As this book makes clear, archaeological theory is a dynamic area of thought and engagement. This contribution, by two of the most talented practitioners of theory, concentrates rightly on recent developments, providing also some guides to future developments. A must for anyone interested in this area and indeed for the sceptic who might be converted.

Chris Gosden, University of Oxford, UK

The volume presents an outstanding introduction and critical assessment of major new trends in archaeological theory. Harris and Cipolla counter the myth that theorizing in archaeology has not advanced since the 90s, and they argue compellingly that archaeological theory should challenge basic assumptions about how the world works.

Edward Swenson, University of Toronto, USA

This is a wonderfully accessible introduction to the key theoretical debates and positions within the discipline of archaeology today. For many archaeologists today the diversity of theory may seem bewildering: the authors have done an impressive job of making sense and explaining, using clear and straightforward examples.

Ian Hodder, Stanford University, USA

Archaeological Theory in the New Millennium provides an account of the changing world of archaeological theory and a challenge to more traditional narratives of archaeological thought. It charts the emergence of the new emphasis on relations as well as engaging with other current theoretical trends and the thinkers archaeologists regularly employ. Bringing together different strands of global archaeological theory and placing them in dialogue, the book explores the similarities and differences between different contemporary trends in theory while also highlighting potential strengths and weaknesses of different approaches.

Written in a way to maximise its accessibility, in direct contrast to many of the sources on which it draws, Archaeological Theory in the New Millennium is an essential guide to cutting-edge theory for students and for professionals wishing to reacquaint themselves with this field.

Oliver J. T. Harris is Associate Professor of Archaeology in the School of Archaeology and Ancient History, University of Leicester, UK.

Craig N. Cipolla is Associate Curator of North American Archaeology, Royal Ontario Museum, Canada.
Introduction

Why does the world need yet another book about archaeological theory? Hasn’t everything already been said? On the shelves of university libraries you can find lots of texts that address different aspects of archaeological thought, and even books declaring that archaeological theory is dead. Matthew Johnson has already published two excellent editions of his lucid book, *Archaeological Theory: An Introduction*, which covers the history of theory in the discipline from the mid-twentieth century. So, what sets this book apart? Archaeological theory in the last 15 years has grown increasingly diverse and complicated. The last ‘great revolution’ in archaeological theory, which we sometimes refer to as a ‘paradigm shift’, took place 30 years ago or more, and increasingly the discipline’s structures of thought appear to be fragmentary. From claims that human behaviour is driven purely by evolution, via an emphasis on human identity and agency, to arguments that we need to move away from talking about people at all, archaeological theory sometimes feels less like a toolbox and more like a random collection of unrelated approaches that talk past – rather than to – one another. Despite laudable attempts to bring some of these approaches into dialogue, there remain major rifts across the discipline. These divisions lie behind the spurious claims that archaeological theory is stuck in a rut, in some way unhealthy or that it has perhaps perished altogether.

We take the opposite view. Contrary to such arguments, we see recent debates in theory as exciting, vibrant and absolutely essential to the discipline of archaeology. Behind the scenes there are a number of interrelated developments in a series of critical areas that are opening up radical new possibilities for archaeological thought. Hidden in diverse and difficult texts, these can sometimes seem to pass unnoticed, with the arguments between differing positions obscuring what they have in common. As two authors from different backgrounds, studying different
periods of the past, with different sources to draw on, we have come together to set out what we think are the most important developments in archaeological thought in the current climate. In this sense, this book emerges from us teaching together and thinking about how to communicate these important ideas to our students and our colleagues.

