

Hermeneutics, dialectics and archaeology

'Above the *subject*, beyond the immediate *object*, modern science is founded on the *project*.' (Bachelard, 1978, p. 11)

Archaeology as interpretation

In this chapter we attempt to provide some preliminary groundwork for a revitalized philosophy of archaeology which moves beyond traditional notions of a split between archaeologist and data, between subject and object, subjectivity and objectivity. These opposed and dichotomous terms and others related to them (e.g. intuitive-deductive; theory-data; idea-fact; abstract-concrete; theory-practice; present-past) pose a primary epistemological obstacle to understanding past and present and the connection between the two. Any philosophy which sets up and maintains a radical disjunction between such polarized terms is a philosophy of NO (Bachelard 1975), which constrains, sets limits, attempts to legitimate the notion of fundamental foundations to thought beyond which we must not stray. It is a rigid framework which were it to be actually adopted by scientists in their *practice* would stultify thought. Virtually all existing epistemologies or theories of the grounds for making knowledge-claims are philosophies of NO. Their correlative is the archaeology or archaeologies of NO which aim to constrain research and lay down a priori frameworks of that which can or cannot be legitimately said. Such are the archaeologies which have been discussed and criticized in the previous four chapters of this book, archaeologies rooted in closed philosophies. Positivist/empiricist discourse is a closed philosophy. By this is meant that it supposes that there is only one correct and proper manner of approaching, describing and explaining reality - by granting primacy to the empirical object of study through sense-perception, elevating the general over the particular and putting faith in testing strategies leading to verification or falsification (see Chapter 2). We have challenged these suppositions and here argue instead for an open philosophy of archaeology - a philosophy which does not set limits, create areas beyond which research should not stray.

Archaeology, we contend, is an interpretative practice, an active intervention engaging in a critical process of theoretical labour relating past and present. It is entirely misleading to pose the problem of understanding and explaining the past in terms of either a purely factual representation tied to the past and purged of subjective 'bias'¹, or a presentist quest for liberation from the dogmatic burden of the archaeological record through unrestrained fictionalizing and mythologizing. Interpretation is an act that cannot be reduced to the merely subjective. Any archaeological account involves the

creation of a past in *a* present and its understanding Archaeology in this sense is a performative and transformative endeavour, a transformation of the past in terms of the present This process is not free or creative in a fictional sense but involves the translation of the past in a delimited and specific manner The facts of the case become facts only in relation to convictions, ideas and values However, archaeology would amount to an exercise in narcissistic infatuation if it *only* amounted to a deliberate projection of present concerns onto the past the archaeological record itself may challenge what we say as being inadequate in one manner or another In other words, data represents a *net work of resistances* to theoretical appropriation We are involved in a discourse mediating past and present and this is a two-way affair

The hermeneutic circle

The hermeneutic circle may be described as consisting of

a laborious construction of the totality of life, which is simultaneously unknown and not available to direct insight, out of the odds and bits of life which are sentiently accessible, but yet incomprehensible The circle starts from the divination of the totality to which the confronted element belongs, if the guess is correct, the element in question reveals part of its meaning, which in turn gives us the lead toward a better, fuller, more specific reconstruction of the totality The process goes on, in ever wider circles, until we are satisfied that the residue of opacity still left in our object does not bar us from appropriating its meaning (Bauman 1978, p 31, cf Heidegger 1962, pp 150ff , Gadamer 1975, pp 235ff)

We can suggest that any interpretative account of the past moves within a circle, perhaps more accurately, a widening spiral, and involves changing or working theoretically upon that which is to be interpreted One cannot understand anything about the meaning of material culture-patterning in the past (or the present) unless one is willing to make conceptualized interventions by means of using social, ethnographic or other starting points about the manner in which the past social totality was constituted If these conceptualized interventions are more or less correct we will gain insight and understanding If not we will be left with an uninterpretable mass of observations Additionally we cannot obtain a grasp of that totality which we seek to investigate until we have some understanding of the contextualized matrices of social life into which the material culture-patterning fitted and acted Interpretation thus seeks to understand the particular in the light of the whole and the whole in the light of the particular to make sense of the interconnections between diverse areas of material culture patterning - burial, artifact use and disposal, ceramic designs, faunal remains, architectural directional placement, etc - requires some prior or anticipatory understanding of the social totality in which the material culture acted as symbol, code, or structure What makes the archaeological data speak to us, when we can interpret it, when it makes sense, is the act of placing it in a specific context or set of contexts, and the project of making sense of the data involves the intrinsic variability apparent, and the full use of this variability in an examination of possible meaning-structures The concepts of a correct or an

