

Social archaeology: the object of study

'A little formalism turns one away from History a lot brings one back to it'
(Barthes 1973b, p 112;

Introduction

In previous chapters we have considered archaeology as a practice in the present, a writing and production of texts about the past. We have argued that the past is not identical to its representation; reality is irreducible to facts, is not information to be objectively, quantitatively defined, but is a field of polysemy, is informed by values, is constituted in practice. We have emphasized archaeology as being indelibly hermeneutically informed, as dialectic, and as itself embedded in historicity. We have also criticized the reduction of meaningful practice to behaviour - the descriptive treatment of meaningful and historical practice as bodily movement. We have emphasized instead individual agency, that archaeology as practice is a rhetoric produced in definite social conditions and social circumstances. In our criticism of various positions adopted in the archaeological literature we have elaborated how they may be construed as ideological - related to contemporary structures of inequality. Archaeology has in so many ways become not a reawakening or remembering of the past, but an apology for the present.

In this chapter we build on this conception of practice and ideology in considering the object of archaeology. In accordance with previous chapters, we reject the possibility of making a methodological prescription of what we are to find in theory, but instead concentrate on a series of ideas and concepts which we consider can overcome the disabling fissures running through conventional approaches.

Archaeology is unavoidably social not only in the sense that it is produced by men and women in and outside institutions but because its data are the products of social practices. Such practices are structured and structures have a dual nature- they are the medium and outcome of practices which constitute social systems in a reflexive manner. This separates structure from its practical constitution - system - and emphasizes the spatiality and temporality of practices. We stress that practice, in its structuring, spatiality and temporality, is political and historical, and social systems are contradiction, not homogeneous entities, but characterized by political relations of dominance and subordination. Individuals are competent and knowledgeable while at the same time their action is situated within unacknowledged conditions and has unintended consequences.

The concepts presented in this chapter have been outlined elsewhere (Tilley 1982a, Miller and Tilley 1984b; Shanks and Tilley 1982, Hodder 1982a, Rowlands 1982, see

also Bhaskar 1979, Bourdieu 1977, 1979, 1984, Giddens 1976, 1979, 1981, 1984 we have also found stimulating Oilman 1971, Hindess and Hirst 1977, Cutler *et al* 1978, Gregory 1982a, 1982b, and Laclau and Mouffe 1985) Our aim here is not to provide an exhaustive treatment of the conceptual apparatus (which would require a considerable work now in preparation, Shanks and Tilley (in press)), to avoid undue repetition we present instead more of a resume

Artifact, culture, system

Focus on artifacts and the labour of typology} and classification as an end in itself is a long-discredited antiquarianism 'The archaeologist is digging up, not things, but people', claimed Wheeler (1954, p 13), arguing for a 'seasoning of humanity', that the dry and dusty remains be brought to life by the archaeological imagination For most of this century the concept of *culture* has provided the link between artifacts and peoples Developed by Childe to mean regularly associated material culture traits in the same time and place (Childe 1956, p 33), 'cultures' were assumed to represent peoples or societies and have been the basic object of study for prehistoric archaeologists Once classified, prehistory could then be described in terms of the interaction of such entities - diffusion of ideas, migration, invasion or internal innovation

Much criticism has been made of the correlation between cultures and peoples Clarke (1968) emphasized that cultures were archaeological rather than ethnic entities, polythetically rather than monothetically defined Renfrew (1978b) has questioned the existence of homogeneous assemblages, arguing that cultures are arbitrary taxonomic categories imposed on a continuum of change, and Shennan (1978) has skilfully elaborated the spatial variability which makes the Beaker phenomenon meaningless as a coherent cultural tradition

Binford (1972) has criticized the definition of artifacts as expressions of social norms specific to distinct groups Instead of distinct cultures and their particular interactions, the object of archaeology was to become culture systems, behavioural and adaptive, in terms of which variability in the archaeological record could be explained In contrast to the pessimism of traditional 'normative' archeology which despaired of being able to specify supposedly non-material aspects of society (religion, beliefs, politics), a full} social archaeology became accessible according to a framework permitting a mechanistic relationship between society} and environment with material culture mediating as an extrasomatic means of adaptation

The optimism of new archeology with regard to the object of archaeology has led to an extensive interest in reconstructing past societies and with schemes of social evolution, even if some of the claims have been discarded or never been accepted (e.g formulation of laws of culture process, rigid hypothetico deductive procedures)

