend as if the world, archaeology and we haven't changed, and which in my opinion has made what it is to be political and "radical" today something quite different than it was thirty years ago. The new concern with things may exemplify the difference (which also relates to Wienberg's somewhat surprising plea for "action archaeology"). Though the epistemological and ontological grounding for this concern is a perfectly sufficient justification in itself, it clearly has several important political and ethical implications. According to the dominant modern conception, things have value only if they are of human concern; things are little but *things-for-us*, and whatever ethical and political issues may pertain to them in archaeology, heritage, and more generally, have been motivated by their beneficial value to past or present peoples. While postprocessualists (and post-structuralists) talked much about the de-centring of the subject, and even criticized anthropocentrism, there was little that suggested any destabilization of the modern hierarchy of beings or that the progressives' empathy and care extended beyond people. What an alternative materialist position involves, and which it shares with many "premodern" and indigenous conceptions (as Hamilakis rightly asserts), is precisely to allow for a more egalitarian or flat ontology, one in which humans feature as more humble and democratized being amongst other beings, and which also acknowledges that things may be valuable in and of themselves (Introna 2009; Olsen *et al.* 2012, chapter 9; Pétursdóttir, in press). In other words, that they do not need a human concern to justify their being and even may have a *right* to exist (Ouzman 2006). One challenging ethical implication of this ontology is thus to refit the radicals' (and humanism's) attentiveness and care for people to also embrace things and other non-humans. Faced with the issues of global warming, environmental destruction and the insanely accelerated exhaustion of what the planet has given us, such an extended ethics based on a notion of care and of humans as a companion species residing among millions of others, may even prove imperative. And contrary to Thomas, who does not find that the new materialism is "revolutionary" in the sense that the New Archaeology and postprocessual archaeology were, I find this position far more radical and challenging in both political and theoretical terms.

A *second* issue that I would like to address is the role of theory and the question of how knowledge is arrived at. Some commentators are worried that my position may be conflated with old-fashioned empiricist archaeology. I am not so worried, since I actually think there is a lot to be learnt from the material sensibility characterizing this archaeology, and that the challenge is not to abolish this sensibility but rather to develop it further. And in undertaking this task I find the *related* project

of phenomenology helpful. Originally launched as a way of “relearning to look at the world”, a reclaimed “seeing” grounded in our lived experience rather than in abstract philosophical concepts and theories, phenomenology can be described as a project committed to restoring to things their integrity by respecting their native ways of manifesting themselves. As paradoxical as it may sound (but it should bring further support to Burström’s Zen wisdom), this “theory” may help us realize and become confident with the fact that our direct and material engagements with sites and things bring forth a mode of familiarity and understanding that cannot be achieved through a detached intellectual stance alone. However theoretically informed we are, whatever nicely formulated hypotheses or research questions we bring along, the sites and places we travel to do not just sit in silence passively waiting to be tested, explored and informed. They bring to these encounters their own unique qualities and competences, which make our fieldwork far less predictable and controlled than suggested by any research design model.

Acknowledging this material impact, that the sites and things themselves affect us and “speak back”, clearly involves an attitude which recalls earlier days of inductive archaeology and what is sometimes condemned as naïve empiricism. And this should be no source of embarrassment. Unfortunately, learning by encountering, by hand, from things, lost its role in the subsequent theoretical tropes of deduction, hypothesis formation, testing, interpretation, and “reading”. And the mantra that all knowledge is theory-dependent made the practice and experience that emerged from our direct involvement with things and landscapes, the *archaeological experience*, more or less irrelevant (Olsen *et al.* 2012:64–65). I think it is time to reconsider these issues and adopt a far more humble and open attitude to how the immediacy of experience affects and informs our research, an attitude which may well be called naïve or banal empiricism – and which I sincerely think is more in tune with the way things and places are *sensed* – and made sense of – by most people (which hardly are “unwitting slaves of some defunct theorist”, to borrow Keynes/Solli’s characteristic of “practical men”). Such naïve empiricism, based on an attentive and open attitude, may be crucial to leave room for wonderment and affection (Stengers 2011), for the “presence effects” that are normally silenced or explained away as irrational disturbances in the scientific and hermeneutic chase for meaning. This empiricism, furthermore, also leaves room for the almost forgotten possibility that knowledge sometimes is revealed or discovered rather than produced.

