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The present past

Introduction

The past (which others may call the museum, the archive, the library) recedes in an indefinite, perhaps infinite series of galleries. Archaeologists wander the winding and seemingly endless corridors, forever unlocking doors which appear new, armed with different analytical keys, picking over the skeletal remnants of past societies, scrutinizing shelves of death or gathering 'truths' from self-referencing site reports. The archaeologist is devoted to the embalmed relics deafeningly silent yet sacred in their meaninglessness, devoted to the preserved past. The past is a mystery and theories abound as to its meaning, its construction, its constructors. In their antiquarian amnesia and isolation (isolation in the midst of all the human debris), some frantically unlock door after door, compiling an infinite inventory of facts, self-evident truths. Others seek to map the labyrinthine floor plan, illuminating the corridors with the lengthening shadows of the present. But are there new doors? new facts? new truths? Is there a way through the maze of the past? Or has the archaeologist been condemned to eternal mythical repetition of the present, to forgetfulness? The solution is to demolish the museum, but *destruktion*, not *zerstörung*; the task is to dismantle the great metaphysical and rhetorical structure, the architecture of discourse erected in the name of a conserved past, not in order to smash and discard the contents, but in order to rescue them, reinscribe their meaning.

Time is central to archaeology. It constitutes the major problem of interpretation and yet is the reason for the discipline's existence. By definition the past cannot be present and yet the traces of the past surround us. The past is both completed and still living. But in concentrating on the time of the past the time of archaeology tends to be forgotten, i.e. archaeology as social practice and personal experience which takes up people's, time in the present.

In this chapter we consider the nature of time as an abstract concept. Time is not just something manifested in C-14 chronology or publication dates. We argue that it is not simply a neutral device with which to analyse the past and discuss the nature of archaeology as an active relation with the past. Archaeologists spend their time (the metaphor is not incidental to what we have to say) producing a past in the present. They survey and excavate and eventually write for an audience. We examine the nature of what archaeologists do and produce and how they justify their activities. We attempt to emphasize archaeology as event and experience in the present, as social practice which cannot escape the present.

The intention is not to sacrifice objectivity and replace it with an extreme and dis-

abling relativism with archaeologists locked into the present. In the works that archaeologists write there can be no simple choice between fictional creations and objective copies of the past. We confront the conventional opposition between subjectivity and objectivity and argue that there is a need to move beyond it. Our aim is to investigate the nature of current fissures in archaeological theory and practice and relate them to their origin in a problematic present.

The problematic past

The present's relation with the past is no longer self-evident. Past and present are separated by a chasm of misunderstanding. A need has been perceived for a special field of activity, for a class of experts or professionals, to deal with the problems the traces of the past pose to the present: the basic problems are

- (1) how to observe the traces of the past objectively,
- (2) how to bridge the distance between the traces in the present and their social origin in the past,
- (3) what to do about the destruction and disappearance of the traces of the past,
- (4) why these problems are worth posing and considering anyway.

There is a consensus in archaeology as to how to observe the traces the past has left behind - by means of survey and excavation, detailed 'scientific' examination. This aspect of the practice of archaeology aims at producing high-quality information (the sceptical and practical empiricist would forbid us to term it 'objective'). It aims at filtering out the 'noise' of subjective experience - the rainy days and the wandering cows. The problems involved at this level are the practical problems of obtaining and managing a 'skilled' workforce, of producing an intelligible site report. The result is the 'objectivity' of the C-14 date (Binford 1982, pp. 134–5), of the accurately observed and drawn site plan or section.

there is much less agreement about the route from present to past and what is there at the end of the journey, about the interpretation or explanation of the archaeological record. Argument has raged for at least the past twenty years as to what archaeology should be - an historical discipline producing a description of what happened in the past, a science of human behaviour, a science of 'culture process' or a science of the traces of the past themselves in the archaeological record. Concern has also been focused on ideological distortion of the past for present purposes.

The traces of the past are disappearing in the present, excavated away in one way or another at an alarmingly rapid rate. What is to be done. Under a consensus in academia and among others enlightened by a 'conservation ethic' there is a belief that it is right to preserve the past. The problem is largely seen as an administrative one involving planning procedures, legislation and funding. It is also to a certain extent an educational problem of inculcating and marketing the conservation ethic, respect for the past.

There has been little concern with justifications for archaeology, little serious questioning of the basic reasons for doing archaeology. With notable exceptions the concern has mainly expressed itself as rhetorical gesture, justification after the act, afterthought.

We shall consider each of these problems, beginning first with that of bridging the distance between the past and present

Time travel: getting from the present back to the past

Topological thinking

Topological thinking, which knows the place of every phenomenon and the essence of none, is secretly related to the paranoid system of delusions which is cut off from experience of the object. With the aid of mechanically functioning categories, the world is divided into black and white and thus made ready for the very domination against which concepts were once conceived

(Adorno 1967, p. 33)

The past is over, completed, and so much of it is lost in the distance. There are still traces with us, the problem is how to use these to enable us to see the past, to visit the distant past. The traces of the past which we find in the present 'belong' to time other than the present. The problem is how to relate to this otherness. The traces belong to a time in the distance which we cannot see clearly. In this way time is conceived spatially, as distance. Spatial time is at the centre of the problematic past. We shall consider its characteristics and its relation to problems of interpreting the past.

The past is conceived as completed. It is in grammatical terms 'perfect', a present state resulting from an action or event in the past which is over and done. This 'perfected' past is opposed to the flow of the ongoing, incompleting, 'imperfect' present. Although the past is completed and gone, it is nevertheless physically present with us in its material traces. But the attribution of the traces to a 'perfect' past, distant from the present, brings ambiguity, the problem.

A 'perfect' past does not imply a mode of presence with an investigating archaeologist, but one of absence. The past is temporally absent, belonging to another time. A 'perfect' past is an 'allochronic' past (Fabian 1983). In such a conception the past is absent not as the contrary of physical presence - the objects of the past are here with us now - but as the contrary of the continuous 'imperfect' present, which is a process, a continuing, incomplete state.

The spatial temporality of objects locked in a 'perfect' past, an evanescent moment of time, implies a mode of possession. The object belongs to the past, time possesses the object locked into its present, its moment in the ceaseless flow. 'The object *has* been, it *has* happened' - the perfect tense itself hints at this mode of possession. Time reduced to spatial distance is simply a system of spatial coordinates - literally a fourth dimension - according to which a potentially infinite number of uneventful data may be recorded. The time of an object becomes a property possessed, equivalent to mass and dimension. The object is conceived as an empty container. Its coordinate in time, location in empty spatial time, is one of its possessed properties, contingent, accidental. In Latin it is *subiectum* possessing *academes* (see the discussion in Heidegger 1978, pp. 153ff, and in Rose 1984, pp. 62-3).