However, the concept of social or cultural system within the ecological functionalism of the new archaeology has been effectively challenged (Hodder 1982b, Tilley 1981a, 1981b) The idea of a social system as developed by Renfrew (1972), Clarke (1968), Plog (1974; and others, is based on a biological analog}, either explicitly or implicitly, that society} can be conceived in some sense as an organism in homeostatic equilibrium within its environment Much archeology has thus been concerned with defining and

investigating relations between social system and environment or ecosystem in relation to technology and population levels. But with the natural system state being defined as stability and absence of change and with a radical separation of what is internal and external to the system, change has usually been viewed as deriving from outside the system parameters, and there is a separation of statics and dynamics, synchrony and diachrony, the latter being associated with change. As a reified whole, the social system has no place for individual action. The major problem is the dependence on *junction* as the explanatory concept – that any social element can be explained by reference to the part it plays in maintaining the survival of the social whole. Things said to have functions are attributable to an enormous variety of categories, e.g. pencil sharpeners, record players, cars, parts of organisms, social institutions, specific events or relationships. Questions of the form 'What is X for?' almost demand a functional answer in everyday discourse. For example a reply to the question 'What are shopping bags for?' might be 'for holding articles purchased while out shopping'. Now this is fairly innocuous and we might think it a fairly reasonable reply. The crux of the problem is that when such answers are given to explain social relationships they become manifestly inadequate, and the more complex the practices which are to be explained, the more inadequate the answer. The subsystems of a society are claimed to function together via negative and positive feedback mechanisms in much the same way as the parts of an organism, such as the heart or the kidneys, function to keep it alive. When certain practices or institutions are present in a social system these are explained as part of its functioning. For example, Rappaport (1967, pp. 224–42, 1971a) proposes that ritual is an information exchange device communicating cultural, ecological and demographic data across the boundaries of social groups. On his account, other rituals regulate the dispersal of human populations, preserve a balance between farmed and fallowed land, and keep domestic animals within an adaptive goal range (Rappaport 1971b). In archaeology such ideas have been used by Thomas (1972) and Flannery and Marcus (1976) among others. However, such a functional explanation for the presence of rituals in all these cases tells us nothing whatsoever about their form and content – all it purports to explain is why these rituals occurred at all. We are left with an empty shell of an explanation in which content is reduced in favour of instrumental logic. Moreover, we have no glimmering of an account of why one particular type of ritual should occur rather than another. The reference made to practical interest, utilitarian value, adaptive expedience (adaptation to the environment) in such a framework entails a radical separation of function and culture, objective expedience and style, function and style (*cf.* Dunnell 1978b, Schiffer 1979). What functional value can the style of a pot possess? – little can be said of particular meaning, of the specific way things are made and done – that is style, which is so much of what archaeologists are concerned with (see Chapter 7). When what matters is simply the 'objective' and 'adaptive' aspects of what is done, meaningful social practice is reduced to behaviour – bodily movement.

For systems analysis in archaeology, the system, environment and subsystems are essentially descriptive categories, patterns of empirical regularities tied together through functional links. Much effort has gone into investigating pattern in the archaeological record (settlement distributions, distributions of exchanged items, resource dis-

tribution, artifact distributions and distributions of features within sites) Once the patterns are depicted then they are presumed to fit into a behavioural functional whole. A functional explanation always presupposes some needs, wants, interests or goals. In other words it is teleological in form. Something occurs as the result of reaching towards or pertaining to a desirable state. Individuals may be very well said to have needs. Indeed this is an essential characteristic of humanity to have aspirations and desires. By contrast social systems themselves have no needs, they have no need to function, to survive, to attain a goal range or to seek out homeostatic states. The needs of the social system cannot be independent of the actors which make it up, so the notion of system function or the function of rituals or other institutionalized practices is entirely irrelevant and misplaced. Feedback processes cannot be conceptualized except in terms of some goal unless they are just random, but to anthropomorphize such processes is an invalid procedure.

It is a misconception to conceive of the object of archaeology as artifacts in themselves, the archaeological culture concept, or as a functionally defined social system. An alternative proposed by some (e.g. Schiffer 1976, 1981, 1983a) is that archaeology should be a science of material culture, its object being the remains and artifacts, their relationships and processes of the formation of the archaeological record. But the ultimate aim is to specify links (usually mechanical) between material culture patterning and 'society', the aim is to reach a description of society, either defined in terms of a functionally adaptive system or in terms of a generalized, atemporal, aspatial 'culture process'.

Some archaeologists, through a reading of Marxist work, especially Marxist anthropology, have drawn on the concept of the mode of production, looking at the archaeological record in terms of social relations of production, involving especially considerations of ranking, kinship structures and ideology within social formations characterized by contradiction and conflict rather than homeostatic mechanisms (e.g. Bender 1978, Friedman and Rowlands 1978, Gledhill 1981, Gledhill and Rowlands 1982, Frankenstein and Rowlands 1978, Kristiansen 1984, Gilman 1984). While fully supporting the aims of this work to overcome the inadequacies of systemic approaches with a valuable emphasis on contradiction, reproduction and change, we wish to question the adequacy of the concept of mode of production and social relations of production as predetermined objects of archaeological analysis.

