

Weird Relations: A Prolegomenon to Posthumanism and its Archaeological Manifestations

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Preamble

The *Archaeological Review from Cambridge* (ARC) has, since its inception in 1981, successfully kept its finger on the pulse of contemporary thinking in archaeology. Its many issues over the years have ranged from insightful commentaries on innovative theoretical trends—for example *Affective Archaeology* (Carman and Meredith 1990)—to more focused methodological explorations—*Science and the Material Record* (Hall and Parikh 2012)—and even critical debates on key ethical issues—*Women in Archaeology* (Arnold et al. 1988). More recently, contributions have covered such diverse topics as disease (Parkinson and Talbot 2017), deviancy (Damman and Leggett 2018) and deserts (Alday and Morrisset 2019). In all cases, the research-based papers and editorials have been written by scholars from across the global academic community and at various stages in their respective careers, making the ARC a remarkably broad ranging journal in both content and authorship. Add to this achievement the fact that it is produced entirely by graduate students, and the ARC can be regarded as a truly impressive publication—one that is rightfully

well renowned within the wider field of archaeology. In this latest issue we are proud to continue the ARC's explicitly theoretical tack, turning to the theme of posthumanism and its potential applications within our discipline. Both posthumanism itself and its archaeological manifestations to date are incredibly diverse, and so what follows is by necessity a somewhat partial overview. However, we hope it proves of some utility in assessing the present state of the field, and a suitable introduction to the papers contained within this volume.

Posthumanism...

'Posthumanism' has become an increasingly visible term over the past decade or so, both within the academy and more broadly. However, as it encompasses a great range of ideas and issues, it can be hard to define what it actually *is*. In many ways, this heterogeneity lies at posthumanism's conceptual core—a gathering of intellectual perspectives that share as a basic tenet the belief that the human subject should not be regarded as a stable or bounded substance with ontological primacy over other beings/things, but rather a decentred phenomenon constituted within immanent networks or flows (a general theoretical position often referred to as a 'flat ontology'). Contrary to the prevailing post-modern critique of the previous century, there is also a tendency within posthuman thought to move beyond discursive subjectivity/inter-subjectivity to consider the actual material qualities and affects that realise/drive processes of becoming, involving not just humans as biological creatures but a whole host of other lifeforms, objects, energies, etc. This heterogeneity is reflected in posthumanism's eclectic intellectual ancestors, common inspiration being found in the familiar corpus of French post-modernism, including Michel Foucault, Jean-François Lyotard, Luce Irigaray and Jacques Derrida, and notably Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, but also other philosophers/theorists such as Baruch Spinoza, Henri Bergson, Martin Heidegger, Bruno

Latour, Gregory Bateson and Niklas Luhmann. In order to break down this bewildering array of writers and ideas, we focus below on a few themes that have characterised recent debates that either draw directly on posthumanist thinking or else share notable common ground with it.

Katherine Hayles was one of the first academic commentators to write extensively on ‘posthumanism’ as a specific term, particularly its relationship to the rapidly developing technologies of the twentieth century. Drawing on the cybernetic advances of the 1940s (most notably Turing’s ‘imitation game’ test for true AI) and onwards, she argued that intelligence, and indeed consciousness, were no longer seen as purely human qualities, nor that there was a distinct demarcation between bodily experience and computer-based simulation (Hayles 1999: 3). However, she went on to critique this position with an affirmation of the centrality of embodiment to human consciousness, even if such embodiment is liable to change through technological mediation (Hayles 1999: 283–284). Importantly, she also drew attention to the ways in which participatory systems increasingly encompass far greater cognitive capacity than that which any single individual (human or otherwise) could hope to marshal (Hayles 1999: 289). These two claims lie at the heart of much contemporary posthumanist discourse—that the physical and material world is integral to systems of cognition and affect, and that these are widely distributed rather than intrinsic to specific bounded entities.

