

Afterword: The pot and the archaeologist – changing each other in an (un-)happy marriage?

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An outstanding pottery specialist told me some time ago that once in a dream she was lying in her bed when she suddenly realised that a ceramic bowl (a Late Helladic IIIC monochrome deep bowl with a reserved zone between the handles) was looming over her in a threatening fashion. She woke up horrified and was worried about what effect pottery and the study of it may have had on her. Are we archaeologists mad for, or getting mad from, pottery? For some archaeologists, it seems that life without pottery is almost impossible and that they should thank past potters for all their efforts to supply us with such a rich corpus of a fragmented past. Generations of archaeologists have classified vessels, sorted them by type, given them names, were inspired to think about complex systems of symbolic communication and were worried how to store or where to dispose of the large amounts of potsherds found during a usual excavation. It is not my aim to enumerate all possible potentials that the study of pottery generates, as this has been extensively demonstrated by the contributions to this volume, even though they concentrate on crucial aspects of pottery – namely its production and the subsequent transport of the products by humans.

In their introduction, C. Heitz and R. Stapfer argue for an innovative approach to the study of pottery that learns from, and at the same time goes beyond, past approaches and which should be inspired by current theories in material culture studies and the practice turn. It goes without saying that it is much more difficult to apply these ambitious theories to the archaeological record than it is to take them as a cautionary tale. However, I am convinced that many current approaches still lack a sufficient understanding of the potential of things.¹

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The respective works have long been overshadowed by rather fruitless discussions of whether things have agency or not (*cf.* Emirbayer and Mische 1998; Knappett 2005; Knappett and Malafouris 2008).

A. Hafner states in his contribution to this volume that there is still a lack of collaboration between archaeology and anthropology (at least in Central Europe, where both disciplines are clearly separated at universities). I think that one of the reasons for this problem is that anthropologists, and also archaeologists, generally apply terms and concepts developed for the analyses of living beings to the study of things, whereas a thing-specific vocabulary is still missing. I think that it is necessary to develop a thing-specific terminology that does not borrow too much from human-related concepts like 'agency' or 'biography' (see Van Oyen this volume). In accordance with Heitz (in this volume), I follow *e.g.* the efforts of H. P. Hahn and H. Weiss (2013; Hahn in this volume) in using 'itinerary' instead of 'biography' in order to describe the mobility of things. I would like to further develop this line of thinking by introducing the terms 'changeability' and 'effectancy' of things, whereby the effectancy of things relies on their changeabilities (*cf.* Stockhammer 2015; 'changeability' is also used by Hahn in this volume).

My understanding of changeability and effectancy first requires a definition of the 'substance(s)' and 'materialities' of an object. Being aware of the multitude of understandings of 'substance' (Olsen 2010) and synonymous terms like 'materials' (*cf.* Ingold 2010; 2012; *cf.* also Heitz in this volume), my definition follows Hahn and Soentgen (2011; *cf.* also Weismantel and Meskell 2014): substance is the physical and chemical quality of a thing or of part of a thing. Substances can be natural (like water, stone, clay, metals) or produced by humans (like alloys, rubber; *cf.* Soentgen 2015). They are shaped into materiality by cultural practices (Thomas 2007, 15), whereby different substances are very often combined. Such a process is most obvious when a potter takes clay and temper and shapes these substances into a particular vessel shape (*cf.* Melko as well as Heitz in this volume, both describe the practice of potting as an integrated bodily and mental process; *cf.* also Alberio Santacreu as well as Hahn in this volume). Materiality is defined by me as the physical presence of an object within the material world, which is perceived by a human individual at a particular moment. Therefore, materiality is inseparably connected to perception and, especially, our perception of things.

When we think about things or interact with them, we regularly perceive them as stable and static. As our perception of objects is always changing, the object changes in itself – even if just in our own perception (*cf.* Merleau-Ponty 1966; Olsen 2006). I would like to call this phenomenon the 'first changeability' of the object, which is not related to a change in the physical or chemical constitution of an object, but only refers to the perception of it, *i.e.* its perceived materiality. The definition of the first changeability is, of course, also inspired by J. Gibson's (1979; *cf.* also Heitz in this volume) 'affordance'; 'changeability', however, further enforces the dynamic of perception and the momentary relatedness of any 'affordance'. The potential of the first changeability becomes very evident in the standard archaeological practice of evaluating pottery: even if archaeologists possess more or less sophisticated systems of classification for vessels, they do not reflect on the particularity of an individual pot in the first moment of encounter, but they just