Against essentialism: social system as relational whole

We have argued in previous chapters that the artifact cannot be isolated from its relational context in both present and past. We would thus agree with Lukacs's (1971 [1923]; programmatic proclamation made in the early days of Western Marxism, of the centrality of the category of totality (see Jay 1984 for an excellent review of historical changes in the use of the concept). Any archaeology which argued for the existence in the past of entities larger than the individual or interactions between individuals and their artifacts, would seem to, at least nominally, conform to this position. Culture, society, social system or mode of production are all holistic units differing mainly according to the definition of constituent parts and the characterization of their inter-

relations Rowlands, in particular (1982), has reaffirmed that the idea of totality is a strength of archeology, concerned as it has been for so long with aggregate units, but does point to problems with the idea of 'society' - that bounded units within the archaeological record which might be equivalent to society don't exist (referring to Shennan's work, 1978), that the unitary notion of 'society,' is historically derived, part of the emergence of nation-states in Western Europe (Rowlands 1982, pp 163-4) We wish to build on this position and contend that there is no underlying principle or principles unifying the concept of 'society' good for all times and all places, principles which would remove the category of society from history The category of totality cannot be pre-defined We wish to argue against the object of archaeology being any particular and abstract object, *society* or *system*, sometimes defined in theory, sometimes distilled from the empirical, essentially existing beyond history We argue that there can be no general structuring of society or of the social world with pre-defined subsystems, with one or several principles or 'essences' (the economic, environment, technology, population, social relations of production) producing effects (as in, for example, the Marxist base-superstructure formula) Such essentialism is mechanically deterministic, reductionist - reducing empirical detail to the effect of a principle - and naturalizes and legitimates & *particular* and historical conception of the structuring of social reality which has the effect of removing it from the historical process Neither individuals nor the theoretical systems they construct can miraculously escape from the historicity of human existence (see Chapter 5)

Nor is there an essence 'human nature', such an entity as homo oeconomicus (Chapter 3) or homo artifex (Chapter 4) We do not criticize such objectifying values with reference to another set of absolute 'human' values (deemed to be superior in some way), but rather wish to emphasise the ambiguity and fragility of human values, their perversion through association with other values and their restriction to particular sections of the population often held to be enlightened and especially perceptive (see the discussion in Chapters 1 and 3 of Cultural Resource Management's conservation ethic which must, it is claimed, be transmitted to the general population, and see the discussion in Chapter 3 of Clark's assertion (1979, 1983) that human cultural value is dependent on the presence of elites)

Such essentialism also reproduces a whole series of disabling dualisms, aporias, conceptual dead-ends which it is vital to avoid

essence	-	appearance
necessity	-	contingency
interior	-	exterior
abstract	-	concrete
concept	-	fact
object	-	properties
<i>subiectum</i>	-	<i>accidentēs</i>
substance	-	attributes
society	-	individual
reality	-	consciousness
body		mind

The terms of each pair are radically separated and often, explicitly or implicitly, the first term is privileged, made to have primacy over the second. The whole complex forms a labyrinth of contradiction encompassing archaeological explanations.

The specification of a principle or essence unifying, underlying and explaining data depends on the idea that it is possible to radically separate that which is primary and constituting from that which is secondary and contingent on a priori grounds. Many conventional approaches to the archaeological past specify an underlying principle or essence (adaptation to environment, systemic homeostasis, economic necessity, social relations, function) which can be separated from the contingent, which produces effects, effects which are determined by the underlying principle (it may be empirical detail, 'superstructures', 'style, social change, artifact variability). Archaeology becomes the viewing of the transcendental signified through its expressions or signifiers (social structures through burial practices, through material culture patterning). The essential is viewed through its appearances.

The search for an underlying principle implies a definitional obsession marking the boundaries of the essential, defining 'real' entities, evolutionary stages, 'cultures', 'subsystems', according to which the past might be explained. Such definition (often disguised as neutral classification) depends on a separation of interior and exterior - that which is internal to the transcendental signified and that which is external, separating the essence from the appearance.

A redefinition of necessity is required. It does not refer to an underlying and externally defined determinant principle but refers to the nature of structural relations. So in a total system with each element specified and related within the whole, all relations are necessary, all elements and relations depending on each other. Such a total system of synchronous necessity is a political project, a totalitarian project of a perfectly defined and administered society, timeless, lasting a thousand years: this is the project implied in the separation of synchrony and diachrony. It is considered possible to make a slice through time and read the social structure of the moment, the static essence of its empirical development: the events of history. As Althusser (1977, pp. 94–6) points out, this essence-development duality is based on a conception of time as a continuity of present (synchronous) moments, homogeneous measurable duration, empty, a conception we have criticized in Chapters 1 and 4. Such a conception makes history a problem, the 'essential section' of the social, the synchronic as contemporaneity itself, timeless presence, has primacy over practice and history.

