Reviews

**Anthropology for Archaeologists**
Bryony Orme
1981 Duckworth pp x + 300

**Modern Material Culture: the archaeology of us**
ed. Richard A. Gould and Michael B. Schiffer

By Paul Lane

In theory these two books should complement each other, for their professed aims cover the wide spectrum of current uses of anthropology by archaeologists. Uneasy bedfellows at the best of times in the past, any discussion of the contribution of anthropology to archaeology is bound to be a controversial issue. Orme is concerned with a discussion of the value of "anthropology to the archaeologist's interpretation of the past". (Orme p. x). The dominant theme of the papers in the edited volume, on the other hand, is to produce a new understanding of the present from the perspective of contemporary material culture. However, despite the fact that both publications are primarily concerned with material culture collected in an 'ethnographic' context, they have very little else in common.

Orme's book has grown out of a previous interest in the influence of ethnography on the early development of archaeological thought. In *Anthropology for Archaeologists* the author appears to be more concerned with familiarising archaeologists with the richness of the ethnographic record, and introducing them to such concepts as 'gift exchange', 'age-sets' and 'rites de passage'. There is, however, very little discussion of the theoretical implications involved in the use of ethnographic analogy. This failure to properly establish the ways in which anthropology can contribute to archaeological theory is perhaps the greatest weakness of this work and warrants some discussion.

In the brief historical overview presented in the introductory chapter it becomes abundantly clear that the most far reaching effect 'ethnography' has
had on archaeological theory has been on our conception of 'prehistoric man', 'primitive technologies' and the 'prehistoric past' in general. Early comparisons were made between the ethnographic accounts of Virginian Indians and the archaeological assemblages of the 'Ancient Britons'. As a consequence of these comparisons one of the most basic assumptions of our discipline was formed. Essentially this posits that analogous situations existed in the past to those recorded in the present. Working from this premise archaeologists have struggled with the problem of making inferences about past societies from their material remains with frequent recourse to ethnographic analogies. Surprisingly little attention has been paid to the form such analogies should take. It was generally assumed that by comparing 'like with like' on the formal level, the archaeological inferences drawn would be of the strongest possible kind. One of the first impacts of ethno-archaeological research was to discredit, albeit unwittingly, this kind of approach, with a selection of 'cautionary tales'. The earlier uses of ethnographic analogy have been replaced by a slightly more sophisticated model which has tried to expand the idea that material culture is "man's extrasomatic means of adaptation". Human behaviour is considered to be adaptive and if consistent relationships are found to exist between certain kinds of material residues and contemporary behaviour, then it can be assumed that if similar patterns are discovered in the archaeological record similar adaptive behaviour may be inferred. This approach focuses on a search for the 'material correlates' of utilitarian behaviour, explaining the unexplainable (anomalies) by inferring explicitly higher level, non-utilitarian behaviour. Furthermore the complexity of 'adaptive behaviour' is considered to be an accurate measure of socio-political development.

The weakness of Orme's approach lies in the adoption of this conception of the relationship between the material and social worlds. Material culture is considered to be a product of human behaviour, a passive reflection of society. Thus, the author argues that as the level of craft specialisation in a culture "is a function of its social complexity, then a study of material culture should provide some indication of the degree of social stratification" (p. 166). Unfortunately, as even Orme's examples make clear, there is no one to one correlation; formally similar artifacts/assemblages are often given different meanings in different social contexts. Orme chooses to ignore totally the ways in which artifacts are given meaning, for instance symbolism is discussed in only two pages. Similarly, instead of presenting the conceptual model used by the Dogon to order and
give meaning to their material and social worlds in the chapter on 'settlement', it is presented in a chapter on 'ritual and religion'. By avoiding any detailed discussion of symbolic processes, the anthropological studies of the division and use of space in settlements are ignored. Yet it is precisely studies of this kind which can instruct archaeologists on the nature of the relationships between material culture and social organisation, ideologies etc. I suggest that however extensive one's knowledge of the ethnographic record, without a general understanding of how material culture plays an active role in the creation, maintenance and modification of social relations and ideologies, this knowledge will not substantially aid one's interpretation of the archaeological record. Orme does not appear to have any conception of the possibility that artifacts are anything other than the by-products of social action and is consequently forced to make a series of generalised statements of limited applicability. I quote but one example, having reviewed various forms of settlement the only conclusion thought to be of general use to archaeology was that "within a single culture there is likely to be variety in the size and duration of settlement units" (p. 134). Is this all anthropology can offer archaeology?