Building on this technological focus, some of the most critical and impactful posthumanist writing has pursued an explicitly feminist agenda. Donna Haraway’s *A Cyborg Manifesto* (originally published in 1985 and reprinted in Haraway 1990: 149–182) was an important forerunner in this regard, in which she adopted the concept of the ‘cyborg’ as a rejection of falsely rigid boundaries between different categories of being (such as human/animal) in a critique of then-prevalent feminist identity politics. Haraway’s cyborg is not a simplistic, cybernetically-enhanced human subject, but a chimeric

entity comprised of a shifting assemblage of partial (sometimes even paradoxical) relations. Her approach here is processual, emphasising the body in constant motion and the implications this has for both individuals and, crucially, more diffuse social realities. Rosi Braidotti's writings on 'matter-realist' feminism (Braidotti 2011: 127–149) follow a similar vein and have had great impact within critical cultural studies. She too adopts an explicitly materialist stance, grounded in the human body and its increasingly technological mediation, and emphasises that both gender and sexual difference operate along an endless scale of subtle gradations rather than occupying discrete categories. This formulation abandons 'subjects' in favour of 'subjectivity', the latter of which is intimately connected to broader social and material relations. Definitions of common humanity thus become "qualitative complexities, not quantitative pluralities" (Braidotti 2011: 145).

In displacing the very idea of 'the subject', Braidotti shows how the term has come to occupy an increasingly entrenched normativity since the Enlightenment—the leitmotif of the 'Vitruvian Man' in all his white, Western, male, heterosexual, propertied and teleologically progressive capacities (Braidotti 2013: 13–16). Her solution is not to simply add more minority subjects to the list of counter-cultural categories, but to reformulate the whole edifice through a posthuman subjectivity which is both materialist and relational, embodied and firmly embedded in specific localities, and above all advocates an affirmative ethics of sustainability and social justice (Braidotti 2013: 51–54). That said, it's important to note that not all such theoretical critique is so optimistically minded. For instance, Elizabeth Povinelli has taken the Spinozan/Deleuzean concept of 'conatus' (the self-striving force of universal existence) and added the caveat that such persistence also includes a great deal of endurance and exhaustion in the face of advanced capitalism (Povinelli 2011: 32). Following Braidotti's emphasis on the importance of the particulars of specific bodies/localities, Povinelli traces incidents where material objects are restrictive or obtuse, very much *not* ready-to-hand in the Heideggerian sense, and how such assemblages are directly affected

by power relations centred on class, race and gender (Povinelli 2011: 102). Posthumanist theory, broadly construed, thus has the potential to be both a descriptively attentive critique of the ‘durative present’ (Povinelli 2011: 12), as well as a future-oriented ethical framework for social lives to come.

The dismantling of bounded subjects has also been central to studies of human-animal relations, which have explicitly critiqued the human/non-human divide central to much Western thought. This approach is partly founded in an increasing recognition of the independently complex social behaviours and cognitive capabilities of non-human animals, from crows to chimpanzees (De Waal and Tyack 2003), alongside an appreciation of how humans are entangled with other animals in complex relational webs, perhaps none more so than the companion species with whom we often share our homes (Taylor 2012). As Haraway (2007) has argued, the meeting of species leads to the creation of entirely new forms of subjectivity. Such processes of social living are necessarily “messy, knotty and emergent” (Taylor 2012: 39), and in their consequent dismantling of anthropocentric superiority they pose newly explicit ethical quandaries regarding how we should treat non-human animals, from diet to scientific experimentation (Braidotti 2013: 70; Castricano 2008; Wolfe 2003). Taking these cross-species power relations seriously also draws us back to critical self-reflection on inter-human social arrangements, as exemplified in Charlie LeDuff’s (2003) analysis of how the bloody and dehumanising work of killing cattle in a North Carolina slaughterhouse is recapitulated in the racial tensions prevalent amongst its effectively segregated white, black, Native American and Mexican staff.

Anthropology has also recently adopted a more open-ended approach to social relations, primarily through the form of ‘multi-species ethnography’. Although late 19th/early 20th century ethnographers, especially those associated with Franz Boas and Lewis Henry Morgan, often concerned themselves with the activities of other species (Kirksey and Helmreich 2010: 549–550), anthropology increasingly came to view these ‘others’ within an instrumental frame, i.e. their

utility for humans in terms of subsistence, technology and symbolic representation. Conversely, more recent research has begun to analyse the rich realm of actual inter-species interactions in which humans are enmeshed, and the new possibilities of agency and subjectivity that such interactions engender (Kohn 2007: 4). Eduardo Kohn (2007, 2013) in particular has argued for an ‘anthropology of life’ that seeks to build a new theory of semiosis founded on cross-species communication. In like manner, Tim Ingold (2013) has advocated a phenomenological approach to co-habitation and shared dwelling to build an ‘anthropology beyond humanity’. At a more abstract level, some anthropologists have used alternative worldviews and cross-species interactions to explicate radical ontologies that completely overturn concepts such as ‘nature’ and ‘culture’, particularly the ‘perspectival multinaturalism’ of Eduardo Vivieros de Castro (2014). Perhaps one of the most innovative instances of multispecies ethnography, in methodology as well as interpretation, has been Anna Tsing’s creation of the ‘rhizomic’ Matsutake Worlds Research Cluster, which draws in collaborators from across the global spread of the commodity chain centred on the aromatic matsutake mushroom, which thrives within ecologically-degraded ‘blasted landscapes’ (Kirksey and Helmreich 2010: 553; Tsing 2015).