Before we get into any of that, though, we need to address a vital question: what do we mean by theory anyway? Johnson begins the second edition of his book by defining theory as ‘the order we put facts in’. But as he goes on to show, even the notion of a ‘fact’ cannot be separated from the theoretical understandings we have of the world. We could even extend this notion beyond the facts we use to answer our questions, to critically reflect on the very kinds of questions we ask in the first place. Let us think this through in relation to a puzzle that compares our two different areas of research. We will often use puzzles in this book as a device to help us think through different archaeological dilemmas, and our first example starts with something archaeologists often encounter on excavations: a humble, unworked stone. How do we know if this stone is an artefact or not? Is this something you can demonstrate factually? If you were digging an Iron Age promontory site in western Scotland and you came across our stone in a pit, you might ask your supervisor whether the stone was an artefact. The supervisor would look at the stone and, recognising that it has not been modified, declare it simply to be natural and throw it on the spoil heap. Here the ‘fact’ is that this stone is not a ‘cultural object’ because it had not been modified in any recognisable way in the past.

Take a similar feature encountered on an excavation on a Native American reservation in New England, where indigenous people are involved in the research. You find a similar stone and again ask your supervisors whether this is worth keeping. Perhaps the Anglo-archaeologist might have a similar response to the one you got in Scotland, but the indigenous archaeologist might tell you that the stone is an important spiritual element from Mother Earth, a prayer set in stone by her ancestors that requires respect and attention. Here the ‘facts’ have changed because of the different theories. Theory one says that physical modification defines human involvement; theory two says that no such modification is required. While your initial response might be to presume that one of these theories is correct – we might call it a science – whereas the other is merely belief, one of the things we will explore in this book is how such a position is deeply problematic. As suggested above, however, we can also go beyond this to think about the very question we posed: ‘is this stone an artefact?’ This question itself is based on a theoretical premise that we can divide the world into things that are artefacts and things that are not – which is in itself a theoretical position. Instead we might ask: ‘is this stone alive?’ This might prompt a whole host of other responses. While you might think that asking if a stone is alive is a pretty strange – maybe even silly – question, we will see later on that this is not necessarily the case.

So, what is theory? Turning back to Johnson’s initial definition, what we are left with is the notion of order – how we organise our interpretations; how we recognise and define data; the different preconceptions, ideas and beliefs we bring
into dialogue with one another. This notion of ideas in dialogue is what makes theory so vibrant and so alive. It is always an ongoing debate and story that we are a part of. It is not something that ‘happened’ in archaeology for us to learn about, but rather a process that goes on in our discipline that we need to embrace. As we will see throughout this book, what theory does is grab the assumptions you hold dearest and shake them until they fall apart. It makes you look at yourself and the world around you in new ways, and it also challenges you to embrace what you would otherwise dismiss and reflect critically on your most fundamental truths. ‘Common sense is not enough’, as Johnson so rightly points out. To this we can add that theory forces us to ask different kinds of questions of our material, and to define our material in new and interesting ways. Not only are the answers to our archaeological conundrums up for grabs, but we can generate whole new sets of questions to ponder.

**Beyond paradigms**

On occasion, we have both encountered senior colleagues who claim that ‘nothing has happened in theory since the 1990s’. Here and throughout the book, we are going to show you how wrong that notion is. Most archaeologists think of the history of our discipline in terms of three big transformations. We are told of culture historic archaeology, processual archaeology (or the ‘New Archaeology’) and postprocessual archaeology. We will discuss each of these further in Chapter 2, but for now here is a one-sentence introduction to each. Culture history emphasises the when, where and what of different human ‘cultures’, placing great importance on description, typology and the transformation and spread of material culture through space and time. Processual archaeology, modelled after the natural sciences, asks why and how human culture changed through time, often looking to the environment for explanations. Postprocessual archaeology rejects the idea that archaeology is only a science, and instead embraces questions concerning multiple meanings, symbolism and identity. All histories of archaeological thought rely on this tripartite structure, including the gold standard in our discipline, Bruce Trigger’s *A History of Archaeological Thought*. The transformations just described are characterised as paradigm shifts, a term that comes from the work of the philosopher of science, Thomas Kuhn. Kuhn defined a paradigm shift as a moment when one set of ways of understanding the world is replaced by another in a revolutionary event. We want to challenge the idea that this captures the way in which archaeological thought has changed through time. A true paradigm shift entails a complete rejection and replacement of what came before. When we look back at the history of the discipline, we find little evidence for such a change. For instance, Ian Hodder, who many archaeologists consider the founder of postprocessual archaeology, still uses typology (from culture history) and radiocarbon dating (a scientific technique) to understand chronology at the sites he excavates. We argue that you cannot be an archaeologist without referring to typologies, employing scientific techniques or concerning yourself with the complexity of meaning and
Introduction to contemporary archaeological theory