The volume edited by Gould and Schiffer is explicitly concerned with examining human societies from the perspective of their material culture. The papers have been drawn from two sources; those presented at a material culture symposium held in 1978 (arranged by Schiffer and Morenon) and a series of case studies carried out by Gould's students at the university of Hawaii. Divided into four sections, each comprising of roughly related papers and an introductory summary, the volume deals with four themes: 'Method and theory', 'Early and Late Americana', 'Experimental approaches' and 'Traditional technologies in the present'. The papers in the latter two sections seem to be out of context and would be more appropriate in volumes on experimental archaeology and studies of lithic technology, consequently I do not intend to discuss them here. The core of the book comprises a series of case studies of contemporary American material culture. Unlike Orme's book, however, some attempt is made to outline the theoretical framework within which these studies can be placed.

In most of the papers presented in the section on Americana the search for the material correlates of adaptive behaviour is acknowledged. The influence of Gould's usage of ethnoarchaeological research on many of the
contributors is made apparent by the frequency of references to 'anomalies'. Rathje's *A Manifesto for Modern Material culture studies* is a useful summary of this theoretical approach. Rathje identifies four main uses for modern material culture studies (hereafter MMC). These are (1) teaching archaeological principles (2) testing archaeological principles (3) doing the archeology of to-day (4) relating our society to those of the past. (Rathje p. 52). The rationale for this manifesto hinges on the basic tenets of behavioural archaeology (summarised earlier). This perspective also assumes that the truth about the past can be revealed by continually testing and remodifying hypotheses. The non-destructive nature of MMC research is therefore considered to make them the perfect arena for carrying out hypotheses testing and for teaching this principle. Wild and Schiffer discuss the potential of using material culture on a university campus and in Tucson, Arizona, as a teaching aid. The authors argue that the experience gained by attending field schools of this type are a plausible alternative to actual excavation experience and also a less expensive and a potentially less damaging alternative. This may be true for North American field archaeology, however the dependence of British excavations on volunteer help would mean that it would collapse if this source of cheap and willing labour were removed.

The section on Americana is dominated by articles on the use of space in settlements, houses or shops and I shall concentrate on these in the following paragraphs. In an article entitled *A Microarchaeological View of Human settlement Space and function*, Portnoy attempts to develop and apply concepts first proposed by Goffman, namely those of 'front regions' and 'back regions'. Portnoy conducted her fieldwork amongst "lower - and middle-class white, Black and Mexican American families in a small Texas city". It is argued that behaviour differs in each region; formal and constrained behaviour being conducted in the 'front region' (eg. parlours) of a house which visitors are allowed to enter. More informal, relaxed and emotional behaviour takes place in the 'back regions' (play/work rooms). Portnoy argues that the material residues of this division of behaviour into public and private should reflect underlying "types of social interaction and behavioural norms" (Portnoy p. 222). The weakness of this model however is that since social interaction and normative behaviour are culturally relative, it is fallacious to apply a culturally specific model which associates formal with public behaviour and informal (and by implication 'natural') behaviour with more private settings.
Allen-Wheeler's paper is one of three contributions concerned specifically with the material culture of stores and their spatial organisation. All three papers approach their ethnographic setting in different ways. Cleghorn examines a store in terms of a distribution centre. Bath attempts a Levi-Straussian analysis of the organisational principles employed in a supermarket and Allen-Wheeler aims at the identification of activity areas. Despite a disparity in aims all three authors are concerned with testing the hypothesis that the material residues of human action essentially reflect the utilitarian demands of a society. Allen-Wheeler examines the archaeological concepts of 'task specificity' and 'activity areas' as demonstrated by the spatial arrangement of the artifacts and structures in a herbalist's shop in Honolulu. On the basis of associating between the function of an object and its location in the shop the author felt it was possible to define four dominant 'activity sets'; observing that the shop "generally appears efficient, professional and well organised" (Allen-Wheeler, p. 108). Some attempt was made to correlate task specificity with geographic source and the conclusion reached was that the medicines and the storage and dispensing objects associated with traditional herbalism, as well as objects connected with acupuncture (also practised on the premises) usually came either from China or Asia. The majority of the objects unrelated either to herbalism or acupuncture were of local or U.S. mainland manufacture. The non-U.S. artifacts appear to have been more prominently displayed and this is interpreted as helping "to create a traditional atmosphere in the shop". The author tells us that the shop is located amongst other 'Chinese' shops and stalls, however no details on the ethnicity of the customers is given, neither is any attempt made to explain why 'traditionality' is so heavily expressed. Owing to the author's failure to put this shop in its wider social and material context the reader is consequently left asking questions as to the position of the Chinese in Hawaiian society. For example, do Chinese immigrants feel a need to express their ethnicity and links with their homeland? Are Chinese under pressure from a more dominant ideology? Is the emphasis placed on traditionality-a reaction to western goods and the perceived socio-political changes which would occur if such articles were adopted?