Tsing’s ethnography again demonstrates a concern with material arrangements and social lives that connects a variety of agentic forces (human and non-human, animate and inanimate) without privileging any one entity in a causal sense. In many ways, this approach is mirrored in more recent iterations of systems theory, particularly as formulated by the biologist Humberto Maturana (cf. Capra and Luisi 2014: 129–143) or sociologist Niklas Luhmann (cf. Wolfe 2010: 3–29). Such theories emphasise the operationally closed, self-organising and autopoietic qualities of individual systems, alongside their nonlinear, emergent dynamics and necessary openness to their environments. Whilst such assertions are becoming increasingly popular within general ecological thought, it is so-called ‘deep ecology’ which shares most common ground with posthumanism. Deep ecologists advocate an eco-centric, non-dualistic view of the

planet and its total biotic community, which stresses the centrality of relations rather than specific entities, whilst maintaining a focus on difference as opposed to undifferentiated ontological monism (Zimmerman 1993: 197–200). This stance carries an explicit ethical burden, mandating a less hubristic approach by humans towards the rest of the world (including each other), and an openness towards the inter-relatedness of all life—akin to Braidotti’s (2013: 60–61) elaboration of life force as ‘zoe’, or Timothy Morton’s (2018: 54–56) ‘dark ecology’. The ecological place of humanity has perhaps been best crystallised in contemporary public awareness through the use of the term ‘Anthropocene’ to define our present era (Steffen et al. 2011), which whilst explicitly foregrounding human agency as a geological force also draws in myriad other organisms and materials in its holistic view of planetary interconnection.

Lastly, the question of how to theorise inanimate materials is also central to posthumanist concerns. Whilst initial discussions of posthumanism may have principally revolved around the more technophilic developments of cybernetics and/or the augmentation of the human body (now often referred to as ‘transhumanism’), both posthumanists and related philosophers/cultural theorists have since initiated an ever-expanding range of debates centred on the physical qualities of existence. Jane Bennet (2001, 2010) has proved a particularly popular writer within other materially grounded disciplines (including archaeology), and articulates a flat ontology explicitly indebted to Spinoza, Bergson and Deleuze which espouses a continuity of agentive matter through all of reality. She specifically emphasises that all matter is essentially in flux, and that multiple flows all coincide and tangle (for a time) to constitute what we heuristically identify as stable entities (Bennet 2010: 128; cf. Ingold 2007, 2015 on ‘lines’). In such an ontological model, entities are ultimately derived from their relations—the claim also made by the Deleuzian-inspired philosopher Manuel DeLanda, as well as more explicitly posthumanist writers such as Karan Barad and Donna Haraway. Whilst DeLanda’s ‘assemblage theory’ (2006, 2016) can run to the overly abstract realms of ‘pure virtuality’, in which

physical phenomena can become somewhat lost (Kay and Kay 2018), he also argues that seemingly specific entities are composed of gestalt heterogenous elements, in which the sum is greater than that of the parts and accrues its own emergent potential for change through further interactions over time.

Both Barad (2007) and Haraway (1990, 2016) similarly adopt an ontology based on the premise that all entities are comprised of ‘intra-actions’. Barad has particularly drawn on quantum physics, and her own theory of ‘agentic realism’, to offer a vision of a shifting material realm comprised of endlessly entangled relations (Pinch 2011), whilst Haraway has used inter-species relations and technological mediation to destabilise ideas of boundedness (see above). However, both Barad and Haraway have in turn been critiqued on the charge that they see relationality as so fundamental to reality that relations appear to precede the entities they constitute (Harman 2018: 257–258). Graham Harman’s ‘object-oriented ontology’ (OOO) alternatively posits that although reality is indeed comprised of objects (physical or otherwise) which are formulated through inter/intra-action and have agentic capacities of their own, objects themselves are somehow irreducible in form, and in a Heideggerian sense are thus always partly withdrawn from comprehension (Harman 2018: 52–54). Although Harman would never describe himself as a posthumanist, a key point of his ontological thinking does link him with those more closely wedded to the term. This is his insistence that not only are ‘real’ objects always partly withheld from human sensual apprehension, but that this is also true for objects’ relations with other non-human entities, whether animate or inanimate (Harman 2018: 258–259). In this sense, his thought likewise represents a radical de-centring of human subjects, and a recognition that not only are we mistaken in seeing ourselves as central to the world, but that in many cases we may even be irrelevant to it.