So the past becomes contingent, our relation to the past becomes accidental and mysterious. The past is gone, distant, and so a mystery, a problem presenting a chal-

lunge to penetrate through the dust and debris to find the way back, to see what is hidden in the distance. But the distance, the other-ness, the absence of the past is postulated as a condition of the challenge. It is this which obscures. Inquiry becomes topological thinking, setting the traces of the past in their place, in the distance. The material traces of the past are ordered, classified, presented with identification papers and locked up. The past becomes a vast labyrinthine edifice to be inhabited. The archaeologist wanders the corridors weighed down with keys, administrating, surveilling, dominating

Commodified time

The quickest runner can never overtake the slowest, since the pursuer must first reach the point from where the pursued started, so that the slowest must always hold a lead
(Zeno in Aristotle, Physics Z9 239b15)

Zeno's paradox of Achilles and the tortoise depends on an infinitely divisible time, it is a time composed of an infinity of durationless moments. But the point is not that Achilles can never overtake the tortoise, but that this is inscribed into the nature of the race itself and who organized and fixed it - ancestors of the anonymous factory time-keeper.

Spatial time is uniform, abstract and commodified time, the time of capitalist production, the time of Zeno's race. It is in essence the abstraction of irreversible time, all of whose segments must prove on the chronometer their merely quantitative equality. In reality the nature of this time is simply its exchangeable character- measured empty duration, separate from the content(s) of existence that fill it up, freely exchangeable with all other time.

Such abstract clock-time allows the exchange of labour and its product; commodified time is the link between the commodity form of goods and commodified labour. 'The calculation and coordination of exchange values by labour time is a specific feature of the commodification of economic relations introduced by the convergence of money capital and the formation of wage labour characteristic of capitalism' (Giddens 1981, p. 119). Capitalism depends on spatial, commodified time.

Empty commodified time applies to all events. All events are comparable according to such time which maintains that a pot and the spread of farming belong to the same calculus, a calculus which is indifferent to them both (*cf* Berger 1984, pp. 9-10). The past disintegrates when the meaning of an object or event lies in its assignation to a point in time. Such assignation occurs at the cost of the integrity of our experience of the past. It amounts to a loss of memory, a betrayal of the past which is forgotten. As a sequence of 'nows' history exists separately from people. It loses its specificity, its coherence and it becomes a problem; hence the paradox of Zeno's race.

Yet such a history or conception of the past also forms a continuum, a seemingly organic whole.

The exchange of commodities is at once smoothly continuous and an infinity of interruption: since each gesture of exchange is an exact repetition of the previous one, there can be no connection between them. It is for this reason

that the time of the commodity is at once empty and homogeneous its homogeneity is, precisely, the infinite self-identity of a pure recurrence which, since it has no power to modify, has no more body than a mirror image What binds history into plenitude is the exact symmetry of its repeated absences. It is because its non happenings always happen in exactly the same way that it forms such an organic whole (Eagleton 1981, p 29)

This continuous whole forms the basis of some populist work which claims that archaeology is in the process of discovering 'our' history>, 'our' past or the past of the whole of humanity Such a viewpoint does not take into account the qualitative historical moment of conflict, rupture or discontinuity It is unable to comprehend the notion of qualitatively different archaeologies, archaeologies other than those written by middle-class white western males (*cf* Hodder 1984, pp 30-1) Individuals, interest groups, and societies all have different perspectives on the past There is and can be no monolithic undifferentiated PAST Rather, there are multiple and competing pasts made in accordance with ethnic, cultural and gender political orientations (see Hall 1984, Ucko 1983, Conkey and Spector 1984)

Commodified time entails that our consciousness is itself set in time like any other phenomenon It cannot deal with subjective experience Objective time is separated from the subjective e individual, analogously work is separated from leisure The work of the archaeologist cannot be related to his or her subjective experience of doing archaeology Commodified time implies the abolition of that time created by the event of consciousness human practice, the flow of actions in and on the world in individualized time

The archaeologist is an Achilles chasing a past which seems so easy to reach and yet They never quite get there Commodified time is the unexamined premise of so much archaeological work It lies behind the allochronism of archaeology - the assignation of the objects and the traces of the past to another and always distant time This breaks the relation between past and present, destroying the integrity of experience of the past Questions of investigation and preservation of the past become apparently unanswerable Problem orientation or general recovery' What should be recovered and why? There can be no coherent consideration of these questions, only rhetorical appeals to accepted values, to pluralism or expert consensus, or a resignation to scepticism Commodification of time denies the historicity of archaeological work itself, its place in contemporary society, the present's production of the past

Commodified time forms a premise of traditional typological work involving the assumption that the temporal classification of an artifact somehow provides a clue to its meaning, that empty time itself explains (see Chapter 7, pp 138-9) It also produces an homogeneous history, permitting the equal treatment of culture at all times and places - comparative method It allows general classificatory stages to be developed in which different societies are shunted into evolutionary sequences Qualitative substantial time which recognizes difference is replaced by quantitative classificatory time All 'tribes' are considered to be equivalent and hierarchically placed in relation to 'chiefdoms' or 'bands' or 'states'

The role of the archaeologist

What is the relation between the archaeologist and the artifact⁵ What is the role of the archaeologist in reconstituting the past by means of the artifact and other traces of the past⁵ What is the role of the archaeologist in the time travel, in overcoming the distance between past and present⁵ The answers to these questions, answers implicit in the theoretical affiliations of archaeologists, are conditioned by the distance, the gap between subject and object, past and present being always-already a problem

Science May be asserted as the means of getting back to the past The archaeologist is to construct a vehicle which is to get to the past on its own The vehicle is science Subjectivity is to be eliminated, it is to adapt itself to the objective

On the other hand the implications of subjectivity May be recognized Scepticism and its doctrinal embodiment relativism maintain that subjectivity just has to be accepted, there can be no completely objective account of the past The 'truth' of the past can never be known for certain, objects are locked into their time, archaeologists into theirs Archaeologists can draw increasingly close, but never quite get there because of subjectivity, belonging to the present (See for example Daniel 1962, p 165 and Fowler 1977, p 138 See also the discussion below on archaeology as ideology)

Wheeler (1954, pp 17-18 and chapter 17), Hawkes (1968) and others have asserted the positive value of subjectivity, the humanities-trained archaeologist, the imaginative individual breaking with the ties of the present to feel the way back to the past So the role of the archaeologist is one of empathy, breathing life into the dusty relics, inspiration, imaginative reconstruction, affective affinity Archaeology becomes a personal confrontation with the past, ultimately it is based on a longing for a dialogue with the past, getting beyond the objects to their human creators, being in their presence

These two features of the confrontation with subjectivity are frequently found together Wheeler (1954) also stresses the limitations of the archaeological record For Coles 'archaeology seeks the evidence and *experience* of life' (1979, p 1, our emphasis) and this aim provides a rationale for experimental archaeology, using empathy and imitating as closely as possible the ways of the past to find out what it was like, 'to glimpse some of the constraints and encouragements that influenced the patterns of life of ancient man (*sic*)' (1979, pp 209-10) Yet clearly 'it is not possible to "live in the past"' (ibid , p 210) It is impossible to repeat the past exactly, in the same way that it is impossible to truly know the past, lost as it is in the distance That experimental archaeology 'lacks the clear ring of truth, of absolute certainty, only aligns it with all other aspects of prehistoric or early historic studies, that archaeologists can do nothing but deal with opinions, with the possibilities and probabilities of past unrecorded events'(Coles 1973, p 168)