incorrect understanding do not rely upon a preconceived set of methodologies (hermeneutics is not an alternative methodology) but make sense only in terms of the past context being investigated. The fullest understanding is irrevocably context-dependent and context-confined. This means that the nature of archaeological understanding is relational to the context being investigated and involves a dialectical movement back and forth between the parts and the totality. This means that the nature of archaeological understanding is inextricably linked to the determinate context being investigated and stands diametrically opposed to an urge for a technical control of the past using laws or generalizations which are not context-dependent.

The notion that an interpretative account of the past moves within a contextually dependent circle, or spiral, removes the very possibility, the myth, that simplistic falsificationist or verificationist testing approaches can be applied to break out of the circle and establish whether or not the interpretations are correct at some stage or other of inquiry. Corrections take place by a dialectical process within the circle itself. The data has no 'pure', bedrock-like refuting essence but is itself indelibly part of the circle (see Chapter 2, pp. 36-43, and further discussion of this point below). However, it should not be too simply concluded that the circle is in some way self-referencing and this leads us on to consider the role of the interpreter.

The role of the interpreter

In Chapter 3 it was argued that a value-free archaeology was an impossible enterprise and we attempted to demonstrate that contemporary archaeology can hardly be claimed to be devoid of social and political values. Here we wish to link in that discussion with the role of the interpreting subject, discussing the hermeneutics of Gadamer.

Gadamer (1975, pp. 235-6) quotes the following passage from Heidegger's *Being and Time* (1962, p. 153), in which he refers to the hermeneutic circle:

It is not to be reduced to the level of a vicious circle, or even a circle which is merely tolerated. In the circle is hidden a positive possibility of the most primordial kind of knowing. To be sure, we genuinely take hold of this possibility only when, in our interpretation, we have understood that our first, last and constant task is never to allow our fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception to be presented to us by fancies and popular conceptions, but rather to make the scientific theme secure by working out these fore-structures in terms of the things themselves.

A number of important implications can be drawn out from this passage (*cf* Gadamer 1975, pp. 236ff., 1979, pp. 148ff.; Bernstein 1983, pp. 136ff.):

- (1) Interpretation is not an optional choice such that 'objective method' can ever be regarded as a substitute for it in the manner, for example, that empiricist discourses might claim. Interpretation resides in our Being or existence in the world. There is no way in which we can escape interpretation. This is an ontological and not a methodological point. The circle or spiral of interpretations is not something which should be regretted and therein resides a positivity, i.e. possibilities are opened out for us.

- (2) Fore-having, fore-sight and fore-conception or presuppositions provide the foundations for any understanding, truth, or knowledge-claims. In this context it is worth noting with Sellars (1963, p. 169) that 'in characterizing an episode or a state as that of *knowing*, we are not giving an empirical description of that episode or state; we are placing it in the logical space of reasons, of justifying and being able to justify what one says'.
- (3) 'The things themselves' (i.e. the data on which we work) exist only in so far as they are conceptualized. To move back to an earlier statement made in this chapter, reality is human, objects are not.
- (4) In the attempt to understand the past we have to open ourselves up to it and the claims to truth that reside in that which we study, truth claims which only we, the interpreters, can bring out and emphasize. This is not the 'truth' of empiricism nor does it imply an act of empathy (see the critique of empathy in Chapter 1). What it does mean is that we situate our opinions, ideas, presuppositions, fore-knowledge, our presentism, in relation to the past. We cannot purge ourselves of values but these can be productively mediated by that which we study. It is impossible to radically bracket off the self. Equally, that studied is not a subjective creation. Interpretation is what Gadamer refers to as 'fusion of horizons' (1975, p. 273) involving an active conjunction of past and present, object and subject.

