
editorial

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Transgressing boundaries. An explanation and an announcement

Some readers of *Archaeological dialogues* may be surprised to discover that the discussion article featured in this issue neither is written by an archaeologist nor makes overt reference to archaeology. Curious as that may seem, we see this as a productive move in the journal's continuing mission to find innovative, and sometimes provocative, ways to stimulate conversations that transgress disciplinary boundaries. In soliciting this piece, we felt that, as two of the most important contributors to the theoretical development of the historical anthropology of colonialism and as scholars who have been at the forefront of cultural anthropology's new re-engagement with the study of material culture, the work of Jean and John Comaroff offers an exceptional opportunity for a creatively heuristic conjuncture between archaeology and cultural anthropology, and that it deserves to be widely read and discussed by archaeologists.

The current piece derives from a much larger body of work exploring the colonial encounter between Tswana peoples and European colonists in South Africa, and it examines the complex social ramifications of the collision between different regimes of value. It analyses the ways in which certain classes of material object, cattle and coins, entered into struggles over commensuration and commodification and became 'metonymic of the contestations of value on which colonial struggles, *tout court*, were played out'. These issues, and the theoretical points made in exploring them, are highly germane to, and bear consideration by, archaeologists working on a range of themes such as colonialism, consumption, money and value in a wide variety of contexts. Indeed, the article may in some ways be viewed as the continuation of a conversation on matters of money and value that has run through two previous discussion articles in the past few issues of the journal (by Joris Aarts in issue 12.1 and by Frans Theuvs in issue 10.2). The comments on the article, by an archaeologist and a historian closely attuned to the use of archaeological data, explore the relevance of the Comaroffs' argument for different colonial situations. Reciprocally, they also point out the relevance of archaeology to the case presented in the main article, and to cultural anthropology more generally. This illuminating exchange will be continued in issue 13.1 with the Comaroffs' reply to the comments. We hope that our readers will find the insights and challenges laid down by this article to be a stimulus to thinking about both theory and method.

We also wish to use this editorial to announce another novel effort the journal is making to foster boundary-transgressive dialogue. *Archaeological*

dialogues is organizing and sponsoring a 'Forum' session at the 71st Annual Meeting of the Society for American Archaeology in San Juan, Puerto Rico in April 2006. This session – entitled “Does archaeological theory exist?” – is designed to bring together European and American scholars of diverse theoretical orientations to discuss whether theoretical archaeology has ever developed into archaeological theory. That is, it asks whether a body of theory that is distinctively archaeological actually exists (or should, or can, exist) and of what such theory might consist. What are the structures and practices (e.g. journals, conferences, field investigations) that promote dialogue and theoretical convergence among archaeologists and how are they in tension with those (e.g. university departmental structures, specialized journals, professional organizations, national traditions) that generate fragmentation and intellectual boundaries? The session provides an international forum for examining these centrifugal and centripetal forces and the implications for the conditions of possibility of archaeological theory. A keynote paper will be presented by Matthew Johnson, and critical discussion will be enjoined by Anick Coudart, Mark Leone, Bjørnar Olsen, Christopher Peebles, Stephen Plog, Adam Smith and members of the audience. The results of the session subsequently will be published within a very short period as a discussion article in issue 13.2. We cordially invite those of you who will be at the SAA meeting to attend the session, and we hope the rest of you will follow the discussion published in the journal with interest and have responses of your own to this question of fundamental importance to archaeological practice and identity.