The truth in scientific archaeology's denial of subjectivity is its reflection of the fetishized position of people in contemporary capitalism fragmented, isolated consciousness separated from overwhelming objective process

Correspondingly, the imaginative and autonomous individual is a myth, an ideological mystification of contemporary alienation Yet such a notion makes implicit criticism of the dominating exchange principle and division of labour whose root in commodified time we have argued is also the source of the always-already problematical

relation with the past The myth is an assertion that society is intrinsically meaningful, produced by autonomous, creative actors. Society and the past are supposedly open to understanding by those with the necessary hermeneutic energy or empathy, imagination or feeling

The contradiction is a familiar one The individual situated in the capitalist market, supposedly free, confronts an objective reality of truths existing independently of volition We are all bound intimately to the capitalist labour process by our participation in it, and by a chain of consumer goods and values. Yet its objective necessity is shut off from our knowledge and reflection. In the same way the past is at the same time so near and so far, it is an intimate part of ourselves and still estranged. There is experienced a passive conformism before the object world, reverence for hard science, and a simultaneous fascination with the mystery, the magic of the past, its aura and wonder: C-14 dates and, ultimately, ley-lines. This contradiction results from a mistaken notion of historical experience. That the past is produced in concrete practice, is reworked and reinscribed in the present, has been neglected.

The destination

What is at the end of the trip in time? A Hollywood epic? A television arts programme? A sociology lecture? It is quite clear that archaeology does not reveal everything that happened in the past. Traditional 'humanist' archaeology wants a living narrative history: key events and aspects of the past articulated into human narrative by the professional archaeologist (who else can perform this service to the present?) (See Daniel 1962, pp. 164–5, for example) Key facts are selected and given meaning by the archaeologist.

We wish to build on two critiques of traditional 'humanist' archaeology first, that the relation between the archaeological record and 'history' is not at all a simple one, second, that the implications of the present, of subjectivity, need to be taken more seriously, are more subtle and complex, than the idea of the creative expert

A fundamental advance of 'new' over 'traditional' archaeology was its recognition that there is no direct correlation between objects and their relationships and a story of the past Clarke argued for a body of theory to deal with archaeological data, an archaeological systematics which had only an incidental relation to historical or social reconstruction 'Archaeological data is not historical data and consequently archaeology is not history we fully appreciate that these (archaeological) entities and processes were once historical and social entities but the nature of the archaeological record is such that there is no simple way of equating our archaeological percepta with these lost events' (1968, pp 12-13). The serious archaeologist should no longer be writing 'counterfeit' history books (ibid. p. 12).

For Binford, the archaeological record is a static record which needs translating into the dynamics of past cultural systems. What he thinks is needed is a body of middle-range theory, a rigorous observation language, a system of scientific inference allowing past cultural systems to be read off the archaeological record (Binford 1982, 1983b, 1983a, chapters 17, 27, 28). Such a concern with the relation of material culture to 'the past' and to socio-cultural factors in general (see also Schiffer 1976) has provided a

rationale for ethno-archaeology, for modern material culture studies, and for experimental archaeology. Some have even given up the trip to the past, at least for the time being.

What comes at the end? For some (e.g., Fritz and Plog 1970, Schiffer 1976, Watson, LeBlanc and Redman 1971) laws of culture process or formational process in the archaeological record, beyond the particulars of historical context, laws by definition applying to all times and places. In *Analytical Archaeology* Clarke is more concerned with making archaeology a respectable social science than with the past and he asserts the autonomy of the traces of the past. The past as event is over and gone. In general it is the case that most work is ultimately concerned with linking objects and their relationships to the social conditions of their creation in the past (e.g., Renfrew 1972, Flannery (ed.) 1976; Renfrew and Wagstaff (eds.) 1982). Discussion continues as to what these social conditions are (see Chapter 6).

We agree with the general premise of such work, that there is no simple direct route from objects and their relationships to conventional narrative history. We also firmly agree that this means that archaeologists should expand their concern to include material culture in contemporary societies. However we would strongly criticize the view that there is a mechanical, albeit indirect, relation between material culture and the contexts of its production. The aim of a science of material culture, a science of the archaeological record, is a mistaken one, a futile search for scientific objectivity. As we hope to show, there can be no *objective* link between patterning perceived in material culture and processes which produced that patterning.

It has been argued that the work done by archaeologists is not neutral, self-contained or objective. Interpretation of the past is affected by present 'ideology' - a point of view related to present interests (Leone 1973, Trigger 1980, 1981, Meltzer 1981, Kohl 1981). This work represents a valuable elaboration of the common sense realization that there is a subjective element to archaeological research.

However, such work has tended to lapse into relativism (Trigger 1984, p. 293). The present's use of the past has been viewed as just another source of bias with consciousness-raising or self-reflection allowing the archaeologist to control for this (Leone 1973). It is essential that the concept of 'ideology' is not reduced to a universal relativism or considered as just another source of bias. Both these reductions neutralize the critical value of the concept.

Referring to the work of Trigger and Meltzer, Leone has remarked that such 'self-reflection offers no real link to the past and, even though it may impose constraints upon the archaeologist, it has not offered a different interpretation of prehistory, nor is it likely to' (1982, p. 753). Such work is mere consciousness-raising which doesn't affect the way archaeologists go about doing archaeology. Leone argued instead for 'critical self-reflection or critical-theory' (ibid.). Building on the work of Leone (1978, 1980, 1981a, 1981b, 1982, 1984) and with Hodder (1984) and Rowlands (1984), we wish to draw out the full critical implications of the realization that archaeology is a practice in contemporary capitalism.

So, there is no direct route to the past and we must remember that archaeology is something done in the present. We will now consider the nature of the relationship between past and present established in the practice of archaeology. We shall find that the past 'as it was' is not what comes at the end of the trip; we are on a return ticket.

Recreating the past

It is a revelation to compare Menard's *Don Quixote* with Cervantes's. The latter for example, wrote (part one, chapter nine):

. . . truth whose mother is history, rival of time, depository of deeds, witness of the past, exemplar and adviser to the present, and the future's counsellor.

Written in the seventeenth century, written by the 'lay genius' Cervantes, this enumeration is a mere rhetorical praise of history. Menard, on the other hand, writes:

. . . truth whose mother is history, rival of time, depository of deeds, witness of the past, exemplar and adviser to the present, and the future's counsellor.

History, the *mother* of truth: the idea is astounding. Menard, a contemporary of William James, does not define history as an inquiry into reality but as its origin. Historical truth, for him, is not what has happened; it is what we judge to have happened. The final phrases - exemplar and adviser to the present, and the future's counsellor - are brazenly pragmatic.