This conjunction of subject and object or interpreter and data requires further amplification. As we have seen, in the hermeneutic circle the interpreter approaches a set of materials in the fullness of their contextuality, and presuppositions permit an initial understanding of the meanings of these materials. In a sense they anticipate their form and nature. In the light of contact with that studied, these preconceptions are inevitably modified in a progressive way to eventually permit a *satisfactory* understanding. Gadamer (*ibid.*, p. 238) suggests that

meanings cannot be understood in an arbitrary way. Just as we cannot continually misunderstand the use of a word without its affecting the meaning of the whole, so we cannot hold blindly to our own fore-meaning of the thing if we would understand the meaning of another . . . All that is asked is that we remain open to the meaning of the other . . . this openness always includes our placing the other meaning in a relation with the whole of our own meanings or ourselves in relation to it. Now it is the case that meanings represent a fluid variety of possibilities . . . but it is still not the case that within this variety of what can be thought, i.e. of what a reader can find meaningful and expect to find, everything is possible . . . The hermeneutical task becomes automatically a questioning of things and is always in part determined by this.

Now this notion of 'a questioning of things' is of essential importance. We are not attempting to mirror the past but to probe into it, to move beyond surface appearances to underlying structures beneath the data we empirically 'see'. A satisfactory understanding is, as the words suggest, never a complete understanding but is itself

embedded in our praxis as interpreters. It involves our mediation of the data. It does not claim to be the reflection of the past. Understanding both *reproduces* and *produces*. It is not a recovery confined to original meaning. The meaning comes into being through understanding. The corollary to this philosophical hermeneutics is that knowledge is practical and in part depends upon what we do and what we want to do, a corollary that will be discussed below. Before initiating that discussion it is, perhaps, worth emphasizing the difficulty of archaeology as a hermeneutic enterprise because this leads us to understand fully the importance of theory construction as the key towards disciplinary development.

Archaeology as fourfold hermeneutic

Giddens (1982, 1984, p. 374) has written of a double hermeneutic as being involved in social science, through a contrast with natural science:

The hermeneutics of natural science has to do only with the theories and discourse of scientists, analysing an object world which does not answer back, and which does not construct and interpret the meanings of its activities . . . But social theory cannot be insulated from its 'object-world', which is a subject-world . . . (Giddens 1982, pp. 12-13)

The social scientist studies a world, the social world, which is constituted as meaningful by those who produce and reproduce it in their activities - human subjects. To describe human behaviour in a valid way is in principle to be able to participate in the forms of life which constitute, and are constituted by, that behaviour. This is already a hermeneutic task. But social science is itself a 'form of life', with its own technical concepts. Hermeneutics hence enters into the social sciences on two, related levels. (ibid., p. 7)

It has been argued that interpretation in archaeology is a process of overcoming the distance between one frame of reference (the present) and another (the past) and that this distance is productive of discourse (on the notion of distance see Chapter 1, esp. pp. 17-18). The process of coming to understand the past is an extremely complicated one and not susceptible to being simply boiled down to a single procedure or set of procedures which can be reproduced by others in the manner of a rote formula or recipe. Archaeology, and history, we wish to suggest, are the most difficult of all disciplines because the process of acquiring a historical understanding involves a quadruple act of interpretative endeavour. Natural scientists are only involved in a single hermeneutic, since they deal with inanimate objects and processes such as chemical reactions which in themselves have no human meaning, but to which meaning may be ascribed. Any theoretical scheme which gives meaning to these objects and processes is itself a form of life involving sets of concepts and procedures and experimentation which have to be mastered, and a mode of practical activity generating specific types of descriptions. Sociologists are involved in a double hermeneutic in that they both live and work within a form of life, a set of contemporary practices from which they cannot escape, and a world of pre-interpreted meanings. The sociologist both shares a form of life and through theory con-

struction and language use or extension attempts to throw light on the participator meaning frames in which he or she is imbricated. Anthropological work involves a treble hermeneutic in that the anthropologist lives within a pre-interpreted universe in the light of which his or her problematic and outlook is framed and yet attempts to understand alien cultures inhabiting other meaning frames. The archaeologist and the historian are involved also in this treble anthropological hermeneutic, with the additional intersection of the past, a form of life not directly accessible, but one which must be reconstructed. So, archaeological work involves

- (I) the hermeneutic of working within the contemporary discipline of archeology,
- (II) the hermeneutic of living within contemporary society as an active participant put broadly, gaining knowledge of that which is to be human, to interact and participate with others and to be involved in struggles about beliefs and social and political values,
- (III) the hermeneutic of trying to understand an alien culture involving meaning frames radically different from his or her own
- (n) the hermeneutic involved in transcending past and present

