

Part II

High-Level Theory on the Causes of Style

The chapters in Part II address the question, What factors cause material style and formal variation? This question is answered in two ways. First, the chapters inventory the broad array of factors that can determine material styles. Second, they review the various theories that evoke these factors to explain material styles and to interpret archaeological records. Together, the chapters in Part II prepare the way for asking the middle-range theoretic question addressed in Part III, Which specific determinants of an artifact's form are reflected in which of its specific attributes and under what contexts?

Taking inventory and giving order to the many kinds of factors that can cause material style seems useful at this point in the history of archaeological studies of material style. The past fifteen years have witnessed the proliferation of ethnoarchaeological and archaeological documentation on the causes of material style, yet also some theoretical polarization and restriction as to the causes that are deemed "relevant," paradigmatically, for investigation (e.g. Wobst 1977; Hodder 1982; Wiessner 1983; Sackett 1985). Most theorizing about material style has focused on factors at the levels of the operative society, small groups, and the individual.

With a broader eye, the chapters in Part II discuss causal factors that pertain to a wide range of phenomenological levels, including the ecological, technological, sociocultural, social-psychological, personal behavioral, personal psychological, and depth-psychological levels. The factors also pertain to functional, structural, and historical theoretical approaches in anthropology, because they include dynamic processes, structural constraints, and adaptive milieu that define processes, events that trigger processes, and regulatory structures that adjust constraints.

Roe's chapter introduces this book's topic by defining the concept of style and some of its primary characteristics. According to Roe, a style is a component of a culture system, and as such, includes ideas, behaviors, and forms—both processes and products. This view of style is broader than that typically used in archaeology to refer to product alone, which is perhaps better termed "material style" (Carr, Chapter 6). For Roe, style involves a negotiation between the individual and society (see also Hodder 1990). Style resides in the choices selected repeatedly, in a largely normative manner, from known alternatives (see also Sackett 1982). A style is also based on the emotional compromise between the creative flight from boredom and the normative retreat from chaos. Roe observes that often a style is defined in hindsight or by outside analysis, rather than during its making by its makers. It is the denizen of a certain place and time. Finally, a style can be defined by only a corpus of items, not one. Extending this definition, Roe goes on to distinguish art from craft, and to discuss the difficulties in the dichotomy that some archaeologists (e.g., Binford 1965; Dunnell 1978) have drawn between stylistic and functional attributes.

Roe's chapter proceeds to describe numerous factors that cause material style, ranging from the ecological to the depth-psychological, and to provide ethnographic examples of them. Some of these

factors include: (1) the structure, grain, and accessibility of the physical–social environment; (2) the “tyranny” of the medium and technique; (3) social constraints on and aids to individual creativity, such as historical tradition, public opinion, the archiving or destroying of prototypes, domains where deviation is allowed, and artisan and group mobility; (4) many aspects of enculturation; (5) economic demand and the status of the artisan; (6) the collective unconscious of the culture, as expressed in mythic representations; and (7) panhuman unconscious structures such as binary opposition, triadic dualism, and dual triadic dualism. Importantly, Roe, following Lathrap (1973), envisions these processes as being hierarchically arranged into a series of levels, which he calls the psychological, formal, social, mythic, and structural. This framework lays a groundwork for middle-range theory building in Part III.

Voss and Young’s chapter focuses on the social-psychological process of self-definition that is intrinsically involved in the formation and use of a material style. Following an identity–interaction model of the self, Voss and Young characterize the self as having two components: (1) a “reactive” aspect that evaluates one’s thoughts, feelings, and behaviors from the perspective of other persons; and (2) a “proactive” aspect that plays social roles and portrays impressions. The authors then summarize the key premises of the social interaction, information exchange, and social-dialectics/structural schools of thought about style, as well as Wiessner’s (1984) social-psychological theory of style, and show how these frameworks implicitly assume the self to be either reactive or proactive in nature, but not both. Criticisms of each school by the archaeological profession are reviewed and shown to stem from the incomplete models of the self assumed by each school.