(Jorge Luis Borges: 'Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote', 1970, p. 69)

Menard produced a recurrence of the exact words of the seventeenth-century Cervantes (a few pages of the *Quixote*) in the twentieth century. Not a copy but a recreation. Several points relating to our argument can be taken from this mythical achievement.

Nothing can be said twice because it has already been said before. This is to deny empty time. Eventful moments cannot be exchanged. Every cultural artifact is inseparable from the context and conditions of its production and appropriation. Every cultural artifact is always more than itself.

The supreme achievement and *impossible* novelty is to recreate the past without copying it. Menard 'never contemplated a mechanical transcription of the original; he did not propose to copy it' (Borges 1970, pp. 65-6). Nor did Menard arrive at his *Quixote* through a supreme effort of empathy - reliving Cervantes's life - but via his own route in his present. 'To be, in the twentieth century, a popular novelist of the seventeenth seemed to him a diminution. To be, in some way Cervantes and reach the *Quixote* seemed less arduous to him - and, consequently, less interesting - than to go on being Pierre Menard and reach the *Quixote* through the experiences of Pierre Menard' (Borges 1970, p. 66). Empathy denies the historical character of present practice, forgets, despairs of the present, in the longing for a genuine past. Empathy cannot achieve truly historical creation which relates past and present, holding them together in their difference, in the instant of the historic present.

Reliving the past without copying would be an entirely different experience. History doesn't repeat itself because it has already happened before. Recreating the past necessarily involves the present - the conditions and context of the act of creation. Recreating the past is a practice which reveals the author, the subject in the present. To copy the past 'as it was', as exactly as possible, is to reflect the past, it is an illusion, a tautology. To reproduce the past 'as it was', to relive the past as a reflection is to produce an image which hides the observing present.

But archaeologists are not often attempting to relive the past 'as it was', to understand the past through empathy and copying the ways of the past (but note experimental archaeology, Coles 1979, chapter 6). Archaeologists survey, excavate, examine finds with the aim of producing texts.

Archaeology - history

Text and rhetoric

Archaeologists observe the traces of the past then record and write about them. Archaeologists produce texts. Archaeology depends on texts. The importance of publication has long been stressed. Long ago Pitt-Rivers argued that a discovery only dates from the time of its being recorded, that the archaeologist is obliged to publish, and this is still widely held as a basic principle (e.g., Frere 1975, Renfrew 1983). However, publication is seen as a technical matter, it is a technical means to an end - the means of recording, storing and communicating the past to an audience. Its function is archival. So attention has focused on the efficiency of the practice of writing and publishing: how much should be published or circulated, what form publication should take (see in addition Grinsell, Rahtz and Williams 1974, Webster 1974, Barker 1982). But the implications of treating publication as a practice of translation of the material traces of the past, of the transformation of the object past into a linguistic medium, implications which go beyond the concern with how efficiently the past is preserved, have not been considered.

Gardin (1980) has explicitly concerned himself with the intellectual processes 'by which we move from the apprehension of a set of archaeological materials to the formulation of verbal statements' (p. 7) which he terms 'constructions' - 'any written text presented as a distinct unit in the archaeological literature' (p. 13). However, Gardin is aiming at efficiently harmonizing means with ends, with the explosion of archaeological information he wants a more efficient form of storage of basic data than site reports and suchlike, suggesting 'data networks' (pp. 148-50), he wants efficient definition of subject matter and aims in explanatory texts (p. 151).

We wish to concentrate not on these technical matters but on the nature of archaeology as the production of texts, conventional literary and data network included.

The word 'history' covers this practice. History is both the events of history and the history, of events, what has happened and its apprehension. The word contains both a subjective and an objective genitive. (See Ricoeur 1981c, p. 288, Rose 1984, p. 61.) The discourse of history, textual production, is part of the process of history > Apprehension

is internally related to the process of the past. So history does not take place primarily as happening, as event, past and gone, that which has happened, evanescent, ephemeral, locked into a moment of time. There is no abstract concept of 'event' which exists separately from the practice of apprehending and comprehending the past.

It is worth contrasting the word 'memory'. The noun 'memory' presumes the active practice of remembering, incorporating past into present, and is a suspension of the subject-object distinction. There is however no verb which corresponds to the noun 'history' - a word to express the practice of rendering the past comprehensible (Frisch 1981, p. 17). We wish to explore this absence. Before doing so we will point out another dimension of archaeology's dependence on texts.

In its dependence on texts archaeology reveals its rhetorical nature which the ideals of objective method would deny. 'In philosophy, rhetoric represents that which cannot be thought except in language' (Adorno 1973a, p. 55). Let us see language as language, language as expression. Archaeology is fundamentally expressive, it depends on a relation with an audience. Without a persuasive, expressive purpose, archaeology as textual production would have no practical dimension.

To realize archaeology as textual discourse is to 'attempt a critical rescue of the rhetorical element, a mutual approximation of thing and expression, to the point where the difference fades'. It is to 'appropriate for the power of thought what historically seemed to be a flaw in thinking: its link with language'. It is in the rhetorical quality that culture, society and tradition animate the thought, a stern hostility to it is leagued with barbarism, in which bourgeois thinking ends' (Adorno 1973a, p. 56). Rhetorical does not mean subjective, self-referring, it means, quite simply, written. We shall now elaborate on archaeology as text, archaeology as rhetoric.

distance

The materialist notion of archaeology as production of text means there is radical discontinuity or distance at the root of archaeology-history. But this is not the alienating distance of the problematic, distant past. There is difference between the objects of the past and their representation in the archaeological text. This is a realization that archaeology is the object or product of a practice. Similarly, the artifact is a product of someone in the past, it is not identical with it, it goes beyond the subjective intentions of its maker and the meanings invested in it.

Such difference, non-identity or distance is emphasized in Ricoeur's use of the concept 'distanciation'. In order to avoid an 'alienating distanciation' (for archaeology the past being considered to be locked into its own time as an object confronting the archaeologist) and 'participatory belonging' (attempts at bridging distance through empathy, affective affinity or imagination) Ricoeur takes the standpoint of 'the text which reintroduces a positive and productive notion of distanciation'. The text is much more than a particular case of intersubjective communication. As such, it displays a fundamental characteristic of the very historicity of human experience, namely that it is communication in and through distance' (Ricoeur 1981a, p. 131). This notion of distance implies that

- (1) the event or act of production does not coincide with the object produced,
- (2) the meaning of what is produced goes beyond what was meant or intended by the author,
- (3) the meaning of what is produced goes beyond the meaning communicated to the original audience,
- (4) the work produced does not just refer to the social conditions of its creation, but in its articulation in the present through the process of interpretation the work points beyond

So to conceive of the past as a problem because it is distant, to attempt to recover the past, bring it to the present and preserve it, in fact means that the archaeologist is incapable of realizing the object of study as a product of someone in the past, is incapable of maintaining sufficient distance to experience the past dialectically as non-identical with its objects and with its representation in a text. It is to treat the past as its objects and not to realize that archaeology is a practice producing its own objects - *texts*

*The archaeologist's 'storyteller'**

Objective reason dispassionately viewing the march of history emphasizes objective process, an objective past of data and event, an informational past dependent on empty chronometric time. Such a past either lacks an integrating basis, threatening to disintegrate into a meaningless series of events and facts, or the practice which draws the past together is forgotten. Such an objective past, abstract happening, abstract event existing separately from its apprehension, is a quantification of experience. It represents a proliferation of information or an administrative inventory of 'facts' which becomes the primary medium for recording experience. For such an inventory meaning is a very real problem.