Partial as this overview has been, it demonstrates that whilst posthumanist (and posthuman-*ish*) theories may cover diverse topics and encompass a great variety of (sometimes contradictory) viewpoints, they also share some important common ground. At

its simplest, this is a concern with overcoming Cartesian dualisms and essentialist thinking. Moreover, there is a general (though not universal, see Harman's OOO) emphasis on the material basis of existence, and the ways in which cognition/consciousness are specifically located in time and space. There is also a heavy emphasis on the processual qualities of flux and instability pertaining to physical entities and subjectivities, and the assertion that such entities/subjectivities arise primarily through relations and are not reducible to essential or stable qualities (though again see Harman for an alternative take). Further, there is a broad consensus that refashioning ontology involves rethinking ethical relations, within and without our own species. Finally, there is a recognition that epistemological variety is both desirable and inherently productive, as it is through the creative interplay of different concepts and disciplines that new ideas are born. On this basis, and departing from its cybernetic origins, posthumanist thinking entails a move away from cyborgs *as such*, which preserves a focus on humans and their specific 'improvement', in favour of Haraway's more playful and ambivalent use of the term (Wolfe 2010: xiii).

...and its Archaeological Manifestations

The heterogenous nature of this mandate, and the general variety of ideas which fall under the posthuman umbrella, in many ways mirrors the diverse field of archaeology. It is perhaps then not surprising that theoretically-minded archaeologists have increasingly drawn on posthumanism in forming their interpretations of past worlds. In doing so, they too have added to the broadening corpus of posthuman thought in novel and creative ways, sometimes bringing internal disagreements with a ferocity to rival the heady days of postprocessualism's early critique of positivism (e.g. Pétursdóttir 2017, 2018; Ion 2018). A fully comprehensive overview of such debates is not possible here (though see Harris and Cipolla 2017 for an accessible and concise summary), so we instead focus on the

broad ways in which archaeology's boundaries and imagination have expanded in response to the posthumanist critique.

The most obvious, though not necessarily initial, impact of posthumanism on the discipline has concerned archaeologists' approach to 'things', often taken to mean something broader than just physical artefacts. Although archaeology has, of course, a long history of engaging with things, the specific novelty of posthumanist-inspired approaches encompasses a recognition of the affective power of material entities. This has expanded our interpretative imagination from a focus on the relationship between things and human culture, where objects were seen as extensions of (and consequently clues to) human thought patterns (e.g. Spector 1993; Tilley; Hodder 1987) or political strategies (e.g. DeMarrais 2004).

Accordingly, approaches that give objects equal billing to humans are now becoming increasingly popular, though scholars vary in their formulations of such a 'flat ontology', ranging from those who hold that things and people really are ontologically indistinct, to those who think it useful to act as if they are discrete so that we can better work out the attitudes of past peoples and their own processes of categorisation. Of these many approaches, one of the more popular has been 'symmetrical archaeology'—the form of 'thing studies' in archaeology that has most explicitly attempted a programmatic statement (Witmore 2007) and taken on the nomenclature of a new approach. Starting from the premise that ontological distinctions or separations are a form of false dualism unreflective of reality, symmetrical archaeology's proponents state that human and thing cannot "artificially be sieved apart" (Webmoor 2007: 564). Furthermore, as all action is mediated by things (Olsen 2007), so human and thing are always already embroiled. Such propositions are similar to arguments made within materiality studies and Hodder's (2012) 'entanglement theory'. However, whilst the programmatic statements of symmetrical archaeology blame the false dualism of objects and things for the "wide divergences, or hyper-pluralism, of approaches characterising current archaeology" (Webmoor 2007: 568), posthumanism has not reduced this divergence, but instead

given rise to a whole host of competing interpretative approaches, each with its own tradition and language ready to befuddle the unwary.