For Althusser, the totality, the social whole is *over determined*. So the totality is not some external structure or some essence, reference to which explains surface phenomena, concrete effects, structure is neither internally nor externally separate but is present in its effects: there is no barrier between abstract concept and the empirical-concrete (Althusser 1977, pp. 188ff.). Laclau and Mouffe (1985) emphasize the potential significance of this contention, the social is a symbolic order. So there is no ultimate and primary substance represented in a separate realm of (contingent) signification, the social is always already a symbolic order. In such a symbolic order meaning is realized through the system of differences, meaning does not reside within any element in-itself but each element means or exists only in so far as it relates to other elements, differing, deferring or delaying absent elements. There can be no self-sufficient or self-identical

element. In supporting the idea of the social being overdetermined in this way we reject the search for an ultimate object of archaeology which can be defined literally and its secondary effects or properties read off.

This involves, a rejection of the concept of an object being separated into underlying materiality (*subjectum*) and properties or attributes attached or possessed (*accidentēs*) (see Chapter 1, pp 9-10). This idea of discrete objects of analysis with definable and quantifiable attributes is obviously encouraged in archaeology by the character of remains, of the past many apparently discrete units pots, tools - and also by the applicability and 'success' of mathematical and statistical procedures. Time is not a dependent variable or attribute - empty measured duration according to which the substance of the past can be plotted. The social does not exist within time so it is not possible to separate synchrony from diachrony, static definition from temporal development, as we have just pointed out in another context.

This viewpoint entails a rejection of conceptions of middle-range theory (see Chapter 2), the idea that a set of mechanical and universal principles can be defined, and according to which dynamic culture process can be read off the static archaeological record which, in effect, becomes contingent, unnecessary, accidental. Equally inadequate are structuralist attempts to reduce all explanation to the structure behind the appearance, essences of that which is empirically observable. Structure and its realization cannot be radically separated out in so far as structure exists only in its realization in space-time - is present in, through and by its effects (see below).

Instead of discrete objects defined according to attributes, a flux of internal relations it is to this relational complex that the category of totality refers. The relations between elements are *internal* (Oilman 1971), it is not a case of discrete elements joined by external relations. There is no totally internal element, a fully, constituted identity, in-itself, identical with itself, any part of a social order is always subverted by internal relations with other elements in a system of differences. The presence or trace of some elements in others prevents identity being fixed, there is always a surplus of meaning which cannot be pinned down. So it is not possible to separate environment from society, external from internal, each defines the other. The economic cannot be separated from the political, from ritual, there can be no literal differentiation. Each is subverted by a polysemy which prevents stable, self-contained definition. The economic is, both present and absent in the political and ritual, is structured as political and ritual space. In addition to rejecting a base superstructure conception we reject any simple a priori separation of economy, politics, ideology.

The object of archaeological study is always partial and incomplete, pierced by contingency, a total system would be a system of total necessity and regularity with all meaning fixed, all action predictable, all intentions fulfilled. Necessity in a relational sense refers to the fixation of meaning, the establishment of regularity in difference, in the contingent, necessity and contingency define each other.

Agency and social practices

What place is there for human agency in a conceptualization of the social totality as consisting of a flux of internal relations¹. Of all the dualisms mentioned above one of the

most damaging and disabling is the individual/society, subject/structure couplet in which the two sets of terms are radically opposed to each other. It is no exaggeration to state that the problem of how to conceptualize the relationship between individual or group agency and wider social processes has been a primary problem of both the philosopher and the social theorist since the Enlightenment and beyond. Conceptualization of the relationship may amount to little more than 'taking sides' either the individual and social practices or society and social structures become effectively annulled. In part this is a debate about free will and determinism. Is society determined by the will of individuals or individuals by society⁵ It is also a debate between idealism and materialism, between preconceived categories of a human essence and a view of subjects being constructed in the social.

One extreme is to assert individualistic voluntarism in which individuals are regarded as creating societies. The latter becomes more or less a residual term, the sum of the individuals who through their actions make it up, a doctrine sometimes termed methodological individualism (Brodbeck 1966, Watkins 1970, Weber 1964, p. 101). Subjectivist sociology (phenomenological sociology, e.g. Phillipson 1972, and ethno-methodological perspectives, Garfinkel 1967, Johnson *et al.* 1984, chapter 3) bears a family resemblance to the same general approach in which human actions are thought to depend solely upon how subjects interpret and account for the social conditions in which they are situated, the meanings such situations have for them as agents and the languages and symbolic forms of discourse they use and construct to explain these states. Human actions flow from subjective intentions, and social structures become subjectively inhabited or based. Such a view also finds expression in much historical narrative in which history is effectively boiled down to the doings of great men and women. The fact that Caesar crossed the Rubicon becomes an essential historical detail distinguished from the crossing of the Rubicon by anyone else.