In contrast to such *erlebms* (experience as event isolated from meaningful context disconnected information) is a *fanning* (experience as event integrated into memory conceptual mediation of the event) for Benjamin, *enfahrung* is the experience of the storyteller (1973c). Storytelling is the reflection and creation of a world where experience exists as continuity and flow, where meaning and time are organically related, where history or archaeology is an organic series of events saturated with meaning.

Memory the noun assumes the practice of calling to mind, of remembering. Storytelling is a mnemonic practice, a bringing to mind, an incorporation of past into present. It also addresses an audience and so is performance or rhetoric. Mnemosyne was, after all, the mother of the Muses.

The storyteller does not aim to convey a pure abstract essence of the past, in the sense that those creating a great inventory of facts or information might try to do. In a story, the past is incorporated into the life or the social praxis of the storyteller in order to bring it out again. 'Thus traces of the storyteller cling to the story the way the handprints of the potter cling to the clay vessel' (Benjamin 1973c, p. 92). The story is the product of an individual but is authorless, like a pot it has a collective dimension. Its truth lies in its use, the intention behind the creative act. Stories invite retelling or elaborating. The audience is invited to make a productive response.

Benjamin's lament for the disintegration of *erfahrung* nostalgia for a mythical past of an integrated fabric of experience, for community, is regressive, the choice is not a simple one between community and story, and capitalism and fact (Wolin 1982, pp 225-6) However, his analysis of the storyteller is a fertile one Events *art* meaningful only in relation to being incorporated into texts which make sense to an audience, being incorporated into 'stones'

Meaning is established by constructing configurations out of successions of events, by producing constellations of concepts, which cannot avoid an act of narration, of 'story telling' This of necessity involves a narrator We experience archaeology-history as 'storytellers', as a series of texts, texts which are simultaneously analytical and expressive

Archaeology - narrative

We are not defending traditional historical narrative The narrative we propose is analytical and retrospective, it views the past from the present But this does not mean that opening the book at the end solves anything history has no end

The aim is not to construct a coherent continuity, a complete story of the past the past is forever reinterpreted, recycled, ruptured

There is no set of maxims more important for an historian than this that the actual causes of a thing's origins and its eventual uses the manner of its incorporation into a system of purposes, are worlds apart, that everything that exists, no matter what its origin is periodically reinterpreted by those in power in terms of fresh intentions that all processes in the organic world are processes of outstripping and overcoming, and that, in turn, all outstripping and overcoming means reinterpretation, rearrangement, in the course of which the earlier meaning and purpose are necessarily either obscured or lost

(Nietzsche 1956, p 20)

The aim is to break ideological coherence -historical continuity which denies difference and ambiguity, fills an empty lime of the past with coherent, consoling narrative, ties the past to an immediate coherence This is not to deny that real historical continuities or traditions exist but it is to recognize that archaeology as production of text or narrative is not identical with the past The production of history through the practice of archaeology is included in the realm expressed Narrative is not restricted (and cannot be) to the perspective within which the people of the past viewed themselves It necessarily includes the narrator's or the archaeologist's point of view So all textual production has the character of a judgement It follows that the past cannot be tied down to a traditional form of narrative with a beginning flowing through inexorably to an end The past is always already begun and has an infinitely deferred end It is always being reinscribed and reinstated in texts but all texts begin and end In this most basic way all archaeological narrative is ironic

Archaeology attempts to forge a linguistic expression of the past congealed in objects and their relationships the words used in the texts remain concepts substituted for the objects there is always a gap or difference (a distance) between the words and that to

which they refer. This flaw in every concept, its non-identity to what it refers, makes it necessary to cite others, to construct structures, constellations, narratives or 'stones' in order to make sense or produce a meaningful representation of the past. However, material culture in itself has no fixed meaning which can be pinned down forever or stabilized in the use of words or concepts. The objects and their relationships only possess meanings under determinate conditions. In other words meanings are always temporally constituted (*cf* Adorno 1973a, pp. 52-7).

The main problem is one of trying to deconstruct our textual representations of the past. This book is, in a sense, a protest against the mythology of a fixed and unchanging past. The archaeologist may textualize one piece of the past together but almost before the cement has dried it begins to crack and rot. We suggest that archaeology should be conceived as the process of the production of a textual heterogeneity which denies finality and closure, it is a suggestion that archaeologists live a new discursive and practical relation with the past. This relation is one of ceaseless experiment, dislocation, refusal and subversion of the notion that the past can ever be 'fixed' or 'tied down' by archaeologists in the present. It involves an emphasis on the polyvalent qualities of the past always reinscribed in the here and now.

Truth and archaeology as narrative

The previous discussion might have given the erroneous impression that because archaeology is a practice in the present involved in constructing texts about the past objectivity is necessarily sacrificed to subjective whim. In this section we attempt an initial resolution of this opposition which we have already noted is an artificial one. This involves considering the nature of what passes for truth.

What then is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonyms and anthropomorphisms - in short a sum of human relations which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically and rhetorically, and which after long use seem firm, canonical and obligatory to a people: truths are illusions about which one has forgotten that this is what they are, metaphors which are worn out and without sensuous power, coins which have lost their images and now matter only as metals, no longer as coins. (Nietzsche 1981, pp. 46-7)

Truth is in a sense metaphor. Metaphor is figurative practice which establishes an identity between dissimilar things or objects. It is a production of new meanings through the discovery of similarity in difference. The truth of the past is metaphorical. It is to be found in the traces of the past, it is present-in-itself in the past, present with us. At the same time the traces of the past point towards an absent truth, a truth outside the past found in the reception of the traces by the interpreting archaeologist. This metaphorical truth unites the perfected and imperfect aspects of the past. So we do not begin with the truth of the past, produced by the people in the past, and end with that truth revealed by the archaeologist in the archaeological text. We find our affinity with the past through our difference to it, through practice which links past and present. Truth is delivered by the interpreting archaeologist on a detour away from the past, a detour to truth.

The interpreting archaeologist fills gaps in the past, but these gaps are always already there. They are not simply a feature of preservation or inadequate amounts of survey or excavation. Like a metaphor the past *requires* interpretation. There can be no coherent justification for an archaeology which fails to take this into account.