This has nothing to do with abolishing theory, as Brit Solli seems to suggest. Neither do I think that any formal definition is helpful for

the questions dealt with in my paper. Theory operates on a number of levels, and my concern was mainly with what normally are considered as ontological and epistemological issues. Here I would like to add that the changes associated with the recent turn to things also challenge us to rethink their epistemological status as “data”. By no longer being treated as epiphenomenal witnesses of society but as its indispensable constituents, and thus fundamentally involved in human conduct and social trajectories, the previously “fundamental” gaps between humans/society and things, between dynamics and statics, have withered and largely made redundant many of the bridging arguments formerly required. Thus, rather than engaging in disentanglement and purification, entrenching archaeological theory into an abstract domain of reasoning, I suggest that we should start doing away with the discriminating separation between theory, methodology and data to replace it with an epistemological openness to how each feeds into and thus affords the other. In other words, start attending to a common ground where theory is not applied but interacts, and is infused by data, and thereby also refrain from arbitrarily separating the “what” from the “how”.

A *third* issue is the reaction provoked by my claim that we should opt for archaeology rather than (culture) history. Referring to David Clarke’s seemingly related but in reality very different assertion, Julian Thomas notes that the archaeologists’ desire to write a “different kind of history” has not declined in the decades that have passed since this proposal. Some of the rationale for this historical commitment, he adds, is that “if we allow that history is something that can only be written by historians, who have written sources at their disposal, it means that the pre-literate eras are condemned to the abject condition of being without history”. I don’t think being “without history” is a great loss or disaster to people who never knew about such a conceptualization of the past, and I do not share the paternalistic inclination that this is something everyone – and everything – *should* have. To continue down this avenue is to reinforce the ingrained confusion of the past with history, made possible by ignoring that history is but one and actually a quite peculiar way of comprehending the past. As argued by Ashis Nandy (1995) in his discussion of postmodernist critique of history and the problem of integrating “the other”, the main remedy for all those who have been sceptical of history has been to improve it, to democratize history and thus to allow for alternative histories. However radical these other histories are, there has been no room for anything other than history, for alternatives *to* history (Nandy 1995:50–53). I think archaeology provide such an alternative for a different conception of the past.

Brit Solli seems to rely on a similar conception of history – and historical narratives – as indispensable. She criticizes me for supposedly having argued that the past we encounter in our excavations is too messy to be ordered. Thus she reassures, “it is certainly difficult to order... but it is not impossible... The stratigraphic analysis of deep cultural layers is based on finding order in that which appears disorderly, e.g. by using the Harris matrix as a tool.” To this I can do nothing but agree; order has indeed been found. Through ever more fine-grained dating methods and advanced stratigraphical and typological sequencing, past settlements and sites have indeed been successfully cut into increasingly thinner slices of time, which again have been nicely and orderly sequenced. And I am deeply impressed by these advances. However, my whole point was to question to what extent this common strategy captures how we (and people before us) engage with and experience the past. Does the past come to us as divorced from the present, as sequenced orders or flow charts, as disentangled entities neatly arranged chronologically relative to each other? Think of a contemporary site, for example Oslo, and how this town manifests itself, is lived in and experienced by Solli and near a half a million of other people. What is concretely manifested and experienced is a chronological hybrid, a multi-temporal material mixture formed due to the durable and thus gathering qualities of things. The past is what makes the present Oslo what it is; people live *with* this past as contemporary and are affected by it.

As little as this town can be divorced from its past without depriving it of what grounds its present, and thereby without depriving the people who live there of their taken-for-granted contemporary “habitat”, as little can we divorce the medieval carpenter and farmer from their enmeshment with the material past. Their life did not unfold in a seriated moment or encapsulated in a single context. Humans and non-humans alike have always been enmeshed with their pasts. Thus, to repeat the plea from my paper: Rather than seeing the hybridized material record as a distortion of an originally pure historical order existing beyond and prior to the entangled mess we excavate – and which we thus need to restore, we should start taking it seriously as an expression of how the past actually gathers in the present, defying the temporal specificity, sequential order, and finitude that we have been obsessed with. It is an “archaeological statement” which is to be taken seriously and to be worked on in our endeavour for a new archaeology. As Hamilakis argues “a new discipline needs to demonstrate, following a Bergsonian philosophy... that a fundamental property of matter is its ability to last, its duration... matter is multi-temporal, it cannot be contained and imprisoned within a single chronological bracket.” As this, in fact, is what

I have tried to argue – in the CSA paper and in far more detail elsewhere (e.g. Olsen 2010:107–128).