On the other hand, functionalism, structuralism and post-structuralist approaches effectively eliminate the individual from the analysis in various ways. Individuals become statistical detail (Redman 1978b, p. 330), props for the structure (Althusser and Balibar 1977, p. 180) or bourgeois illusions which require decentring (Coward and Ellis 1977, p. 94). Foucault (1979, 1981) is always much happier when referring to 'bodies' rather than 'people'.

In the position taken here we wish to refuse this dualism, to acknowledge that without individuals and the social practices of individuals societies would not exist but that at the same time the individual human subject requires a thorough decentring from the stage. We can agree both that 'man is a myth of bourgeois ideology' (Althusser 1976, p. 52) and that 'it is only from the face-to-face relationship, from the common lived experience that the intersubjective world can be constituted' (Schutz 1972, p. 166). This requires a materialist dialectical conception of the relationship between subject and structure, the agent and society. Considering the agent as an active decentered subject enables a position transcending mechanistic reduction and voluntaristic idealism. All subjects are *positioned* in relation to other subjects, groups and institutions or collectivities, power, ideology and social structures. To state that the subject is positioned does not require that he or she becomes a mere component or a prop.

The following points may be made about agency

- (1) All action is social action
- (2) The primary characteristic of such action is a realization of teleological positing
- (3) All social actions are determined actions because (i) some actions may be forced by violence or its threat, (ii) most actions have a habitual basis, (iii) some actions are influenced and promoted via ideology, (iv) actions which seem to be free in the sense that they involve a choice on the part of the subject, involve interests and values. However, these interests and values are themselves situated in a socially constructed field so that the choices are not free-floating. No child born in Britain makes a choice of whether or not to speak English if the act of speaking has a communicative intent in relation to other English speakers

to regard all action as social action is to recognize the constitution of action in sociability and in socialization processes. A child brought up in complete isolation could hardly be subsequently regarded as being a competent member of society. There is no principle of action which can be regarded as being a distinctive property of an individual if by this is meant some intention, purpose or quality originating entirely outside social life. Actions make sense in relation to the social context in which they are situated as does language. Robinson Crusoe may have been alone on his desert island but in another sense he took his entire society with him. The practices of individual subjects and their relational effects in the social totality take place both *in* language and *in* the materiality of Being. The individual is both constructed through language use and the materiality of his or her social being but also has a certain reflexive efficacy in that construction process. When an agent makes a statement about a situation or produces or uses an object the statement made or the particular type or form of production or usage is a product of past experiences, intentions for the future and the particular language or material object involved. Through agency, praxis, language and consciousness become conjoined and there can be no sharp division between language and the manner in which social reality is constructed. Reality is conceived through language and through acting on that reality such that language, thought, reality and action all become contextually interbedded. The role of language and action is less to reflect or picture or operate in reality but to actively shape that reality, reproduce it or transform it.

The distinctive quality of action and agency is that it is purposive. Societies as a whole are not purposive and neither are animals, birds or plants. The latter may be held to be characterized as being 'purposive without a purpose' (Kant). Lukacs underlines the point that 'only in labour, in the positing of a goal and its means, consciousness rises with a self-governed act, the teleological positing, above mere adaptation to the environment - a stage retained by those animal activities that alter nature objectively but not deliberately - and begins to effect changes in nature itself. Since realization thus becomes a transforming and new-forming principle of nature, consciousness, which has provided the impulse and direction for this, can no longer be simply an ontological epiphenomenon' (Lukacs 1980b, pp 22-3).

When we speak of agency, the vocabulary used to consider actions and their results involves terms such as wishes, desires, interests, intentions, purposes, dispositions, motives, principles, irrespective of whether or not these wishes, etc ever actually were effected. Reasons may be regarded as causes of actions but not in a limited cause and effect type sense. Von Wright (1971, p. 107) puts forward the following scheme, in tenseless form, for understanding action

From now on A intends to bring about p at time t

From now on A considers that, unless he does a no later than at time t' , he cannot bring about p at time t

Therefore, no later than when he thinks time t' has arrived, A sets himself to do a , unless he forgets about the time, or is prevented

This is a scheme of practical inference or reasoning capturing notions of time, place, consciousness and teleological positing, emphasizing that intentions, goals for action, knowledge of the circumstances in which the agent finds him or herself and the means by which action is effected or done are all interdependent and changing or, in other words, relational. Such a formal scheme has a fairly limited area of application in the sense that it is an 'ideal type' and in most practical situations in the ongoing stream of daily life agents do not formally reason in such a manner. Wittgenstein notes that the 'game of giving the reason why one acts in one particular way does not involve finding the causes of one's actions' (Wittgenstein 1969, p. 110). To make sense of this statement requires a consideration of the relationship between action and consciousness.