Truth is a mobile army of metaphors, an 'entire thematics of active interpretations' (Spivak 1974, p. xxiii), an incessant deciphering. It is a practice which reveals no primary truth of the past, no primary signified beneath the incrustations of interpretation, metaphor, metonym. Truth does not reside in a presentation of the past in-itself. The traces of the past need to be articulated through speech or language expressing meaning in their translation or transformation, in their presentation to an audience. The interpretation and presentation of the past via textual conversion does not transport *a* truth, a *property* of the past acquired in the present. Instead it transforms, translates or reveals.

Truths are 'coins which have lost their images and now matter only as base metals'. Coins depend on being stamped, on inscription, to be more than pieces of metal. All objects depend on being written before they have meaning. But this is more than a surface inscription. Objects depend on being incorporated in texts; they are internally constituted by the changing script of social relations into which they fit (Eagleton 1981, p. 32). It is vital to remember the same of truth and knowledge.

This relationship with the past is one of *mimesis*. This concept as used by Aristotle refers to a relation between reality and the production of a text. The mimetic text does not copy or duplicate reality but imitates creatively. It is neither an objective duplicate nor a subjective fantasy. Theory and the facts are not separate but combined to make a productive and potentially expansive unity which ties observer and observed together into a whole which cannot be reduced to either. It involves an active rearrangement of the elements of observed empirical reality, not taking them as they are immediately given, but rearranging them until their new relationships reveal their truth. Mimesis is an *ars inveniendi*, an art of coming upon something, a practice combining invention and discovery (Adorno 1973b, pp. 34ff.; Ricoeur 1981b, esp. pp. 179-81, 1981c, pp. 291-3). This knowledge is never certain, it is always provisional and ready to be re-presented or reinscribed in a fresh framework. It is an act of translation of the empirical past, simultaneous reception and spontaneous elaboration of an original (Benjamin 1973a). It is empirical while at the same time denying the validity of empiricism (see Chapter 5).

Such a conception emphasizes archaeology as historically situated practice. The production of the past is itself time bound. What is implied here is not the quantitative time of the capitalist labour process, of the factory clock: 'prior to all calculation of time and independent of such calculation, what is germane to the time-space of true time consists in the mutual reaching out and opening up of future, past and present' (Heidegger 1972, p. 14). Archaeology as practice is a mode of presencing, a practice which unites and yet holds apart past, present and future. Presencing involves qualitative historical time (Heidegger's fourth dimension). It is an historic present including everything absent (perfect) and everything present (imperfect) (Rose 1984, p. 76). Presencing accepts the presence of the past as imperfect, incomplete, opened up to human agency, creativity

and development. Such a past is open and not fixed and 'given' in its own realm of empirical data. The past is imperfect, incomplete, requiring interpretation, it exists as a project in the present, a concern, the object of theory and practice.

As we have argued, interpreting the object cannot be reduced to grasping the meanings invested in the object by people in the past. Knowledge is not the agreement of consciousness with an objective past, however this might be achieved, e.g., procedures modelled on natural science or empathy. Events always become historical posthumously. The truth of the past is located in the present in the sense that 'the true histories of the past uncover the hidden potentialities of the present' (Ricoeur 1981c, p. 295). So the culmination of interpretation is not an image of the past in itself but self-understanding of the present. Interpretation is an act of appropriation of the past which renders the past contemporary and yet confronts the difference, the otherness. Interpretation is not a search for a hidden past to be possessed through empirical information and description, nor is it a dialogue with the king behind the gold funeral mask. The confrontation with difference brings self-understanding in the articulation of past and present which opens up or discloses possibility. It is encapsulated in the Greek - *aletheia* - a truth, a denial of the condition of forgetting, of latency, of obscurity, of that which has escaped notice. It is a resurrection of the forgotten, a remembering. The conventional attitude to the object past is of selecting what seems important, what seems memorable, and this problem of selection is central to contemporary policies of conservation (see below), we are to remember the past. But this is a passive preservation, not an active calling to mind. It is a selection according to the values of the present which preserves not the past, but the present. So often it is not a confrontation with difference. Resurrecting the forgotten requires us to suspend our values, treat them not as universals but as contingent, historical, open to change. The authority of archaeology, the knowledge it produces is not to be found in the past but in the direction of its transformative practice. The truth is not to be found in history; history is to be found in the truth.

The practice of archaeology

Spectacular archaeology

The production of 'facts' about the past still dominates archaeological work. Despite the relatively recent concern with theory, most archaeological writing consists of factual description. A survey of the books and journals in any university library would confirm this and is well worth undertaking, although the results would inevitably be depressing. Flannery (1982) has expressed a wish to get back to the certainties of fieldwork and without doubt others are similarly disenchanted with theorizing and speculation. Yet the split between data acquisition and explanation remains, and fieldwork is by no means a technical and neutral practice.

Archaeological fieldwork is based on a visual metaphor of knowledge, the traces of the past are observed and recorded. But an observed past is a problematic past. It is based on commodified spatial time, archaeology is conceived as observation of objects of the past separate from the viewer, a past locked into its own time. Hence the objectivity, of fieldwork - the objectivity of conceptual detachment, non-involvement. However there

is an obvious paradox: excavation does involve 'the past'; it destroys it. This link between destruction and observation is just accepted, sometimes mitigated through planning and sampling, but often it is forgotten.

Observing the past imports illusions of simultaneity, first into the elements of the observed past - for example, the idea of 'heritage', a palimpsest of unspecific 'history' all around us - but especially it introduces simultaneity between the object and the act of contemplation. No account is taken of the time of the act of 'observation'. This again involves a disregard for the active and productive (or destructive) nature of fieldwork and excavation, for its roots in contemporary historical contexts. What is historic in thought - the practice of archaeology, our experience of digging - is equated with irrelevance.

Despite the fact that it involves physically interfering with the past fieldwork as observation and recording remains essentially passive. It is a spectacular archaeology. In the society of the spectacle (Debord 1983) that which is lived directly (the past itself and the practice of archaeology) is shunted off into the realm of the spectacular. The past becomes a series of objects and events, a parade before the archaeologist who merely reviews. The practice of archaeology becomes the observation of a separate past and its representation as 'image'. Scientistic 'objectivity' requires this to be a mirror image. In effect archaeology becomes a voyeurism. The realm of the spectacular escapes the involvement of individuals.

Archaeological method and theory have no way of dealing with the subjective experience of doing archaeology - Flannery's fun (1982, p. 278). Yet this is a major feature which attracts people to archaeology: the moment of personal discovery, personal contact with the past; it dominates the popular image of the archaeologist - romantic adventure and discovery. Flannery's (1976 and 1982) and Binford's (1972) excursions into their personal experiences are entertaining and diverting; they have no *necessary* relation to archaeological method and theory. The same applies to the personal reminiscences in *Antiquity-the 'Archaeological Retrospectives'*, and indeed the editorials.