identity in the past. These divisions may be useful as a device for telling the history of archaeological thought, but they have little intellectual value in the present and do not actually exist in practice.

Contrary to those claims that ‘nothing new has happened in theory since the 1990s’, we argue that change in archaeological thought is continuous. This means that change runs throughout the three ‘archaeological paradigms’ up to the present. The subject matter of this book is the development of archaeological thought in the new millennium – what many archaeologists might consider later postprocessual thought up to the present. As we just reasoned, however, these debates are built upon the bedrock of theory set in place by the history of earlier ‘paradigms’. Of course, we do not see this bedrock as static and completely intractable either. We regularly go back and rework our understandings of ‘older’ concepts like typology even as we pursue new research agendas. \[11\] In short, we find that many aspects of our concerns predate the later postprocessual label that some will attach to this book.

Theory in the new millennium

What this book examines, then, is developments in archaeological thought since the year 2000. We won’t be strict about this date, of course, with various chapters dipping a little further back in time, but it does represent our primary focus. What this book is not, however, is an encyclopaedia of archaeological thought during this period. We are not trying to cover every perspective, or indeed every single approach. There are several reasons for this. First, such a book would be enormously long, and still have too little space to do justice to each approach it would need to cover. Second, it would be hard to develop a coherent argument through a book whose aim was to be encyclopaedic. Third, and most importantly, archaeological theory and archaeological theorists are situated – that is, we come with our own interests and expertise, as we discuss below. We are not the best people to write about human behavioural ecology or Darwinian notions of evolution, or other approaches that we will not cover in these pages. These approaches, which play important roles in certain parts of the field, are not directly connected to the questions we are interested in asking, or that we want to engage our readers with (although we will touch upon evolution and ecology from different perspectives in Chapter 9). For similar reasons we focus primarily on archaeological theory from Britain, America and Scandinavia because these approaches form a coherent group, engaging with a particular set of questions.

Our book is about a specific set of interrelated developments that have garnered a range of labels. You can variously encounter these notions described as ‘the material turn’, ‘the ontological turn’, ‘the turn to things’, ‘thing theory’, ‘the relational turn’ and so on. They include approaches with names like ‘symmetrical archaeology’, ‘new materialism’, ‘object agency’, ‘materiality’ and ‘Peircean semiotics’. Are these all the same? Perhaps according to those senior colleagues mentioned above, yes, but not to us. These debates are related, as we will see, but not identical, and they offer a dynamic and challenging new set of approaches to thinking about
Introduction to contemporary archaeological theory

5

archaeology that have not yet been brought together in an accessible manner – that is what we aim to do here. In this sense, then, this book is both an introduction to contemporary archaeological thought and an argument about where archaeological theory is going.

What unifies the different approaches we will discuss in the book is an attempt to deal with a central tendency not just in archaeological theory, but also in western traditions of thought more widely, to conceptualise the world in terms of dualisms. What do we mean by this? Think of the example we discussed earlier about our stone, the one found in either Scotland or New England. The fundamental debate was about whether this stone was a cultural artefact. If it wasn’t, the default position of the supervisor in Scotland was that it was natural, that it belonged to nature. Okay – what’s the problem with this? The answer is twofold. First, as our Native American colleague showed us, not everyone divides the world up like this. To her the stone was alive; the division between nature and culture was not clear. This means when we are digging other sites, like our Iron Age promontory enclosure in Scotland, we cannot be certain that ‘natural’ objects were perceived as such by people in the past there either. So imposing our dualism onto the past gets in the way of understanding their point of view. See Table 1.1 for a list of problematic dualisms that often impede archaeological thinking.