A *fourth* issue is whether things speak or not, or even are “full of stories” as Solli asserts. Mats Burström pertinently asks “what language(s) do things themselves speak? And how are we to hear what they say? ...will things really cry out if we – the archaeologists – are quiet?” To briefly recapitulate some of my main arguments, one concern was with the tendency to anthropomorphize things in the current campaign to turn to their favour. Though understandable as an initial strategy to include things, this domestication easily ends up erasing their thingly difference, whereby they end up very much like us – exhibiting a range of positive human qualities. Treating things as storytellers may be seen as one aspect of this appropriation, which precludes their own genuinely material way of “articulating” themselves. Another and related concern was with how we in our urge to conduct social analysis have weighted things with interpretative burdens they often are unfit to carry – and that this urge also have made us indifferent to their own being and what things *qua things* actually may reveal about themselves, the past and the present. If we encounter things full of stories or hear them speak clear and loudly, it may be wise to consider whose voices are actually heard.

Nevertheless, things do express themselves and they strongly affect us through their enormously varied register of manifestations. Some of these material affordances are explicitly and implicitly used in human communication, and things clearly play an important role in “social messaging”. However, this more or less intentional aspect of social communication embraces only a small part of how things “address” us in our inescapable bond of cohabitation. By their ubiquitous and constant presence things affect us in innumerable ineffable and immediate ways and thereby also play a crucial and indispensable role for our well-being and existential security. Yet, do they speak? At least in a figurative sense it may be claimed that things argue and enter into a dialogue with us – and with other things. Yet such “speech” is vastly different from human language; it is a physiognomic “discourse” – and if it were translated into our language it would, on the one hand, appear highly banal, yet also effective and imperative: “walk here”, “sit there”, “drive like this”, “use that entrance”, “lower your speed”, “stop”, “turn”, “lie down”, “queue”! All our everyday activities, from our morning toilet through our entire working day until bedtime, are affected or governed by things uttering such concise messages. Our habitual practices and memory, indeed that which is termed social and cultural forms would be unthinkable without such a physical rhetoric. Yet at the same time this “dialogue” is also about intimacy and familiarity, belonging and remembering; a

rich and multivalent “conversation” that involves all our senses. Sight is just one such sense; things touch us, grab us. We know their materiality, their texture; we smell them and can taste and hear the sound of them. These affective encounters create affinity with the world; they evoke the symmetry crucial for our common being *in it*. This, I find, is decisive not only for how things affect us in our everydayness, but also for our archaeological attentiveness to them. If we regard our relationship with things primarily as an intellectual encounter, viewing things as signs or texts we should read and interpret, or as something we need to look “behind”, we also run the risk of stripping the objects of their otherness and thus of their true nature. In so doing we may also deny them the opportunity of turning to us, of “talking back” in their very own material way.

Returning to Burström’s inquiry, the matter is not for the archaeologists to be quiet but rather to be attentive to the way things *are* and articulate themselves, and thus – to lapse into another anthropocentric parable – to refrain from putting words in their mouths. And in particular in those cases where they are asked to witness about issues they don’t know much or even anything about, we should respect their right to remain silent. Our attentiveness to things as archaeologists and scholars importantly also involves the question about translation, how it impacts on the way we document, represent, write and disseminate. How to record in order to faithfully represent the things and sites encountered; how to attend to and mediate their affective presence? How do we translate and “prolong” these things and our encounters with them into an archive for subsequently extending their presence to analysis and dissemination? These are all very challenging questions that we just have started to address and discuss seriously, and which of course involve a range of means other than conventional archaeological prose. However, despite the bad press that texts and language have received lately, I am still confident that things can also be cared for in writing and speech. I do not subscribe to the “abyss” doctrine grounding many social constructivist approaches, arguing that things (and the “world”) are separated from language by some untraversable abyss, making any statement just a linguistic construction. Siding with theorists as varied as Benjamin, Gadamer and Latour, I believe things also contain their own articulations which can be carefully and attentively translated into language as well as being productively mediated by other means of expression.

I am very grateful to Solli, Hamilakis, Thomas, Arwill-Nordbladh and Burström for their sincere attempt to engage with my paper and the arguments herein. Their criticism has been explicit and fair and it has made me rethink a number of issues, and I am also happy to see more

agreement than anticipated. This has made this a rewarding undertaking and hopefully also made this discussion a positive contribution to the current debate in archaeology. I am less sure what to say about the contributions from the three remaining commentators. Cornelius Holtorf and I have such a fundamentally different conception of what archaeology is, and why we do archaeology, that it is difficult to find much common ground for a productive discussion. Indicative of this difference is Holtorf's statement about our book on *Pyramiden* (Andreassen, Bjerck & Olsen 2010). What he found most interesting and compelling was not the site, the masses of stranded things or what they revealed about the town and those who lived here, but Bjerck's short account about our personal doings during fieldwork here. What interest could there be in the site, its things and the material memories they hold, compared to that of the archaeologists' presence – of archaeologists documenting themselves? Indicative, if amusing, is also Holtorf's classic remark about what he considered the most precious artefact found during the investigation of a megalith at Monte da Igrejada, Portugal: a finger ring lost by one of the team members the day before (Holtorf 2006). Why do we need to be curious about things and the past when we can study archaeologists in the present?