The importance of individual experience is devalued, becoming meaningful only when reduced to the status of entertaining anecdote or as the spectacular excesses of an Indiana Jones. However, the archaeological object *is* constituted in practice: sites are excavated and pots scrutinized. Objects come to possess meaning in the work of the archaeologist. Such practice requires time. Time is an aspect of archaeological work, but not as an independent variable, a device for applying to the past, to classify and supposedly understand. That which is analysed becomes part of the archaeologist's life, his or her experiences of doing archaeology. In the aridity of the informational report all this is forgotten. The past experiences of the archaeologist, such as working out the sequence of deposits in a section of trench, are claimed not to be subjective but objective, facts and not fictions. So the presence of the past as objects and their relationships in the present is based on the archaeologist's experiences, its origin is autobiographic. This autobiographic origin ties the archaeological object to the present because it is always produced. So the archaeologist is not leading knowledge from the present gropingly towards the firm ground of the past but rather the reverse, from the archaeologist's past into the object's present. Flannery (1982) asserts the primacy of the experience of doing

good archaeological work. In a very different sense we would agree. The experience of archaeology is not irrelevant and it is essential to consider those who experience the production of the past. Archaeology is not a neutral instrument for exploring the past but its theatre. What is required is a critical sociology of archaeology.

Conservation and heritage

The past, its preservation, and the work of archaeology are in the hands of professional archaeologists, academics, state employees and local government workers. In this work the conservation issue is paramount. Planning, managing and rescuing the past is a vital concern.

In the literature of cultural resource management (see Schiffer and Gummerman (eds) 1977, Green (ed.) 1984 and articles in *American Antiquity*) the traces of the past are defined as of value to the present (Lipe 1984). Their utilization and disappearance requires management, they are, after all, a non-renewable resource. Central to the management of the past is the assessment of individual items in the resource base and this is seen as a problem of significance: is this site or burial mound worth digging or preserving rather than another⁵? In effect this is a pricing of a past turned into a commodity. Decisions are taken by 'accountable' professionals, knowledgeable, autonomous, trusted, acting for the clientele. The professional body has self-written rules (Society of Professional Archaeologists Code of Ethics, Davis 1982, Green (ed.) 1984), is concerned with integrity and its responsibilities (King 1983) and business efficiency (Cunningham 1979, Walka 1979). Justification for the profession is seen as being essential: 'if people aren't educated they won't want to adopt a conservationist stance towards the past as a whole' (Cleere 1984, p. 61, cf Lipe 1977, p. 21). The past and its study are thus marketed.

In Britain the problem of significance has been solved by recourse to inventory-listed buildings and scheduled monuments - although there are problems with the system. Although the body of archaeologists and other workers concerned with the past is different from that in the United States (employed almost entirely by the state, local government and educational institutions; they are considered no less 'professionals' - 'professional guardians of the cultural heritage' (Cleere 1984, p. 129), with credentials authenticated by government and professional bodies (academic qualifications, Museums Association, Institute of Field Archaeologists) - looking after and presenting the past to the public.

The language of cultural resource management might be termed the language of cultural capitalism. It is a practice in which a series of individuals assert a hegemonic claim to the past and organize the temporal passage of this cultural capital from its historical context to the present of spectacular preservation, display, study and interpretation. The professional body decides on the basis of *its* claimed knowledge what is worth either preserving or excavating. After subsequent interpretation or conservation the public, or non-professionals, are informed that this is *then* past, their heritage, and that it should be meaningful to them.

The language used and the strident advocacy of professionalism does not make the past produced any less alien from the public (or the 'client') but only more so. All that

is required of the non-professional is to consume the past presented at a distance and in leisure-time. The past, history or archaeology becomes an other, an alien factor passing before people. For the public the commodified past has the contradictory relation to the buyer of any commodity: available to purchase while mysterious in its origin, in the technology of its production. The production of the past remains a mystery isolated from the present in the hands of the professional elite or the authoritative planner. Reaction against the sense of alienation created may take the form of pot hunting, metal detecting or unauthorized excavation.

What is needed is not the promotion and protection of a commodified past but its active reworking in the present by archaeologists who do not assert themselves as managers of some unspecified general heritage, a mythical landscape worn with time. What is at stake is not the preservation or non-preservation of the past but the practice of archaeology. This practice has come to lie increasingly in the power of a professional self-appointed minority and it tends to have the effect of denying people their *active* participation in history, in the practice of making history and coming to an understanding of the present past. Instead what is all too often presented by the 'managers' is a petrified past which is constantly in need of preservation, a decaying corpse in need of embalming before the smell becomes too strong.

Justifications

A concern with the justification of the work of the profession has expressed itself recently primarily in the literature of cultural resource management. Indeed the question of justifications for what archaeologists do has become critical: the treasure hunting public are plundering the past, financial stringency requires archaeology to specify its value and relevance and scientific archaeology seems so irrelevant. Of course, there have always been archaeologists who expressed a concern with the purpose of the discipline but the literature dealing with justifications for archaeology is comparatively sparse. The main aspects are summarized in Fig. 1.1. The justifications focus on:

- (1) the actual practice of archaeology and related fields (e.g., fieldwork, planning or conservation);
- (2) the objects and monuments produced and preserved;
- (3) the images associated with the objects and monuments (scientific explanation, descriptive narrative, etc.).

The question of justifications itself implies a contemporary society born free of a connection with a slowly unfolding and never-changing past. What may lie behind these justifications and the perceived need to supply them is a critical contradiction in the historical consciousness upon which they are based. It resides in the disconnection between past and present which does not fully take into account the active production of the past and that the archaeologist and the past are inextricably linked. The justifications also have their basis in a disjunction created between professionals producing the past and a public passively consuming: isolated professionals lonely in the crowd of contemporary society and unable to cope with the subjective, experiential, practical and transformative aspects of their historical work.

Why do archaeology? Because it entertains or educates 'us' with the achievements of humanity, 'our' common roots, 'our' symbolic unity, 'our' heritage. It is 'our' past and 'we' need it. Why archaeology? Because it's natural, everybody wants to know about 'their' past. Why? Because we know and we're telling you.

Whose past is it? Who are the 'we' of 'our' past? Who is speaking and writing? The justifications, of course, come from those involved in producing the past and supplying it to others. It involves a persuasion to accept the past being supplied and the practice of those who supply it, a persuasion to accept the authority of those who pass judgement on the past. In fact the question of justifications is posed and answered by those with a guilty conscience. Most, if not all, archaeologists realize this. Many of the justifications given at present reveal real need for history, for the past. They do not embody the realization that people, everyone, not just professionals, make history, produce it *now* in the present, actively tying together past, present and future: the realization that history is not the consumption of a supplied image.