see the type or category to which they attribute the object (for an instructive example *cf.* Holtorf 2002, 57-58). In a next step, we adorn each pottery shape or type with a particular name, which often already communicates a particular function and / or meaning of the vessel. If we name a vessel a 'cooking pot', function and meaning are inseparably connected with the object in its designation. Through repetitive designation of an object as a cooking pot, this interpretation becomes so natural and self-explanatory that we do not reflect further about a possibly much broader range of additional functions and meanings in archaeology, whereas ethnographers are very aware of this fact (*cf.* also Köhler as well as Hahn in this volume). The object's designation becomes part of our life world (Habermas 1981; Schütz and Luckmann 1979). By using function- and / or meaning-specific categories, we ignore the fact that functions and meanings are processes rather than states and are only constituted through social practices with the object. If we find that an already-classified vessel does not fit into the respective category, we are puzzled, sometimes even angry and we are often reluctant to accept this change of perception. The vessel irritates and affects us; it has an effect. The same is true on a higher level of abstraction, *i.e.* the selection of names for an 'archaeological culture'. In her contribution to this volume, E. Gross convincingly demonstrates the problem these terms have caused in past research through their unreflected use and the fact that archaeologists tended to understand their 'cultures' as pure and homogenous containers, whereas intercultural contact was seen as the exception rather than the norm. Once these categories are created, they haunt us and it is most difficult to get rid of them afterwards, even if their unsuitability for research becomes most obvious. The consideration of the first changeability might also be relevant when thinking about the use of pottery of different stylistic traditions in the same household as described for the Neolithic in western Switzerland. What kind of practices, what kind of handling was necessary to perceive, feel or hide stylistic differences and how could their presence have influenced different kinds of usage?

During the itinerary of an object, its shape and substance can also change without any human interference (*cf.* Ingold 2010; 2012). I call this phenomenon the 'second changeability' of the object: with time, the substance(s) and features of an object change, get lost or are added. Food deteriorates and changes its quality – becomes inedible, sometimes even poisonous, or acquires a unique taste or alcoholic component. Liquid permeates through the wall of a vessel or the resin coat on the inside of the vessel changes the taste of the food or drink inside over time without any additional human practice. The second changeability is not a virtual changeability like the first one. The object changes in its materiality and / or substance. It forces us to care for it, it has an effect and evokes practices and emotions.

Whereas time is the crucial factor for the second changeability, human practice is the same for the 'third changeability', which I define as the transformation of objects in the course of human practices with the objects. Objects wear; they bear traces of their use. Pots show manifold kinds of use-wear ranging from very fine scratches to very obvious cracks, spallings, holes or other markers of their use. In her contribution to this volume, I. Hohle also reflects on such use-wear on pottery – in her case on vessels of the 'Linearbandkeramik'. Although I do not agree with her wording (she speaks of a 'new life' of the vessels), she is very right in pointing

out the transformations of meanings that could arise during their itinerary. The ethnographic work of I. Köhler in northern Côte d'Ivoire gives another example, as she mentions and illustrates new ways of using pots after their partial breakage (*cf.* Köhler in this volume, Fig. 5-6). Like the second changeability, the third one is not a perspective change of the object, but a real one. These traces of use can become witnesses of past times and anchors of memory, which become the basis for the creation of meanings and histories. At the same time, use-wear also forces us to act: we polish scratches, we mend holes or cracks and take care of objects. Again, objects have an effect on us, they possess an effectancy. Having in mind the use of pottery of different stylistic traditions in the same household as exemplified in Stapfer's contribution, I would now be most interested to hear more about whether vessels of similar shape (but of different stylistic tradition) show similar traces of use-wear or not.

I have just defined three different changeabilities of the objects: first, based on the continuously changing perception of the objects; second, the change of objects through time without human interference; third, the transformations of objects due to human practices. All three changeabilities are entangled with each other because the relevant factors for their transformation – *i.e.* perception, time and practice – depend on each other. All three changeabilities can force humans to act. They constitute an object's effectancy. Objects have an effect on us and we do not have to associate their potential with any kind of intentionality, which again is integral for agency.

In archaeology in general and in the study of past (and also present) pottery in particular, the introduction of the changeabilities and their integration in the already established protocols for the evaluation of finds forces us to, first, always reflect on our own categorisation of the artefacts and the implications that we create by applying a specific term. The acknowledgement of the first changeability should be an incentive to avoid use-specific nomenclature like 'cooking pot' or 'fruit stand' and, therefore, the hasty attribution of a specific function or meaning to an object. This would also instigate us to further reflect on the third changeability and the related dynamics of functions and meanings and their permanent creation in the framework of human practices. The second changeability in the archaeological analysis sharpens our focus on the inherent dynamics of a thing and its changes over time, which is crucial for the momentary perception and appropriation of it. The second changeability emphasizes that such processes of transformation are not only a post-depositional phenomenon, but are already of crucial relevance during its previous itineraries. The third changeability aims to strengthen our interest in the micro-remains in / on a thing, (micro) traces of its former use and modifications of the materiality and / or substance in the framework of past human practices. Even though the study of micro-remains, use-wear and related traces of human practices with the object have recently found increasing interest in archaeology, we are far from establishing a standard protocol for their analysis, and they are still overlooked and / or neglected most of the time.

To sum up: pots are much more dynamic than we archaeologists often think. Their three changeabilities reveal the potential of their effectancy, of which understanding is so necessary when thinking about human-thing entanglements. Be they actors in the past, in present-day Africa or the authors of this volume: there is no doubt that pottery has an enormous effect on us humans – and not only in our dreams!

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