Some scholars have recently taken the arguments of symmetrical archaeology even further, in a move so different from its first instantiation that Harris and Cippolla (2017) refer to this as ‘second-wave’ symmetrical archaeology. This manifestation calls archaeologists to pay close attention to things themselves, particularly those elements which exist beyond the human (e.g. Olsen and Witmore 2015; Pétursdóttir 2017). Things, they argue, pre-exist relations with humans, or “hold something in reserve” (Olsen and Witmore 2015: 190), and must therefore be studied in their own right and not just as facets of human culture. Thus we find Pétursdóttir (2017) amongst the surf and detritus of sea drift on the coast of Norway, seeking to engage with the objects all about her. Her perspective is explicitly founded on Graham Harman’s OOO (see above), understanding objects as having a ‘dark side’ never actually revealed in our encounters with them. Following Harman, Pétursdóttir seeks to build an archaeology which responds to what “the current climate is calling for” (2017: 175). This entails conducting an investigation which seeks to take objects “seriously” and to “place our trust” in them (Pétursdóttir 2017: 199). Instead of an interest in the human past, archaeology is here understood as the “discipline of resilient things” (Pétursdóttir 2017: 178). The story of human interaction with particular objects, even of human responsibility for their appearance in a given context, fades into the background.

It remains to be seen where this exhortation will lead, though we remain concerned, as Ion (2018) expresses in a strong critique (though see Petursdottir’s (2018) equally forceful rebuttal), that humans may become entirely displaced from interpretation. An interest in things for things’ sake is certainly valid, but can it fit within the broad church of archaeology? Shouldn’t we, at some point, return our analyses to the *human* past, that which we claim to study? ‘Thing-ology’, though not perhaps the name its proponents should adopt, seems to us to be a different kind of discipline altogether, at

home in the present or the past, though primarily concerned with human lives in neither instance, nor with the trajectory of human collectives through time. This seems to be the point at which the above approaches diverge from the discipline of archaeology *per se*, at least as far as we understand it. Archaeology has not hitherto been the ‘discipline of resilient things’—for instance, fossils are certainly resilient, but except in unusual circumstances (e.g. Brück and Jones 2018) they play little part in our studies (much to the disappointment of your uncle at the Christmas dinner table).

Related to these developments, posthumanist thinking has opened up new ways of investigating and recognising alterity in past ontologies. Freed from the assumption that ‘types’ as we recognise them are somehow innate or universal, alternative ways of understanding the world can be explored. Banfield’s (2016) study of the ‘packing material’ used at the Neolithic stone circle at Avebury is a good example. Here, she recognises a potentially relational set of meanings emerging within the Avebury complex which links the stones, and particularly their settings, to riverine environments. This is a radical re-interpretation of the packing material, previously seen as purely functional matter in line with more modern understandings of materials and their properties. Crucially, whilst the stone used in the packing material and that of the standing stones themselves appears to a modern gaze to be the same material, Banfield convincingly argues that this was not the case during the Neolithic. She thus explores how the qualities of these materials emerge through their relationships, and an ontological split subsequently occurs between categories which we would otherwise identify as one and the same.

Posthumanist thinking has also had a large impact on archaeology’s approach to animals. Indeed, discussions advocating the agency of animals are perhaps the least controversial of posthumanism’s developments (e.g. Lindstrøm 2015). Although archaeological interest in animals can be traced back to processualist-minded resource exploitation models, it is only more recently that a broader range of social questions pertaining to animals have been explored. Some of this work maintains a duality between humans and non-humans, the

sub-title of Nerissa Russell's (2012) work on social zooarchaeology—*Social Zooarchaeology: Humans and Animals in Prehistory*—demonstrates this perfectly. Under this guise, animals are understood to play largely symbolic roles in human society. More radically, however, Overton and Hamiliakis's (2013) identically (and, thus, confusingly) titled 'social zooarchaeology' takes a more posthuman tack. Their approach begins with an understanding of species as co-shaping, recognises the agency of animals, and emphasises the physical nature of species' interactions with one another. In a similar vein, Armstrong Oma (2018) tracks the assemblage of sheep/human/dog/house in the Scandinavian Bronze Age and stresses the various ways in which this entanglement of species and things changed the course of history and created new dependencies amongst these various entities. Her book's title—*The Sheep People*—is gently evocative of this sort of approach, and encapsulates how people, sheep, and indeed sheep dogs, acted upon each other and were mutually transformed in the process. People who live with sheep—*Sheep People*—are different sorts of things entirely, involved in new and different assemblages, from those who came before.