Unfortunately, this is only one half of the problem. The other issue is that this system of categorisation itself impedes us from understanding our world as well. To think about this, let’s move away from our stone for a moment, and think about an example we have all encountered – the human body. In the modern world we tend to think about the biological structures of the body as completely natural. In fact, when it comes to the achievements of human bodies we police these boundaries rigorously. If you are an Olympic sprinter you have to work at improving your body ‘naturally’. This means that you can exercise, you can work on your diet and you can make sure you sleep properly. What you absolutely cannot do is take an ‘artificial’ – or cultural – enhancement like human growth hormone. Using this chemical compound, synthesised in a lab, would mean that your body was no longer ‘natural’ and thus not a reasonable point of comparison with others involved in the sport. This is why drug testing exists, scandals occur and records are re-written. Yet at the same time, this distinction actually makes no sense. The same athlete will wear shoes made from the latest compounds that allow them to run faster. They will eat foods with genetically modified proteins that allow their muscles to regenerate quickly. If they suffer injury, their ligaments will be reattached by modern medical techniques employing all kinds of ‘cultural’ equipment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nature/culture</th>
<th>Material/ideal</th>
<th>Object/subject</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fact/interpretation</td>
<td>Nonhuman/human</td>
<td>Agency/structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women/men</td>
<td>Body/mind</td>
<td>Past/present</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 1.1 Some dualisms that impede archaeological thought
thus cheating, is not obvious or clear, but rather constructed by the rules of the
organisations involved, both explicitly and implicitly. Look at your own body and
try and divide it up into the natural parts and the cultural parts. At first it might
seem obvious – strip away all the things and nature is what is left behind. But
inside your body, the antibodies that you were injected with as a child continue
to work and keep you free of disease. The chemicals you inhale continue to attach
themselves to your red blood cells; the fact that you worked all summer on an
archaeological site has shaped your muscles and the muscle attachments on your
bones. For example, both of us are right handed, so we use our trowels primarily
in that hand, creating calluses on the skin and stronger muscles in the forearm. If
you think about the process of digging a site, these dualisms become even more
blurred. Where is the edge of your body as you start digging into the ground, the
tedge of your skin, your clothing or your trowel? As Figure 1.1 suggests, some of
the approaches we will be exploring in this book will start to make us think about
the material things of the world around us as more ‘alive’ than we might previ-
ously have done. The key point to emphasise here is that we cannot understand
the human body in terms of dualisms like nature and culture; they simply get in the
way of us grasping anything interesting about it at all. We will look at more of these
examples when we talk about people and things in later chapters.

Archaeologically, these divisions are equally as arbitrary, and in fact the oppo-
sition between nature and culture is only one of many ways in which we have
learned to divide the world up. We oppose mind and body, ideas and materials,
women and men, individuals and collectives, and past and present, just to name a
few. In our everyday lives we use these divisions when we divide ‘mental’ illness
off from regular everyday bodily illness, or when we debate whether our love (or
hatred) of baked beans came from ‘nature or nurture’. Even the way in which the
history of archaeological thought has been told relies on a dichotomy between
change and continuity. Either you have one (and thus a period of paradigm shift)
or the other (stasis). In fact, as we have argued so far, these two are part of the same
process and are largely indivisible from one another. We return to this point in the
next chapter, where we explore the long history of these dualisms.

The different approaches we will look at in this book have different tendencies,
influences, histories, taken-for-granted, and strengths and weaknesses. Each tries
to wrestle with dualistic thinking that has come to us via a long and wandering
path. This shared starting point, however, should not be used to obscure the differ-
ences between them that are real and at times profound, as we will see throughout
the book.

