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# editorial

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## Face to face

From its inception, *Archaeological dialogues* has lived by the conviction that theoretical debate should be conducted not only on paper, but also at conferences and symposia. To this end, the Archaeological Dialogues Foundation has organized an annual symposium in the Netherlands on theoretical issues in archaeology since 1990 (Jongste 1994). With the international expansion of our readership and editorial board in recent years, we have been looking for new opportunities to stimulate face-to-face debate across geographical and theoretical boundaries.

A first occasion presented itself in April 2006 at the 71st Meeting of the Society for American Archaeology, in San Juan, Puerto Rico, where *Archaeological dialogues* organized a forum sponsored by the journal and Cambridge University Press. The forum asked the question ‘Does archaeological theory exist?’ of keynote speaker Matthew Johnson, and of a panel consisting of Anick Coudart, Mark Leone, Bjørnar Olsen, Christopher Peebles, Stephen Plog and Adam Smith. Their thoughts on the matter can be read in the pages of this issue. A major part of the forum consisted of open discussion, with lively and sometimes passionate audience participation. One highly pertinent voice from the (otherwise unfortunately unrecorded) audience participation, by Silvia Tomášková, was added to the written version of the discussion in the following pages. In line with the discussion-article format of *Archaeological dialogues*, Johnson replies to his discussants.

The provocatively open nature of the question posed by the forum title was deliberate. As organizers of the session and as a journal, our goal is to promote and to enable discussion on theoretical issues that matter. In doing so, we do not have an agenda for pushing certain viewpoints, neither our own nor those of a particular school of thought. This led to a certain heterogeneity in the themes raised during the discussion in the forum, which can also be recognized in the diverse issues that the panelists picked up from Matthew Johnson’s paper. We see this as a successful way of bringing to the table issues which archaeologists of various national and theoretical backgrounds feel to be in need of critical reflection in archaeology today. Topics that were raised by the forum audience included the problematic relationship between theory and practice, the question of whether archaeological theory enters into public discourse, the incommensurability of different theoretical traditions, the roles of other disciplines to which archaeological theory is connected, and the respective roles of those disciplines in various national traditions.

Of course, by claiming not to have an agenda with respect to particular opinions we do not pretend to be neutral facilitators. *Archaeological dialogues* provided contours to the debate, most obviously by selecting the keynote speaker and the members of the panel, and more subtly, but perhaps more incisively, by organizing the forum at an English-language conference. The audience quite rightly pointed out the lack of diversity with respect to the gender and age of the panelists. While admitting readily that these were not among our primary selection criteria, we stand firmly behind our primary goal to select a group of speakers that represented diversity of geographical background and theoretical orientation. Moreover, we view this as the beginning of a debate to be picked up by our readers, rather than as a definitive statement to be handed down by a select panel.

As a journal with roots in Continental European archaeology, we realize the consequences of choosing a language of debate, and feel a certain ambiguity towards the choice of English for the debate. It excludes and exoticizes voices that express their thoughts in other languages but, the world being what it is today, English like no other language provides a means to enable discussion across boundaries. This in itself should continue to be a matter of critical theoretical reflection.

As noted above, the topics that were addressed and many others that may be raised in response to the question ‘Does archaeological theory exist?’ are open for further debate. We invite the readers of *Archaeological dialogues* to participate, and welcome suggestions for debates, on paper or face to face.

## Reference

- Jongste, P., 1994: Power and politics in Dutch archaeology. A review of the second symposium on archaeology and theory in the Netherlands, *Archaeological dialogues* 1, 77–82.