While Holtorf finds my account “not particularly interesting to discuss”, Anna Källén is “sad to witness such an arrogant dismissal of archaeology in Sweden in general, and *Current Swedish Archaeology* in particular, with only eleven of the hundred works in the bibliography by archaeologists with affiliations in Sweden”. I shall not repeat what I earlier (re)stated about my ambitions, but just add that her comments made me realize that my prediction about “the diminishing of national and regional frames for identifying archaeologies” and that “labels such as Swedish or Scandinavian archaeology will gradually lose their meaning as signifiers for ways of doing archaeology” obviously was a bit too premature. I must admit that I have problems following her arguments and serial attacks, and I shall confine myself to one rather randomly selected example. In a section of my paper I briefly discussed things' inherent qualities – that an axe is significant primarily due to its unique axe qualities, likewise that a reindeer has become valuable to people (and other beings) because of its immanent and multiple reindeer qualities. I ended the section by referring the readers to my book (Olsen 2010) where I have explored this issue in far more detail, upon which Källén remarks “And here follows a reference – not to the axe or the reindeer itself, but to Olsen 2010. To me, this is a pretty strong indication that, no matter how much we hope for the stone to speak, there is no other way to express our knowledge about the axe and the reindeer than via our own

situated bodies.” If this is representative of the Swedish archaeology she claims I have ignored, I am quite happy to be illiterate.

Ignorance is also the remedy prescribed by the last commentator, Jes Wienberg. However, he doesn't follow his own advice, and the tone of his exegesis made me wonder about his agenda and how to reply to some of his otherwise quite interesting remarks. We may agree upon the limitations of the keynote genre but I am somewhat perplexed to be made responsible for it. I was asked by this journal to write a discussion paper, a discussion to which also Wienberg – quite surprisingly given his flagged aversion – agreed to take part in (and thus, I suppose, is co-responsible for continuing the genre he dislikes?). I may have been flattered, even happy, to get this invitation from a respected Swedish journal but I also found it an interesting opportunity to write about some topics that engage me. And regarding the inclusion of two of my own publications in the Nordic anniversary list (one co-authored), this was – as stated in vain “to those already agitated” – not an exclusive or well-researched list. Still, as their inclusion indicates, it was actually quite difficult to find obvious candidates among Nordic contributions to theoretical archaeology published in a year ending with 2 or 7 (my anniversary criteria!). However, I am happy to see nominations for more influential and important books or papers to replace them.

When trying to formulate a reply to Wienberg it is tempting to lapse into the same sarcastic style, ironizing over the never-ending trend among middle-aged academics to try in vain to jazz up their otherwise dull texts with pop-cultural references; over scholars who perhaps disappointed over not being chosen to write the keynote paper still cannot refuse the offer to comment on it (and where they naturally begin by confessing how much they dislike the genre); over scholars who claim to always have observed intellectual battles with ironic distance, and who haven't showed much esteem for archaeology's “relevance” or any revolutions, now suddenly (of all things) are promoting “action archaeology”, having “the key questions of the present at the forefront of archaeological debate”, etc. However, what kind of debate and discursive community would that amount to? Contribute to collegiality and academic decency? Serve as an invitation to debate over arguments? Contrary to Holtorf and Källén, I am sure I could have had a productive dialogue with Wienberg over some of the issues brought to the table. However, being covered with heaps of red herrings, it is often difficult to understand what is meant and to find consistency in his argumentation, such as when he starts out claiming that all keynote predictions in general will prove “misleading, wrong or ridiculous”, while on the next page accepting my four trends as “reasonable observations”. One of them

even splendid! Or despite describing my paper as “a text of great interest for its reflections on theoretical archaeology”, mainly dismisses it as an unashamed example of power exercising and personal self-gratification. Thus at this point on the evening of 31 December 2012 I do not feel very tempted to continue this exchange. Anyway, in a few hours we will have a new year, new anniversaries, and a new chance to get it right.

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