A stratified model of agency

Faced with a choice between alternative goals and modes of conduct an agent may undertake a process of reasoning in some sense equivalent to the model of practical inference discussed above. Similarly, apparently spontaneous actions may be rationalized afterwards in such a manner. The ability to be able to talk about action or provide reasons for conduct invokes discursive consciousness of the event. The game consists of being able to make the action intelligible in terms of the stream of other actions in daily life, forms of conduct implicitly or explicitly known to all social actors in any particular socio-historical context, knowledge which may readily be drawn upon for justifying or explaining actions. Discursive consciousness is thus a *rationalization* of and for action.

Characteristics attributable to agents always go under some sort of description. Typical terms include selfishness, greed, laziness, altruism, caring, industriousness, etc. Such attributes do not so much originate in the actor but are only possible or intelligible in terms of the particular social totality under consideration and in other situations the same actions might be described or understood in another fashion. In other words, there are no basic existential characteristics of 'humanity' such as these, good for all times and places. Actions have to be understood in terms of the context(s) in which they take place. The vast majority of social action is not normally open to discursive discussion but takes place on a level of practical consciousness or knowing how 'to go on' or proceed in a certain situation. Driving a car while not thinking about traffic rules,

speaking while being unaware of the grammatical basis for language, eating dishes in a certain order are all examples of the same general phenomenon and practical consciousness pervades all practice from bodily hexis to the types of material goods found in an individual's home to the type of drink he or she chooses to take and the manner in which it may be consumed. Actions are performed in one manner rather than another because the social world is fundamentally a symbolically structured reality and inherently meaningful. The knowledge of the world on which agents draw in their day to day encounters and labour is largely implicit or taken for granted knowledge, and social life involves the constitution and transformation of meaning-frames through which agents orientate their conduct to others and the social and natural environment in which they are situated or positioned. Practical consciousness forms, typically, the primary basis for understanding that most action is overdetermined in that a host of unacknowledged conditions may underline any action or set of actions. Similarly actions, more often than not, may have unintended consequences. For example: *A* approaches *B* to greet her while holding a knife in his hand (because at the time he was gutting a fish). The intention of *A* was to greet *R* but at the last moment *A* trips over an unobserved boulder and stabs *B*: an unintended consequence of action. To make matters even more complicated another scenario might be: *A* actually intends to stab *B* and moves towards her with this end in view but trips over the boulder. Was the knife entering *B*'s body an intentional act or not? Had *A* not tripped over the boulder might he not have changed his mind at the last moment? The latter example is introduced to emphasize that the outcome of any action is always uncertain until it has been effected and that actions take place in an infinite variety of different circumstances which influence their outcome and result. Bourdieu (1977) and Giddens (1979, 1984) both emphasize that action sequences are typically monitored and that actors are not in any sense motivated cultural dopes but aware of their conditions of existence, although for the most part this is an intuitive, practical awareness. The boundary between discursive and practical consciousness is constantly shifting and sliding according to the time, the place, and the actors involved. The division between practical and discursive consciousness 'can be altered by many aspects of the agent's socialization and learning experiences. Between discursive and practical consciousness there is no bar; there are only the differences between what can be said and what is characteristically simply done. However, there are barriers, centred principally upon repression, between discursive consciousness and the unconscious' (Giddens 1984, p. 7).

To assert that action is determined is not to propose any mechanical determinancy but to acknowledge that actors find themselves in a life-world not of their own choosing and operate in that life-world and may reproduce or transform it through their activity. However, the motivations (unconscious desires, or formulated or unformulated reasons) for actions are contextually created in a determinate sociohistorical situation.

Structures, structuring principles

So far we have emphasized the notion of active agency but, given the rejection of any position which attributes the properties of social totalities as being derived solely from the activities of agents as individuals or in groups, institutions and collectivities, the

position that we wish to adopt here is that the social totality as a network of internal relations embraces the concepts of system and structure. By the former is meant the networking of relations between individuals and groups in a field of existence embracing the categories of the economic, the political, the ideological and the symbolic which together constitute conditions of existence for the social strategies of individuals and groups situated in time-space. The social totality as a system networking of internal strategies and relations between individual groups is also a structured totality. Action and meaning becomes orientated or fixed at specific spatio-temporal conjunctures in that economic, social, political and ideological/symbolic relations are ordered by structures which constitute and are constituted in and through social practice and social strategies deriving from that practice (Fig. 6.1)

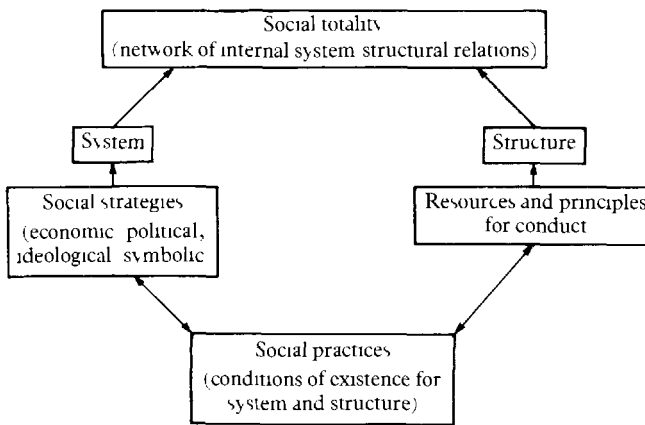


Fig. 6.1 Model of the social totality

The conception of structure employed here may be summarized by the following points