Fortunately some impression of the relationship between ethnic groups in Hawaii can be gained from Blake's article Graffiti and Racial Insults. Apparently, racial insults against Hawaiian-Chinese and Chinese are rare, and most of the social antagonism is directed against whites and Japanese. By
examining the distribution and frequency of ethnic insults with sexual and scatological remarks which were contained in graffiti, Blake found that the latter were generally associated with 'diversion areas' eg. bars, theatres, playgrounds and bus shelters. Whereas the former occurred principally on toilet walls which Blake defines as 'liminal zones' (à la Victor Turner). Apart from being an interesting piece of sociological research, Blake has also presented, albeit implicitly, an example of how artifacts can make an ideological statement and how their spatial distribution contains meaning beyond that of fulfilling utilitarian demands.

I ideological statements and their material expression are the concern of Meltzer's paper. Once again the spatial relationships between artifacts is examined; in this case between the objects on display in the 'National Air and Space Museum'. Meltzer categorises this museum as an 'ideological state apparatus' after Althusser, and suggests that the conscious omission of various artifacts (such as fighterplanes and associated technology developed during the Vietnam war) and the association of particular objects with certain themes (such as Julia Child, a T.V. cook, explaining how life begins, complete with a recipe for primordial soup) serve to either mystify (as in the first example) or reify (as with Julia Child) a particular ideology.

Meltzer uses Althusser's terminology to define this category of display as being the creation of vulgar ideology, that is,"presenting the subject favourably". (Meltzer, p. 123). In a shorter analysis of a film covering the history of aviation in the U.S. the author argues that a non-vulgar ideology is being presented alongside a vulgar one. The essence of this non-vulgar ideology is the impression that space = time, a view instilled into our brains by the technological advancements made in aviation which have made distances seem shorter. Incidentally, although this is not acknowledged by the author, Whorf has frequently stated that time is spatialised in English and other west European languages.

Whereas Meltzer's conclusion is a disappointing one, virtually negating all the implications raised in the rest of his text, Leone in a chapter entitled Archaeology's relationship to the present and the past demonstrates how pervasive our own ideologies are on our attempts at a social reconstruction of the past. Leone describes a reconstruction of an 18th century bakery at Colonial Williamsburg, which produces ginger-breads for sale to tourists and argues cogently that the contemporary relations between blacks
and whites in the States is legitimated with reference to the past. In other words the contemporary social order was imposed on the reconstruction and made to appear 'traditional' and as a consequence socially valid. Leone suggests, and I would endorse his view, that archaeologists must recognise the fact that the meaning they impose on archaeological remains and on any presentation of material culture is ideological and serves to create and recreate that same ideology. As the dominant ideology changes then too must archaeological displays; changing in order to communicate, legitimate or mystify the new ideology. Of all the papers presented in this volume only Leone's essay offers any real hope for archaeology. It challenges the widely held belief that archaeologists are searching for "the truth about the past" and suggests that it is "in how we get back, not forward, that we will learn about ourselves" (Leone p. 13).

Prehistoric Communities in Northern England
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