This concept of assemblage (cf. DeLanda 2006, 2016) has proven central to posthumanist-inspired archaeology, and in particular has enabled an expansion of our understanding of, and ability to deal with, issues of scale, both spatial and temporal. Privileging one scale over another is inherently reductionist. However, as assemblages are never static and operate at many scales at once, the concept brings us closer to a real-world picture of cross-scalar movement and becoming (Crellin 2017; Harris 2017). For instance, Harris (2017) points to the burial of a child as a moment that may inform us of grief or trauma, but is also an instance which enfolds changing conceptions of age or death over a much longer timescale. The concept of assemblage thus allows multiple scales to be engaged with simultaneously, and a more complex interpretive picture to be built as a result.

Of course, such approaches have not been without criticism, and that from without (e.g. Lindstrøm 2015; Ribeiro 2016a; 2016b) can be as harsh as that from within (e.g. Ion 2018, Pétursdóttir 2018). The

attribution of agency beyond the human has proved a particular cause for concern. Resistance to this claim is partly based on a conflation of agency with intentional action, and which therefore posits agency to be a specific quality possessed only by conscious minds. Conversely, posthumanism and related theories hold that agency is something more like an affective force, which emerges relationally through interaction. There has also been a related conflation of ‘cause’ and ‘responsibility’ (e.g. Ribeiro 2019; Lindstrøm 2017). However, approaches that reject a pre-existing ontological separation of reality are not necessarily focussed on either cause or responsibility as their primary concern. Rather, their interest is in explaining how and why objects interfere in the world, and in creating an archaeology which recognises things as more than tools. Latour’s famous gun-person hybrid (Latour 1999, also see Webmoor 2007) recognises that the existence of the gun changes the world, and therefore the subsequent course of events. Who or what entity/entities ‘caused’ the subsequent shooting is only one question we might ask of the total assemblage/network. Such imaginative setting up of multiple questions and possible modes of thinking is crucial to the creative impetus of posthumanism, and is responsible for a great deal of its intellectual appeal across the humanities and social sciences.

Broadly speaking, the concerns of posthumanism thus represent an opportunity to expand the discipline’s imagination in a wide variety of directions. The resulting archaeologies ‘take seriously’ a number of elements of past people’s worlds and encourage us to step out of a Western mindset and embrace the alterity of the past. Investigating the relationships in which humans were embroiled in the past has fostered numerous lines of inquiry which contribute to a greater understanding of the lived experience of past worlds, just some of which we have been able to mention here. The papers presented in this volume represent vastly different approaches, each drawing on different understandings of posthumanist thought but all bringing us closer to representations of pasts populated by dynamic entities, human and otherwise. To begin, Núñez-García provides a critique of some of the arguments of posthumanism, particularly

those associated with ‘second-wave’ symmetrical archaeology. Her work enlivens the production of an iron knife, demonstrating that the relationships between the maker and the material are key to understanding this process, while also recognising that this need not be a relationship of equals.

For Paddayya, the relationships between humans and a totally different material—cow dung—are shown to have greatly influenced the construction of places both physical and metaphorical in Neolithic India. This turn to a material oft overlooked/underappreciated by archaeologists illustrates the benefits of allowing materials’ properties and affordances to emerge relationally through our work. Hjørungdal next presents an example of how human-animal relations can be further rethought utilising a posthuman framework, presenting a picture of the co-making of worlds by beavers and humans in the Scandinavian Mesolithic, in which humans may not even have been the principal world-building species. Matić takes a different, more explicitly ontological, tack, arguing powerfully that we need to take seriously the ontological claims of past communities, in this context arguing that the Pharaoh can be understood to have literally become the god Montu when in battle. The joint nature of pharaonic being—both human and divine—contrasts nicely with the active ruins presented by Leathem in her paper. This fascinating exposition explores the possession of people by ancient ruins in the Mexican town of Mitla. Here, again, we are charged with taking seriously ontological claims which may seem strange and unusual, yet have very real and discernible affects in the world. Finally, Oliver Harris provides a commentary essay on these papers, neatly drawing them together by following the thread of ‘difference’ through their various posthumanisms.

Altogether, this volume presents a collection of varied visions of radical alterity in both past and present, pointing the way to archaeologies which explore the differences between past understandings of the world and our own, perhaps even ‘troubling’ (cf. Haraway 2016) our present situation to the point of reappraisal. Although inspired by posthumanism, it is still people who ultimately remain the central

concern of these papers, albeit located within disparate networks, collectivities and assemblages of diverse entities and perhaps unforeseen affects. In a suitably odd turn of events, such posthuman decentring and extension of agentive capacities has led to a series of archaeological accounts in which past worlds, and the lives led within them, become altogether more alive.

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