- (1) Structures are atemporal, aspatial entities yet chronically subject to change in time and space. They are present only through their effects, at their points of constitution via human agency and the social practices and social strategies which arise as a result of this agency.
- (2) Structures are constituted by principles and resources orientating social practices and which are in turn, orientated by those practices. These resources for conduct may involve sets of operations for ordering the social world such as left/right, back/front, inside/outside, pollution/purity, oppositions as rules or norms for conduct. At the most abstract level the principles involved which structure structures (structuring principles) are basic grounding oppositions such as that between socialized production and private appropriation in the capitalist state.
- (3) Structures as dynamic entities embrace contradictions and non-correspondences. There are no structures common to any society but only

particular structures located determinately at specific moments in time-space
 Internal contradictions in structures are a necessary potentiality for change and
 such contradictions can only be dissipated through change

Structuration

The practice of individuals is both structured and structuring, articulating meaning and conduct in a system of *difference*, creating meanings for action and conduct and conditions for the interpretation of those meanings and reproducing or transforming structures. Structured practice is produced according to the form or *modality* of the articulation of the structuring or generative principles and resources composing structure. The mediation of social practice via structure and the constitution, transformation or reproduction of structure via the medium of practice is embodied in the concept of structuration (Giddens 1979, pp 69-73, 1984, pp 1-40) which is akin in some respects to Bourdieu's use of the term 'habitus' (Bourdieu 1977 pp 72-94, 1984, pp 101-2, 169ft). Both concepts play a similar role in linking social practices and social structures in a dialectical fashion.

The concept of structuration usefully encapsulates the chronically incomplete and 'imperfect' (see Chapter 1, pp 9-10) nature of the social as lived, that structures are not hermetic and permanently fixed entities but are in a constant process of reproduction and transformation in practice. Structures form a medium for practice enabling and constraining it and, at the same time, are the outcome of practice and are reproduced or transformed by that practice. The process of structuration is both a temporal and spatial process. Time is not empty duration and space is not a vacant container, but both serve to constitute the form and nature of social practices and are relative to particular practices. So there is no objective measure (such as annular chronology) according to which all variation may be referred and classified and there is no of distinguishing long and short-term change on an a priori basis (as palaeoeconomy, for example, assumes in its separation of the biological-evolutionary from the social historical, the former being identified with long term, underlying change).

The concept of structuration and the notion of habitus defined by Bourdieu as 'the durably installed generative principle of regulated improvisations [which produces] practices which tend to reproduce the regularities immanent in the objective conditions of the production of their generative principle [i.e. structure]' (Bourdieu 1977, p 78) overcomes the duality of individual and society, the atomism of an individualism, a voluntaristic idealism which specifies motivations as the determinant factors in social practice, facing the reified and mechanical change of a holism in the face of which the individual is powerless (although, according to the apparently collective nature of archaeology's data, atomistic individualism has hardly appeared in archaeology, it is present as the absent opposite of mechanical holism). From the perspective that all action is social action and that individual actions are mediated by structure which is in turn actively reformulated and reconstructed through individual agency, people do not consciously produce society, the social always already exists as social structures which enable and constrain action but do not determine it mechanistically. People act knowledgeably in terms of intentions and choices upon which social structures or unintended

consequences of action depend. People are knowledgeable with the capacity to define themselves, and practice is open to discursive and practical consciousness; knowing *that* and knowing *how* to act. The social is a negotiable field and practice is inherently political with actors pursuing particular sociopolitical strategies.

That the social is overdetermined - always preconstituted as a symbolic field - and that structure has a duality enabling rather than determining in a mechanistic sense the practice of knowledgeable actors, means that there is an internal relation between activity and consciousness, body and mind. There is no primary substance - the object-world, reality - or behaviour, which produces effects in consciousness, determining a field of ideal signification. Action always goes beyond itself; it cannot be treated as movement, i. e. as behaviour. To explain an action, reference must be made to the social positioning of agency and to the context of practice. The object world and social world are always already symbolically constituted as part of language, symbolic systems, consciousness. This is not opposed to objects (and social structures) existing external to thought or language or consciousness; it is rather to assert that objects cannot produce themselves as objects (social structures as structures) outside language and consciousness. So categories, concepts, signification, representation are internal to, constitutive of the objects to which they refer. Products of labour, including material culture, embody mental operations, just as ideas have a material existence. Another important point is that symbolization, metaphor, metonymy, paradox, rhetoric are not aspects of thought and discourse which add additional sense to a primary literal meaning of the social or object world -there is none. They are part of the chronic process of negotiating meaning, of subverting the necessary character of positioned social relations.