**Imagining theory**

One of the ways in which we have tried to think through the problems we want to
explore in this book is in the use of images of different kinds. Some of them are very
familiar (for example, we might illustrate a particular archaeological example with a
photo of the object under discussion). However, there are two other kinds of images
we use that are worth a little more explanation. The first is our cartoons, drawn by the fantastic San Francisco artist K-Fai Steele. These feature a skeleton archaeologist and a trowel that comes to life and begins to explore the world for itself. On the one hand, these cartoons are designed in each chapter to bring to life the kinds of questions we will be discussing and help us to think about them differently. On the other, they allow us to make the visual point that new archaeological theories question the boundary between living and non-living things in interesting ways. Putting things down as images always raises questions, though; for example, you might wonder why we have used a skeleton as one of our protagonists. The answer is that beyond the archaeological element to it, it gets us out of having to provide our character with gender or ethnicity — in that sense it is a much more accessible figure! The second issue worth flagging up is the trowel itself and its anthropomorphic qualities — that is, the way it has taken on elements of a human (with eyes and so on). Later in the book we will be very critical of anthropocentrism (making humans the centre of everything), so why have we opted for this act of anthropomorphism? The simple answer to this is that it makes our cartoons intelligible and understandable; it allows them to work in the way we want. To think about the way in which objects help to bring our identities into being (Chapter 4), have agency (Chapter 5) and so on, we depict our trowel as a person to provoke our readers to think differently about the way in which people and things explore the world together.

The second set of images that are a little unusual begin in the next chapter and can be found in the form of the different boxes we have included about thinkers, both inside and outside archaeology, who have had an impact on the
theories we discuss. We chose to illustrate these boxes not with photographs of the thinkers we are discussing, but instead with images of things connected to their ideas – often, but not always, objects of different kinds. One of the key ideas explored in this book is that objects and people bring each other into being in different ways, and so our use of objects to stand for people in these boxes helps us to explore how the theoretical ideas we are discussing are themselves often in part produced by encounters with the material world. The selection of who to include in boxes was a very difficult one – there are many archaeologists and theorists from other disciplines who we would have loved to incorporate, but could not find room for in the end. The other issue is that selecting boxes forces you to examine the people who have come to dominate theoretical debates in archaeology and other disciplines. More of our boxes contain men than women, and very few are of persons of colour. This is crucial to point out as it represents the way in which white men continue to dominate theoretical debates. We hope that it serves as a reminder of the profound challenges we face to broaden the scope of archaeology’s inclusivity both in terms of gender and race.

Theory and us

Rather than present only a singular perspective on contemporary archaeological theory, we rely on co-authorship to help us integrate our distinctive approaches and opinions. Despite coming from two very different backgrounds and working in distinct archaeological contexts, we find a level of unity in our thinking that we hope will prove useful and interesting for our students and colleagues. This unity begins with our mutual passion for archaeological theory and for teaching in general. It continues through to our independent struggles with dualisms in archaeological theory prior to teaching together and writing this book. Of course, the ways in which each of us came to engage with archaeological theory, find fault in the dualisms mentioned above and endeavour to grapple with these issues are distinct and worth further elaboration.

Oliver is a British prehistorian focusing mainly on Neolithic Britain. He became fascinated by archaeological theory as an undergraduate because of the way in which it challenged his assumptions about how the world worked. His field research looks at long-term change in western Scotland, and how we cannot solely rely on writing an archaeology that is only about people to understand this. The theoretical topics he is particularly interested in are new materialism and assemblage theory, which we will encounter later in the book.

Meanwhile, Craig is an American historical archaeologist trained in anthropology. He is interested in the long-term indigenous prehistory and history of New England and the Great Lakes, particularly the complicated intersections of indigenous societies and European colonists that took place in those areas. In studying these topics, he strives to foster working relationships with indigenous descendant communities. This, he argues, makes the archaeological process more visible and relevant to those traditionally situated outside of academia while incorporating contemporary
indigenous knowledge and sensibilities into the research. Some of the topics in archaeological theory that Craig feels most passionate about are practice theory, postcolonialism and semiotics.