By presenting a more complete model of the self, Voss and Young provide a common ground for integrating the different schools of thought about style. Specifically, they clarify that self-evaluation is an aspect of enculturation, which the social interaction theory posits as determining style. Also, impression management is clarified to be an aspect of social communication and social strategies, which the information exchange and social-dialectics/structural schools respectively see as determining style. Thus, the different processes that are evoked to explain style by the three schools are shown to be aspects of the greater process of re-creation of the self through material style, and the three schools can be integrated within one general framework.

Such integration of the three schools of thought is not possible with a similar social-psychological model offered by Wiessner (1984). Wiessner discusses only a single social-psychological process, termed “identification by comparison.” This process emphasizes impression management by the proactive self. Wiessner’s social-psychological model is thus more closely aligned with the information exchange and social-dialectics/structural schools of thought.

At the same time, Wiessner’s work complements Voss and Young’s in that it shows how the nature of a social situation (e.g., fear, competition, cooperation, affluence) determines which aspect(s) of the self is relevant for comparison and, thus, expressed behaviorally and stylistically. The aspects of the self that Wiessner discusses include the personal and social selves, generally, as well as more particular identities.

Voss and Young’s chapter makes three other essential contributions. First, it introduces archaeologists to Hsu’s (1985) model of the self. This model distinguishes seven phenomenological levels, each having distinct processes that can affect material styles: the unconscious, preconscious, unexpressible conscious, expressible conscious, intimate society, operative society, wider society, and the outer world. Hsu’s model is used by Carr and Neitzel (Chapter 1) and Carr (Chapters 6 and 7) to inventory and hierarchically order the various processes that can determine material style.

Second, Voss and Young build some middle-range theoretic arguments that relate the level of visibility and form of spatial distribution of the material attributes of artifacts to various causal processes. These relationships can be drawn because attribute visibility and spatial distribution pertain directly to the two components of the self: the individual as a communicating actor and the individual as a self-evaluating member of the social group, respectively. As statements of pattern generation rather than simply correlation between patterns and processes, the relationships drawn are a strong form of middle-range theory (Conkey 1990:9–10).

Third, Voss and Young's chapter emphasizes how an understanding of the nature of the self implies the necessity of including decision-making processes in any encompassing approach to style. The authors point out that the individual, being positioned at the intersection of cultural tradition and context, must mediate through decisions (including stylistic ones) various cultural demands, immediate social situations, and personal motives and desires. That mediation is accomplished, in part, through the self. Voss and Young's emphasis upon decision-making processes in stylistic theory reiterates Sackett's (1985), and is extended to a more operational level by Carr (Chapter 7) through the concepts of "message priorities" and the "decision hierarchy." Voss and Young's view contrasts with Braun's (Chapter 5), as discussed below.

Washburn's and Braun's chapters expand our view of style from its social and social-psychological causes, which have been the focus of most recent archaeological studies of style, to both lower- and higher-order causes: perception and selection, respectively. Washburn's chapter has three purposes. First, it offers and gives evidence for a model of the perception process. The model posits that mental images of objects are descriptions of relationships among their features rather than iconic pictures. In the face of continual visual overload, the perceptual process by which mental images are formed, recognized, and classified necessarily involves the selection of only certain essential relationships.

Second, Washburn's chapter links the perception process to the creation and maintenance of the styles produced by social groups. Washburn argues that the relationships that are selected in the perception of objects tend to be consistent within a social group and can vary among social groups. In turn, these characteristically selected relationships are expressed in the production of two-dimensional works of art, creating art styles that are distinguished by their structure. For example, modern Western art commonly captures three-dimensionality in two dimensions using the projective transformations of perspective, whereas non-Western art often uses metric, affine, and/or other kinds of transformations. Thus, structural styles reflect social groups of one scale or another. In Washburn's analytic experience, the social group is typically the culture or ethnic group.

Third, Washburn's chapter reviews a mathematical system for describing the universal, basic, formal properties of nonrepresentational and representational planar art. The properties considered include line, color, texture, orientation, and especially symmetry patterns. Washburn also summarizes recent developments in the nomenclature for describing these properties. By focusing on basic properties that occur in all media, the system has the advantage of allowing descriptions of styles in varying media to be made and compared.