The difficulty involved in archeology as fourfold hermeneutic is what makes the discipline potentially so exciting and worthwhile. It undoubtedly goes some way to explain the public fascination with archaeology. However, it is worth underlining once more that the difficulties involved should not lead to any romanticism or nostalgia for the past to think by some transcendental human effort we can get back inside it. This was the major failing of the hermeneutics of the late-nineteenth century, especially as expressed in the work of Dilthey and more recently by Collingwood (1946). Equally, the apparent ease with which contemporary scientific archaeology claims stringent objectivity, via a restricted set of simplistic methodologies, has to be rejected. It can, in fact, only claim to do this at all by a remarkable set of reductions in which human beings *are* virtually exorcized from the project. The fourfold hermeneutic involved in any and all forms of archeology undermines any attempt to fix for once and all the manner in which the past should be understood in terms of methodological rules for procedure. It rather requires the use of a multivalent plurality of approaches. A concomitant of the intellectual difficulty involved in understanding the past should be that archaeology must have a highly developed theoretical structure. Arguably, it should be the social science with the most sophisticated and highly developed set of theories. In actual fact archaeology remains the most weakly theoretically developed of all the social sciences. A curious inversion appears to have occurred - the discipline most in need of theory by and large appears to think that it can get along quite nicely without it.

Thought as embedded in historical process

Archaeological interpretations of the past are not secondary- to the physical reality of the past, the objects in the archaeological record. Understanding the past is a dialectical process occasioned by continual adjustments of ideas, concepts and representations and is not something that could be fixed by a single method such as the hypothetico-deductive method. In essence, this is a method which is designed to leave us, as interpreters of the

past, speechless and powerless because it attempts to take away the responsibility for *choice* between competing ideas and concepts in a purely mechanical manner. It embodies a hope that the burden of choice, of evaluation, will pass away from us. The notion of the hermeneutic circle allows us to realize that we can never shed this burden of choice. Any interpretation of the past is multiple and constantly open to change, to re-evaluation. In essence the attempt to privilege a way of reducing all possible descriptions of the past to one methodology is an attempt to escape from humanity, from the fact that the past is produced in the here and now, in the present, by men and women. To suggest procedures could be developed leading to a totally objective view of the past (e.g. Binford 1982) is, as Sartre suggests (1982, p. 37), to place oneself in the image of God. Rorty nicely develops the point

Such a being does *not* confront something *alien* which makes it necessary for him to choose an attitude toward, or a description of, it. He would have no need and no ability to choose actions or descriptions. He can be called 'God' if we think of the advantages of this situation, or a 'mere machine' if we think of the disadvantages
(Rorty 1980, p. 376)

Now as all archaeologists know, or should know, there are a multitude of possible competing descriptions of an artifact, an assemblage or any set of remains encountered in the archaeological record. The choice involved in the description of these remains is related to the theories used to understand them.

The result of the archaeological project is that a vision of the past is produced and presented through publication. Archaeological work is historical in at least three ways: the archaeologist is concerned with the past, the archaeologist creates a past, in turn the past once created itself becomes historical. The implication of this 'historicism' (for the want of a better term; is that a critical attitude must be maintained in relation to archaeological practice. As we argued in Chapter 3, archaeological practice is, in part, political practice. To refuse to treat past social actors as mere 'objects' resulting from analysis to name just one area, does have political and social implications for the present. The manner in which the past is conceptualized, the data interpreted, and the analyses performed all provide meanings for the present. The kinds of explanations archaeologists give provide messages to other archaeologists and the non-archaeological public as to what archaeology *is* – the essence of its practical transformative activity on the past. Archaeology does not simply provide a conception or view of the past. It is also a discipline which should inform us of the nature of the human condition and the possibility of social transformation. In this sense we can agree firmly with Bernstein that what is required is 'to learn to think and act more like the fox than the hedgehog - to seize upon those experiences and struggles in which there are still the glimmerings of solidarity and the promise of dialogical communities in which there can be genuine mutual participation' (Bernstein 1983, p. 228). For the archaeologist to think like the fox rather than the hedgehog (perhaps slug would provide a better dramatic referent) is to realize that his or her work does have social and political implications and to act in conformity with this – to think clear-headedly about the nature of contemporary society in which he or she is inevitably embroiled and to ask whether the presuppositions he or she