These differences in nationality, disciplinary training, regions and period of study, and lines of evidence employed in our interpretations certainly set us apart, but not to the degree where we talk past one another. This is not a book about theory in Britain or America, in prehistory or historical archaeology, or in archaeology or anthropology. It is all of these things. As outlined above, most of the book is about how we, as a team, think about the history of the discipline and the problem of dualisms therein. In the following nine chapters, we present the different positions that we agree are most relevant to this set of debates without being too judgemental. In the final chapter, we step back and begin to explore how our own approaches diverge.

**Structure of the book**

The book follows a loose chronological sequence. We divide our discussion into three main sections. The first section covers the introduction and background for this project, outlining where our history of dualisms originates. The second section explores what we see as some of the key responses to these problems along with several more recent approaches. Here, we highlight a specific set of trajectories involving what we will refer to as the rise of ‘relational approaches’ in archaeological theory. By relational we mean that these approaches focus primarily not on bounded entities (things, people, agents or structures) but rather on the relations between them. The final section of the book delves into contemporary debates, which are currently in process as we write.

The first section is made up of this chapter and Chapter 2. There we present a brief history of archaeological thought, further exploring transformations in archaeological theory – often referred to as paradigm shifts – and their continuities with one another. These continuities relate to the core theme of the book: dualisms, to which we will also refer from time to time as dichotomies or binary oppositions to limit repetition (all three terms have the same meaning). We frame this background chapter as a history of dualisms, the opposition between nature and culture being the earliest and most fundamental of binaries that continues to influence the discipline. Just think back to our rock problem introduced earlier: natural or cultural? We find a deeper antiquity to this puzzle and its interpretive hazards than a standard ‘three-paradigm’ approach to archaeological theory allows.

The second section of the book consists of four chapters. Chapter 3 explores notions of practice and agency in archaeology. A key move of the 1980s and 1990s was the realisation that archaeologists needed to think both about people’s actions and how they related to the world around them. These concerns led archaeologists to move away from thinking solely about what things meant to people, to emphasising critical questions about what people did with things and what things did to people. This ushered in what we will refer to as recursive models of social action. Chapter 4 considers issues of identity and personhood. The crucial questions about
agency discussed in the previous chapter connected up with studies of gender that emerged in the 1980s. This led to new emphases on critical questions of identity and personhood over the last 20 years. Identity raises important issues about the historically contextual nature of who people were. Questions about personhood go a step further, asking what it means to be a person in a particular context, and whether personhood is limited to human beings. Chapter 5 builds upon this last point in its focus on object agency and biography. We start off by considering the ways in which objects relate to personhood and therefore come to have agency and biographies of their own. Here, we trace the moment that archaeologists began to look at objects as more than just the simple outcomes of people’s actions, as things people understood as being meaningful or even as structuring elements of people’s lives, but as agents in their own right with biographical qualities akin to those of humans. Chapter 6 closes this section of the book with a discussion of materiality, phenomenology and entanglement. These approaches, directly related to studies of object agency and biography discussed in Chapter 5, consider how the experience of the material world was crucial to further transcend dualisms such as nature/culture, mind/body and structure/agent that previous attempts failed to solve.

