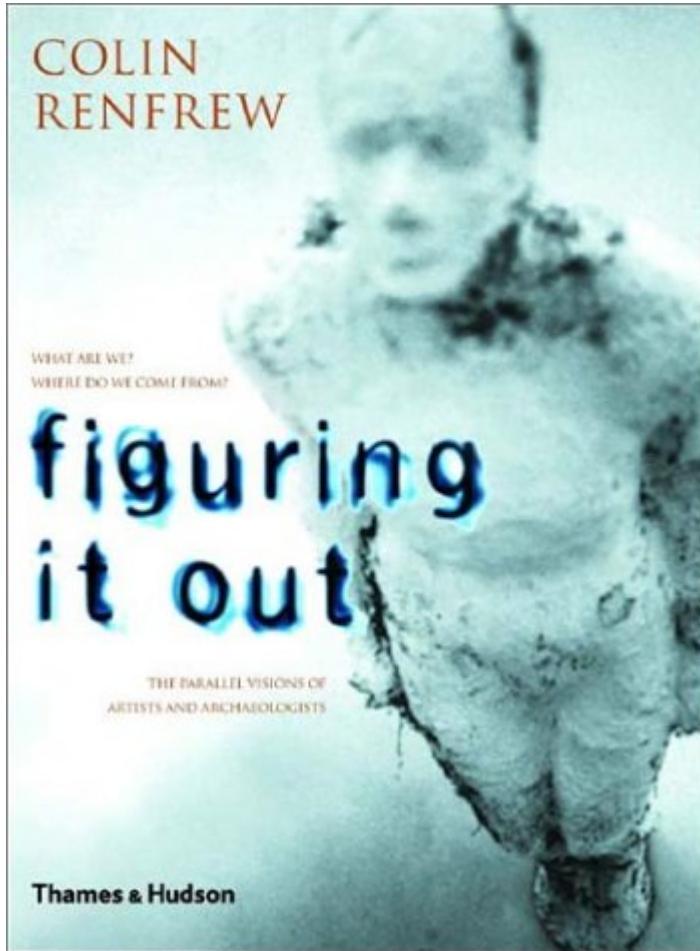
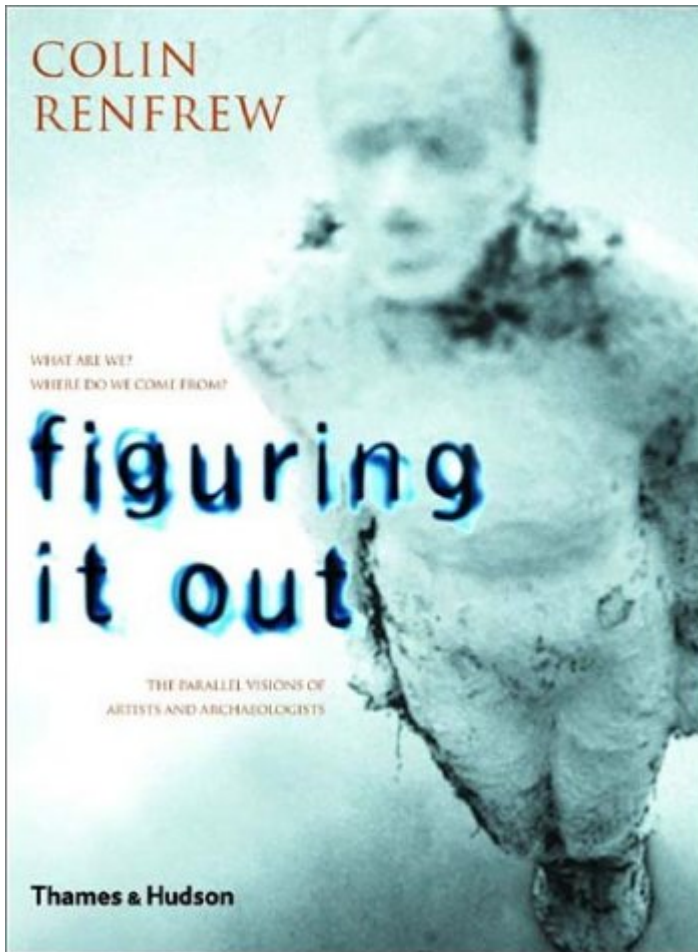


COLIN RENFREW AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ART



In the wake of Colin Renfrew's visit to Stanford last month I picked up his book Figuring it Out: The Parallel Visions of Artists and Archaeologists. I only glanced at it when it came out last year.





I really like it. There is a wonderful range of questioning and reference.

His topic is the human condition, how art helps us understand it, and as does archaeology.

Themes – archaeological processes, people and artefacts, artefacts as property, value and prestige, the everyday, writing and symbols. All components also of an archaeological narrative (he likes Merlin Donald on the origins of mind).

He spends a little too much time for me making the case that art as more than the timeless aesthetic of beauty. But he is great on the likes of George Segal (socialized contemporary bodies), Antony Gormley (anthropometrics and the universal body) and John Bellany (figurative narrative and memory). I am not so keen on Mark Dion's excavation as art (here is my review from the Cambridge Archaeology Journal) – I don't think it reveals much.

My take (as I keep saying in this blog!) is that these artists and archaeologists are both dealing with an aspect of 'the archaeological' – the (history of) the

social fabric – and, ok, call it as aspect of the human condition, if you want. Then there is a neat reflexivity in all this, or symmetry as the likes of Callon and Latour and the actor network theorists might say – archaeologists are studying how people have dealt with the archaeological, themselves included.

A comment for the archaeological theorists among us – **is Colin now a post-processualist?** There is none of the processual fascination with the interplay of environment, social rank, resource allocation, trade and exchange here. And I notice he is now talking now about cognitive archaeology rather than cognitive-processual.