employs in trying to come to terms with an essentially alien past will either challenge or help to sustain the contemporary social order. No political position is neutral on this issue and there can be no neutral archaeology. We cannot and must not just describe dominance, power, hierarchy, inequality, exploitation and oppression but must engage in a critical perspective on the past. Archaeology is not, then, just some kind of resuscitation of the past in the present, but must involve a critique on the particular past that leads to our concrete present. For this critique to be successful, to have force, we cannot afford the essential irrationality of subjectivism or relativism as this would be cutting the very ground away from under our feet. What is needed is a transcendence of these through our practical work as archaeologists, through our own historicity. The guiding light which Gadamer's reconstruction of hermeneutics provides is that as far as archaeology or any other social science is concerned there is no simple choice to be made between a subjective or an objective account of reality unless one is to abandon science altogether and write novels instead. The post-empiricist philosophy of science seems to be arriving at a similar conclusion: see, for example, Hesse 1978, Bhaskar 1978, Harre 1979, Putnam 1978, Harre and Madden 1975, Papineau 1979).

Beyond hermeneutics, towards dialectics

Up to this point we have stressed the nature of archaeology as an interpretative hermeneutic exercise. However, this is not sufficient. There are certain well-known problems with hermeneutics: the lack of a notion of structure and of adequate consideration of power and ideology amongst others. While archaeology is inevitably an hermeneutic exercise and should be hermeneutically informed, it is not simply reducible to hermeneutics. In discussing the hermeneutic circle we have already referred to a dialectical process of the interpretation of data binding it to theory. In the following section we wish to draw out the implications of this more fully.

A dialectical approach to the past involves at least three conceptions of the use of the term 'dialectic' and the language associated with it, terms such as 'moment', 'mediation', 'contradiction'

- (I) a mode of theoretical appropriation of data,
- (n) a method of analysis and criticism transcending subject/object divisions,
- (in) a theory of social reality as a set of internally connected relations in a process of flux

Here we focus on points (I) and (II). In Chapter 6 we consider point (III).

In an investigation of the past we are necessarily involved in making the elementary presupposition that there is an objective reality which exists beyond the realm of experience of any individual human subject. A real past exists but the pure essence of the objectivity of that past — how it really was, eludes us in that to begin to deal with the past involves us in decisions or choices as to how we might conceive of it. This is simply an extension of saying that we are inevitably involved in a process of selection and subsumption under some description. There are real past 'facts' but the facts that the archaeologist deals in are not these. The facts employed in a study of the past are not independent of their theorization. They are in no sense given to us but a product of the

process of knowledge acquisition. Ideas, or the means for the factual constitution of the past, do not fall from heaven, but like all cultural products of human activity are formed in given circumstances. The facts of the archaeological case are 'real' as opposed to 'ideal' constructions in that they involve a transformation of aspects of data. The facts are thus theory-laden constructions constrained by resistances in the data. To understand any past object of study, be it a tomb or a potsherd, we need to ascribe meaning and significance because the data studied is a product of meaningful and symbolic human action. The meaning of an object is not given to it for us to directly perceive, nor is it solely constituted by a knowing subject. The meaning resides in, and is internal to, the dialectical relationship between the two. The interpreter conceptualizes the object of interpretation (that which has been created by subjects), and in turn, the object affects that conceptualization. Subject mediates object and object mediates subject in a reflexive process resulting in knowledge of object by subject. Following from this we must reject any naive distinction between the object conceived as concrete hard fact and theories or ideas about it conceived as abstract. Theory works on empirical objects which are theorized, brought into the account, through the subject-object reflexive relationship. Theory does not, then, work on a completely independent real object but on a *theoretical object*. The theoretical object on which theory works pertains to the real, to the data available in sense-perception, i.e. it takes or develops some aspect of it and is empirically constrained, but the theoretical and the real object are not one and the same thing but have a relative autonomy from each other. The data thus becomes a theoretical appropriation of the real, and theory works on this data through its further conceptualization. There can be no question, then, of testing in terms of either a verificationist or a falsificationist strategy. This is because there is literally *nothing independent of theory* or propositions to test against. Any test could only result in a tautology. At this point it is worth noting that such a position does not call into question the use of statistics and what are incorrectly termed statistical tests (e.g. chi-square, rank scales and other standard procedures). What we are saying is that these and any other statistics do not confirm, refute or falsify propositions. All they can be used to do (and this is the manner in which they are used in Chapters 7 and 8) is to redescribe data patterning. We still have to make sense of the redescription or grant it meaning and significance. The redescription provided by the use of statistics may be more or less useful to us in our attempts to conceptualize the past. They may help conceptualization as aids to description and redescription, interpretation and reinterpretation.