The third and final section of the book includes five chapters. Again, we see the debates discussed here as ongoing. Chapter 7 explores a more recent approach to the study of meaning and symbolism in archaeology that takes direct influence from the writings of philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce. This bourgeoning set of theories offer valuable critiques of the dualisms of earlier approaches to symbols and meaning based initially in structuralism. This chapter offers a logical transition between ideas of materiality, discussed in Chapter 6, and a newer set of theories often labelled as ‘posthumanist’. Chapter 8 engages in posthuman approaches in its exploration of symmetrical archaeologies and new materialism. The chapter looks at the ways in which recent concerns with material things have prompted certain archaeologists to go beyond thinking about how things and people ‘co-constitute’ each other to thinking about how people can only act in the world with things. These thinkers even problematise the division between things and people. As we will show, this move towards symmetry raises a host of questions for how we think about the past, and these cutting-edge ideas are increasingly influential in archaeology. Chapter 9 follows along this line of reasoning to examine emergent ways in which archaeologists are now thinking about relationships between people, plants and animals. Inspired by developments in biology and evolutionary thinking on the one hand, and the new materialist approaches outlined in Chapter 8 on the other, archaeologists are rethinking the roles of plants and animals in past worlds, and moving towards a multi-species archaeology. Whereas they might once only have been of interest in their calorific or symbolic value, plants and animals are now starting to play their own roles in what we think of as a more-than-human approach to the past. This chapter allows us to demonstrate certain continuities between what some think of as wholly different approaches. We find common ground here with studies of evolution and ecology, for example.
In Chapter 10, we engage with postcolonial concerns, framing our discussions around the Other. Here we discuss four related uses of postcolonial theory in archaeology: 1) as a means of rethinking the agency of people normally excluded from our writing (who we can term, in postcolonial style, ‘subaltern’); 2) as a means of decolonising archaeological practice by collaborating with indigenous communities; 3) as a means of treating nonwestern thought as a form of theory and how this can create new ways of understanding the past; and 4) as a means of fundamentally rethinking people/thing relations in general. The last set of approaches argue that material things – in addition to certain groups of people – are subaltern and colonised by humans, and therefore in need of liberation. This chapter also considers ‘alterity’ as a general category. This term typically means alternative, different and Other. We explore current anthropological approaches that frame this term as representing radical and absolute difference. These raise serious issues about taking the point of view of nonwestern people seriously and also evoke interesting questions about how we think about the past.

Chapter 11 concludes the book. We consider the wider ramifications of the arguments explored throughout. These encompass challenges to the traditional history of archaeological theory, as we alluded to earlier in this chapter, along with wide-ranging consequences for the discipline of archaeology (beyond just theory). We finish this chapter with a dialogue between us exploring some of our own perspectives on the different approaches covered in the later chapters of the book. This serves to highlight our individual views on these problems and debates.

We argue that archaeological theory remains an important toolbox. It gives you a choice of different approaches that are useful for answering differing kinds of questions, and indeed for posing different kinds of questions in the first place. In this book we are going to look at the tools that we think have proved especially useful to us, and to others like us, in thinking about the past in new and interesting ways since the turn of the new millennium. What is essential to recognise, however, is that whichever of the approaches in this book – or indeed of other approaches we do not address – you happen to choose, remember that there is no archaeology without theory. If the simple act of excavating a pit and finding an unworked stone involves theoretical engagement, as we saw in the puzzle earlier, then there really is no area of our discipline that sits apart from theory. This book aims to provide a comprehensible narrative about the development of some of the central theoretical approaches of the last two decades. It is a story we cannot afford to ignore.

Notes
1 Bintliff 2011; cf. Thomas 2015a, 2015b.
3 E.g. Cochrane and Gardner 2011.
4 Johnson 2010: 2; Wallace 2011: 8–10.
5 As the anthropologist Alfred Irving Hallowell (1960: 24) has shown, this is actually a very useful question to ask.
12 Introduction to contemporary archaeological theory

6 Johnson 2010: chapter 1.
7 Trigger 2006.
8 For a recent example see Zubrow 2015.
9 Kuhn 1962.
10 For interesting discussions touching on this see Jones 2002; Last 1995; Thomas 2015a, 2015b.
11 E.g. Fowler 2013.
12 Shanks 2012; Thomas 2004.
13 This is the dominant approach; of course in all contexts, modern, archaeological or otherwise, there are multiple understandings at play (cf. Harris and Robb 2012).
14 There is also a more complex argument about the difference between anthropomorphism and anthropocentrism, and the way in which the former can be used judiciously to challenge the latter, but it is a little early in our story to be getting into that! (See e.g. Bennett 2010; Harman 2016; Malafouris 2013: 130–1.)
15 Wallace 2011.