There have been encouraging and positive responses to the problem of justifications,

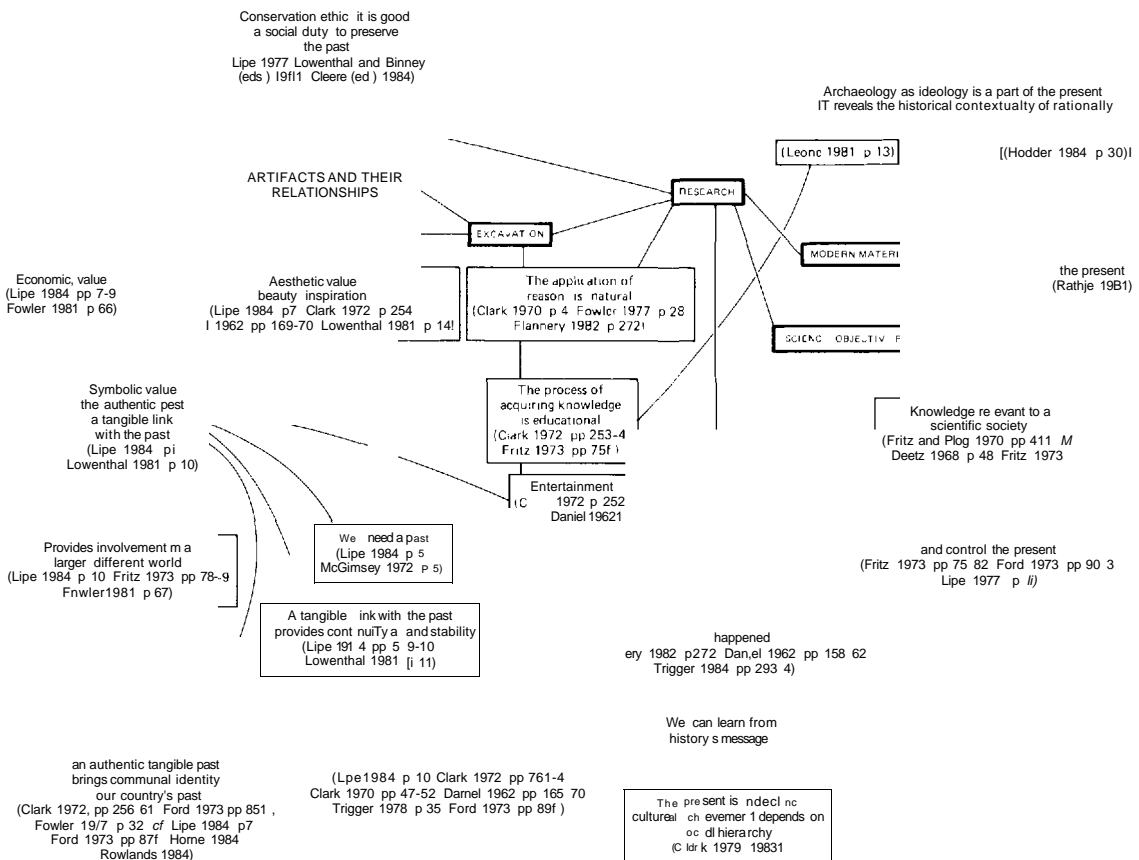


Fig 11 Some justifications for archaeology

reactions to self-contained scientific objectivity, and suggestions that we understand the present's use of the past which go beyond expression of a simple sceptical doubt about objectivity (see above, pp. 14-15). In particular, Hodder has argued (1984) that archaeology is not neutral knowledge but plays an active social role in the culture in which it is produced. It is an active product of the present and its relationship to non-archaeology must be considered. This provides a rationale for much-needed surveys to find out what the non-professional thinks and feels about the past and its study. For Hodder, archaeology can show the historical contextuality of rationality while excavation becomes interpretative experience rather than a technique. This argument clearly accords with ours.

Conclusions

The word history finds one of its deepest roots in the Greek *ιστορ* (*istor* or *history*) - one who knows law and right, a judge. The features of the court of contemporary archaeological reason and the archaeological judgement are familiar. The past has been arrested and presents a problem, a mystery brought before the archaeologist who sits as judge. He or she observes and questions the accused and witnesses, extracting information through instruments of torture, confessions of what happened and why (though he or she is often, if not always, over-enthusiastic and kills the witness). The archaeologist employs accusations, *κατηγορία*, 'categories', to partition and dominate, to reveal order in the mystery, in the chaos of evidence. The accusations are made according to the Law, the law of timeless reason. The archaeologist as judge reflects on the mystery, separating, distancing reality from its representation by accused and witness. Eventually they pass sentence - *sententia* - the act of penal speech which defines and dominates. The verdict is made public, published. The accused is never found innocent; sentence is always passed; the archaeologist is a hanging judge. What right has the judge to sit in judgement? What claim, what justification, what legitimation? It is the judge's institutional relationship with the accused, the possession of power, power justified by the Law, abstract and impersonal. Such a Law is mythical; it has no history and knows no history.

An alternative: the judgement of the Homeric *istor*- arbitrators to whom a dispute is brought. Giving opinions for disputants to accept or disregard, they judge and are in turn judged. There is no exclusive judge, no exclusive accused, no separate consciousness and object, subject and object, no pure subjectivity or pure objectivity. The event of the dispute maintains the ambiguity, clarifying and connecting. Both judge and disputants are subjects of the law and act according to its prescriptions while recreating, reaffirming the law in the act of arbitration (they are the true subjects of the law). The law is not formal abstracted law, timeless and remote, possessed by an independent subjectivity distant from the dispute, the object of concern. The law is the pre-Olympian *Δίκη* (*Dike*) - justice, one of the *Horai*, the seasons. *Dike* is the stream and current of lived duration, the way of life, of living, of doing, of practice: the law of substantial not empty time, eventful, communal, mortal time, lived time, *history* (Rose 1984). It is *Dike* who in Parmenides holds the bolts to the gates of time through which is found truth - *aletheia*.

The truth or practical knowledge of the present-past, borne and transmitted through the actions of individuals is suspended and frail, it flits by to be snatched at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again. Knowledge of the past is precarious, destroyed by the archaeologist's trowel. There is another aspect to this most basic feature of archaeology, that it destroys the past it investigates: it is that we must do without the consolation that the truth of the past cannot be lost. But there is no eternal image of the past to be rescued in its material traces. Knowledge of the past does not consist in some eternal heritage or in empiricist/positivist science. The past is never safe, never divorced from the present. Even the dead aren't safe, stacked on the shelves in the archive, or displayed in the hermetically sealed museum case. The past is colonized and appropriated by a narcissistic present. Breaking down the barriers, moving beyond subjectivity and objectivity, realizing that theory is critical practice, allows us to reinscribe and transform the void of past/present to a productive present-past and create an archaeology which has social and political relevance to the society in which it operates.

The shadows of the present crisis loom over us - educational cut-backs, the philistine assaults of the new right, populist imagery of a conflict-free heritage, visions of solidarity cloaked in mythical images (or of conflict defused by 'scientific' understanding - subsystem disequilibrium¹). It is necessary to forge a practice in keeping with this, facing the contradictions of our contemporary relation with the past, unravelling but not resolving. Such archaeological theory and practice must express itself as an undercutting of authoritarian impulses to pin down the past and will entail a radical pluralism, an unceasing reworking of the past. This archaeology is not a calm and isolated act according to a vision of timeless reason, merely a glimpse of bygone times. The archaeologist stands vulnerable and exposed, strategist in the conceptual struggle for a meaningful past.