If one rejects an account of archaeological knowledge grounded in processes of testing, in a confrontation between subject and object, the question arises as to how great is the distinction between a data-based account of the past and a fictionalized account. It would be common to differentiate archaeology from literature on the grounds that archaeology deals, at least nominally, in a realm of fact while literature moves in the realm of fiction. It is true that the archaeologist may not invent facts at will while the literary writer may and has a much greater freedom in exploring relationships. On another level the distinction between archaeology and literature breaks down in that archaeologists construct what may be termed facts and all archaeologists use heuristic fictions or models to organize and orientate the archaeological record and make it

meaningful, to sort out that which appears most pertinent to understanding. The idea of a purely factual archaeology, a totally objective account of the past, is itself an ideal type or a heuristic fiction. Even if some archaeologist were to achieve this impossibility it would remain unrecognized by either the investigator or others. The paradox is that to appreciate an objective mirror image of the past for what it is we would already have to know what the past was really like. The alternative, the way out of this paradox, is as argued in Chapter 1, to accept the presence of the past and that in the present and the future new pasts will be created.

Explanation

Explanation can only take place at the level of the theoretical object because it is only here that meaning is conferred. As the theoretical object is inextricably related to the real object, this is also explained, but only through its theoretical mediation. Explanation and understanding of the archaeological record consists in

- (1) Making conceptual links between the theoretical objects such that they can be shown to be related to each other in a coherent fashion. This is a process of conceptual extension and translation between the theoretical objects,
- (2) Showing the manner in which the interlinked theoretical objects can be generated by underlying principles related to the life-world of the past. These principles are formulated by the analyst as a result of his or her knowledge, a knowledge dialectically produced through conceptual labour working on theoretical objects, and the conceptual links made between them. It represents a third and final level of theoretical appropriation of the real. The plausibility or conditional truth of the account, resides in the logical links established through the stages of the theoretical appropriation of the past and has nothing to do with a correspondence in any direct or simple manner with external facts. The entire process of analysis and explanation of the real moves in a dialectical process in which theoretical analysis results in the formulation or understanding of structuring principles of social life which are then referred back in order to explain data via conceptual links (Fig 5.1)

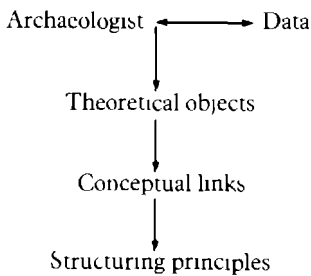


Fig 5.1 Stages in theoretical appropriation

We support the realist point (Bhaskar 1978, 1979) that the observable is generated, and thus at least in part explained, through unobservable processes or relationships

This is the single most important realist proposition which sets it up in direct opposition to positivism/empiricism and it involves the rejection of the Humean conception of causation discussed in Chapter 2, in which the world is presupposed to consist of atomistic particulars or cause-effect regularities known through sense-perception by the subject who then applies a thick layer of logical cement (inductive or deductive reasoning) to link together cause and effect which, at the outset, have been separated. A realist position, by contrast, asserts that regularities which are observable through sense data are the result of unobservable generative mechanisms which link them together. These mechanisms are real, that is they possess ontological status, but exist independent of thought:

The realist view of explanation can be conveniently summarised in the claim that answers to why-questions (that is requests for causal explanations) require answers to how- and what-questions. Thus if asked *why* something occurs, we must show *how* some event or change brings about a new state of affairs, by describing the way in which the structures and mechanisms that are present respond to the initial change. To do this, it is necessary to discover *what* the entities involved are: to discover their natures or essences.