Washburn's chapter, appropriately, does not attempt to address the issue of why members of a social group tend to perceive consistently or why the mode of perception of a group commonly remains stable over time. These questions relate to processes of other phenomenological levels: specifically, the small-group, social-psychological dynamics described by Voss and Young (Chapter 3); historicity and selection described by Braun (Chapter 5); and perhaps processes of the collective, cultural unconscious mind (see Carr and Neitzel, Chapter 14). Also, Washburn's chapter introduces but does not resolve the debate between herself and Hodder (1982:206; 1986:47–48) as to whether the structural styles of social groups are passive and normative, or are used actively, or may be either. Again, this question cannot be answered relative to the nature of perception, itself; it is a middle-range theoretic and contextual issue.

A possible resolution to Washburn's and Hodder's debate is given later, in Chapter 7 by Carr. Here, it is suggested and some evidence is cited that a symmetry pattern can reflect a wide range of processes and constraints, and can indicate social groups of any of a variety of scales, depending on the visibility and communication potential of the particular pattern. In turn, the visibility of a symmetry pattern depends on the level of design to which it applies, its complexity and comprehensibility, and the visibility of the artifact class. Complex symmetry patterns, like the grammatical rules of a style, are stylistic "nuances" (Friedrich 1970), which one would expect to be good indicators of either passive or active social interaction. Complex symmetry patterns might reflect passive, learned norms within a network of artisans, or active interaction (e.g., intermarriage, artifact exchange) among small social groups. Simpler, more visible symmetry patterns might actively and directly symbolize differences

between societies or other social units. This flexible view of the processes that a symmetry pattern can reflect mediates Washburn's and Hodder's positions. However, it can be difficult to apply in certain cases, where the same symmetry pattern is found in multiple design levels of an artifact class (Washburn, personal communication) and thus has multiple degrees of visibility.

Braun's chapter shifts our attention from the broad array of factors, of varying spatial and temporal scales, that may determine a style and stylistic variation to the causes of specifically long-term, transgenerational stability and change in the statistical popularity of alternative styles. The causes he isolates are natural and cultural selection. Braun assumes a neo-Darwinian selectionist perspective from contemporary evolutionary biology (Gould 1982; Sober 1984) and translates relevant theoretical concepts from the biological realm to the human behavioral realm. Variation, continuity, and change in stylistic and all other cultural practices are seen to be the consequence of three factors: (1) the innovation of practices; (2) their transmission by cultural means; and (3) cultural and natural selection of practices. For Braun, natural and cultural selection arise from the specific "effects" (i.e., consequences) that stylistic and other cultural practices have—absolutely and relative to the effects of other practices—and the implications of those effects for the differential transmission and perpetuation of the practices. Braun asks, "What is it about the practices, themselves, that shape their statistical popularity?"

Braun contrasts his view with that of Hill (1985), who attributes cultural selection to human decision making and intention. For Braun, intention and decisions are aspects of innovation rather than selection; they are the source of only the "outpouring" of trial-and-error, alternative practices, which are then subject to selection. Although Braun would prefer to leave the human being and human decision making out of an explanation of transgenerational stylistic change, from other viewpoints, there does seem to be room for both Hill's and Braun's ideas in a full treatment of the selectionist perspective (see Carr and Neitzel, Chapter 14).

In developing his selectionist perspective, Braun makes two additional contributions. First, he emphasizes that a selectionist explanation of style is, in part, historical in nature. At any given time, the pool of alternative cultural and stylistic practices that is available to a society and that is subject to selection results from that society's history of innovations, contacts with other societies, and previous episodes of selection. Or, in Hill's (1985) framework, the current set of alternative social and stylistic practices for choice are defined and constrained by past choices. This historical character to selection is summarized by the phrase "descent with modification," and the term "historicity."

Second, Braun reviews and translates the social interaction, information exchange, and social-dialectical/structural theories of style in terms of selectionist concepts. The translation reveals a meeting ground for all three frameworks. Braun notes that it is the actual effects of stylistic practices, not their intended effects (e.g., communicating messages, guiding social action), that lead to selection for or against the perpetuation of those practices. Also, both isochrestic and iconographic variation, which are the subjects of the three theories, can have social and other effects. Thus, both kinds of formal variation and the theoretical frameworks that address them can be accommodated within selectionist theory, in spite of differences in the degree or kind of intent that the theories assume stylistic practices to reflect.

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Style, Society, and Person

Archaeological and Ethnological Perspectives

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