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Book Review - Ian Hodder - Entangled: An Archaeology of the Relationships between Humans and Things

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Entangled: An Archaeology of the Relationships between Humans and Things

Ian Hodder. NY: John Wiley & Sons, 2012. 264 pp. ISBN: 9780470672129. \$36.95.

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In his new materiality-based book, *Entangled: An Archaeology of the Relationships Between Humans and Things*, Hodder once again secures his place as one of the great writers in archaeology. *Entangled* is one of the rare books that is an engaging and thoughtful read; in this case, the devil is truly in the details. This book is not for those who shy away from complexity. Hodder's arguments are refreshing and innovative, engaging with concepts that relate all parts of the material world, humans included. *Entangled* is also a playful book, and Hodder clearly enjoys himself with section and chapter titles that speak to our "thingly" existence (2012:38).

Materiality and materialization approaches in archaeology are swamped by detail; while offering exciting new ways of analyzing archaeological material and populations, they also are plagued by overlaps and accumulated minutiae that can create difficulties for students of archaeology venturing into "stuff" for the first time. *Entangled* provides a navigable roadmap, summarizing the essentials of recent theories within archaeology, including, phenomenology, behavioral archaeology, human behavioral ecology, cognitive archaeology, evolutionary theory, Actor Network Theory, materiality, material culture studies, and complexity theory. More importantly, Hodder's comparisons create no straw men, and he is able to critically compare and contrast approaches without setting up unnecessary oppositions.

The primary thread of *Entangled* argues that human-human, human-thing, thing-human, and thing-thing relationships and interrelationships create dependence and dependency, or the enabling/reliance and constraint that are defining characteristics of contingent human experience. These approaches are outlined alongside the above scholarly theories, and in the latter half of the book, are assembled to form Hodder's answer to materiality, Entanglement Theory. The Entanglement Theory argument is built slowly but seductively,

as assumptions about the nature of these relationships are exposed through Hodder's concise language and legerdemain-esque introduction of supporting evidence from the additional fields of biological and natural sciences. Proverbial wisdom suggests that the 'past is a foreign country,' but Hodder shows how entanglement can be viewed as a near universal in both past and present. The structures, scales, and complexity of the entanglements may be different, but the means of arriving at them are seen to be remarkably similar, as is the result: the general irreversibility of long-standing entanglements over time.

Given the nature of Hodder's subject matter, it is often of considerable benefit to the reader to relate theories to more concrete examples. However, the utility of Hodder's 'thought experiments,' like most heuristic devices, is dependent on one's familiarity with the model. A quick Google search may help readers decipher the more nuanced descriptions of sailboats, tennis, and period-specific piano music. Archaeologically focused audiences will be more comfortable with the examples based on the always-fascinating Çatalhöyük. Hodder has led international teams in excavation at the site since 1993. He uses his ample experience to provide a testing-ground for Entanglement Theory in the latter half of the text, in the context of exploring the origins of agriculture and settled life in the Middle East.

Hodder's approach is not necessarily unique. In part, it is a skillful and balanced synthesis of previous arguments regarding the nature and objectives of materiality that have been grounded in the domain of social theory. Where it does depart from current material theory is that it places a greater emphasis on the 'biological, chemical, physical thing,' as well as the unique temporality of things, without venturing into materialism or ecological determinacy. In foregrounding the 'material blobs,' one could argue that Hodder's approach is limited by a less-explicit concern with human actors. His vision of agency, "the ever-present force of things," (Hodder 2012:215) is also less explicitly about the resistance, power, choice and conspicuous consciousness that is utilized in contemporary archaeological work. It would be interesting to learn whether Hodder feels that this tack is necessary to avoid binary oppositions; in other words, what is the price of a greater recognition of physical things within social theory?

Scholars of materiality and archaeologists would be well served by exploring the various visual representations of entanglements presented by Hodder in the text. The most useful diagrams use Çatalhöyük as a data set: the

'tanglegram' representing clay entanglements (2012:181), a model of entanglements in space (2012:187), and a seasonal resource entanglement reconstruction are standouts (2012:191). Additionally, through his arguments regarding the nature of entanglements, Hodder provides a way for archaeologists to discuss the physical processes and properties of things themselves without becoming overly materialistic. This is an important point: in a moment in the discipline where a sense of hyper-agency is more and more prevalent, it is vital that analysis is not weakened by strict subject/object dualisms. In essence, entanglement joins a more science-based archaeology with anthropological archaeology, as Jones (2004) and others (e.g. Gosden 2005, Needham 2005, and Taylor 2005) called for in an extensive commentary published in *Archaeometry* (47:1) in 2005.

While it is unlikely that archaeology will ever be unified by a theory like the biological sciences are by evolution, entanglement does provide a framework for questions all archaeologists should be asking of their data. The beauty of *Entangled* lies in its complexity, with the multiple lines of evidence and attention to detail that generates robust analysis. With such nuance, perhaps we can see the 'faceless blobs' smiling.

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