(Keat and Urry 1975, p. 31)

This means that we need to pay attention to the underlying logic governing the apparent visible logic. We are involved in a search for structures underlying the real. Now, social structures differ from natural structures in a number of important ways. Social structures are relations of production and reproduction which are both constraining and enabling (see Chapter 6). Social structures, unlike natural structures (i) do not exist independently of the activities they govern; (ii) do not exist independently of the agent's conceptions of what activities they are carrying out; (iii) are in a chronic state of structuration and are only relatively enduring (Bhaskar 1979, pp. 48-9; Giddens 1984, 1979, chapter 2). The notion of structure is taken up further in the next chapter and all we wish to note here is that these structures are composed or constituted by structuring principles. These structuring principles are to be related to theoretical objects and are partially explanatory in so far as they can be shown to generate them. The data is thus explained by a necessary step of shifting away from it and the dialectical interplay of theorized data takes place within the hermeneutic circle.

Knowledge

Knowledge is propositional; it resides in making statements about the world and being able to justify these statements. Standard epistemologies rely on either (i) making a transcendental claim or a metaphysical statement which we can either accept or reject, or (ii) are forced to move backwards in an infinite regress (see Rorty 1980, for an excellent exposition). We do not reject the concept or notion of knowledge but wish to take some of the unjustified 'glamour' away from the term by adopting the position that knowledge arises from the practical activities *or praxis* of men and women in the world (*cf.* the consideration of truth on pp. 20-2). This is not a roundabout way of

suggesting 'all knowledge is relative' since a relativist claim of the latter sort is contradicted by the universality of the clause employed to argue for it.

Theory is not something which can be merely 'applied' to empirical data. Statements and interpretations or propositions about the past result from practical actions or theoretical labours linking subject and object and going beyond both. Hence theory is practice and knowledge is a production. This conception of knowledge as a production has a number of distinct advantages and we owe it in one form to the work of Althusser (1977). Viewing theoretical work as social practice sharing features with other social practices (e.g. economic, political, technical, ideological) characterized by a distinctive means and mode of production and type of human labour working on raw materials to create a product, removes the untenable notion of knowledge being reducible to a product of pure flights of genius -we just need a few archaeological Einsteins to tell us how the past was or how to set about research! The raw materials from which knowledge is created are concepts, notions and facts (theoretical objects) which for archaeology are either the work of prior discourse inside or outside the discipline or are themselves produced and then further reworked. Returning to the notion of the historicity of thinking discussed above, the idea of knowledge as production leads us to understand that this production always takes place at a particular time and place in a field of power relations and politics. Involved in the production of knowledge is *conceptual struggle* and concepts, more broadly conceptions of the past, may have *effects* as interventions today in the present. In this sense the past is real and not dead and gone: through archaeological and historical production it is an active part of the present.

Conclusions

We have argued that archaeology is a hermeneutics, an interpretative practice, and have outlined a conception of archaeological research as dialectical and knowledge as practical. These conceptions were supported by an emphasis on historicity and critique. A critical archaeology is both reflexive (critical of itself) and critical of the past. It aims to explain meanings and ideologies by disclosing the social conditions, social relations, interests and structures from which they arise. This permits the possibility of being able to disclose the manner in which meanings may be constructed and imposed by dominant groups. A task of a critical archaeology providing a critical explanation of the past is to study the manner in which material culture may be employed to foster 'distorted' communication and used in power strategies (see Chapters 6-8).

In this chapter we have made a brief set of philosophical remarks which are only intended as possible guides towards the fully fledged development of a hermeneutic, reflexive, dialectical and critical non-empiricist philosophy of archaeology. There can be no final answers to the problems we have discussed; as with the book as a whole, the end of this chapter is arbitrary: it signals a beginning. We finish with some summary points.

- (1) The task of a philosophy of archaeology should be to offer potentialities rather than to foreclose them.
- (2) Archaeology is characterized by a fourfold hermeneutic and, as a hermeneutic process, is an attempt to make sense of the past in its contextual embeddedness.

- (3) We need to escape from the notion of 'hard' facts and 'weak' theories and put both on an equal and dialectical footing.
- (4) It is necessary to go beyond surface appearances in understanding the past.
- (5) It is important to distance being empirical - considering data in all its potential fullness and complexity - from being empiricist - granting primacy to that data.
- (6) Archaeology is neither subjective or objective; it transcends this dualism.
- (7) We should see the gap between past and present as productive of discourse and dialogue rather than as a troublesome barrier.
- (8) Archaeology is historically and socially situated - a political practice.
- (9) An archaeology which is involved in an active interpretation of the past reveals the potential of the notion of critique in relation to past and present.