Contradiction, power, ideology, change

The seeds of change need no sowing. Structures, dynamic and partial, are a unity of oppositions, a fixation of difference, chronically subject to change in their reproduction in practice. Actions may also have unintended consequences which react on the generating structures. The social is open, incomplete; the identity of any element in the social order can never be fully defined or found in a particular case, but exists as a field of relations. This system of difference is domesticated and arrested in structures. But structures do not fix meanings in a haphazard manner. We have pointed out the thoroughly political nature of social practices; structures enable and are produced in practices which are organized around political relations of dominance and subordination, power and control.

Productive power, power as the capacity to act in and on the world is an integral element of social life, a component of all social practice. Such *power to* can be distinguished from *power over*, social control and domination. So power is both productive, a positive force intimately involved in the reproduction and transformation of the social order and reality, and power may be a repressive and negative element, supporting social inequalities. Productive power draws upon and creates resources, material and non-material (forms of knowledge). Repressive power works within institutions and mechanisms which ensure subservience to the social order (forms of legitimate authority) and ultimately rests on a sanction of violence, direct physical coercion. Power

then has no unitary form, no essence which can be possessed by individuals or groups but is lived, is an aspect of practice and structure

Social structures embody contradiction, structures are never total, never fully articulated with each other, never fixed and reified, but in a state of constant reproduction and change which may result in contradiction within and or between structures. This is particularly the case with a disjunction between intended and unintended consequences of action. Contradiction between structures results in antagonistic beliefs and meanings regarding practice and clearly relates to social relations of inequality. Contradiction translated into antagonistic interests and open social conflict generates social change.

But this translation into conflict between social groups, political struggle, is not automatic. Particular contradictions may not appear in the know how and knowledge of a particular social group. They may not be aware of the context, meaning and consequences of a particular practice. We have already noted that repressive power may be used to exert control and forcibly prevent political struggle. However, such direct physical repression is rarely fully effective and is usually supplemented by ideology.

Ideology does not refer to a body of ideas, views, beliefs, held by a group of people, but is an aspect of a limited practice, an aspect of relations of inequality. Ideological practice misrepresents contradiction in the interests of the dominant group and may exhibit the following properties:

- (1) it represents as universal that which is partial,
- (2) it represents as coherent that which is contradictory,
- (3) it represents as permanent that which may be in flux,
- (4) it represents as natural and necessary that which is cultural and contingent.

Above all, ideology serves in the reproduction rather than the transformation of the social order: a strategy of containment and social closure.

Social totality, social practice, social strategies, structure, structuration, contradiction, power, ideology, conflict: this constellation of concepts provides a means of understanding and explaining reproduction and change within a field of sociopolitical relations of knowledgeable social agents.

Material culture: objectification and social strategies

The objectification of man places a seal on the inert. *He comes to know himself in the inert* and is therefore a victim of his reified image, even prior to all alienation. (Sartre 1982, p. 72, n. 32)

Material culture is an objectification of social being, a literal reification of that social being in the co-presences and absences embodied in the material form. Inert matter is transformed by social practices or productive labour into a cultural object, be it a product for immediate consumption, a tool or a work of art. Objectification - the serial transformation of matter into a cultural object - is the inevitable consequence attached to and flowing from labour. The image of humanity inscribed in material culture is, of course, not a phenomenal image of the self but of the powers involved in transformative e

social practice The practice of individuals is 'written' and imprinted in the world leaving traces of varying degrees of solidity, opacity or permanence - material culture Even act of social production is always one invoking an interconnection between inert materiality, consciousness, action and thought If there were no teleological positing on the part of agents there would be no material culture Material culture results from a productive process and as a production it is the result of purposeful activity it bears the indelible stamp of the positioned subject, positioned in relation to social structures and social strategies

The social labour congealed in the object is inherently meaningful labour, labour which takes place in relation to a symbolically constructed social field Just as the practice of agents is both structured and structuring so material culture is structured by agency and once the labour becomes objectified in material form it acts back to structure practices Obvious examples are buildings which channel movement, both enabling certain patterns and constraining others - exerting influence The objectification of practice in objects binds the two spheres together inextricably and the link is conceptual and internal to the objectification process Structured patterns of action and consciousness become retained in objects as significations of the practice that produced them A dialectical movement is involved in objectification in which activity transforms matter and negates its original form in the process of that transformation while at the same time the objectified object is a stabilization or negation of the action which produced it (see Sartre 1982, pp 159ff) Material culture retains the significations involved in its production as inscriptions intertwined into its nature and form This gives these significations their efficacy in the ongoing stream of social conduct the objectification of practice results in the creation of a form which confronts future practice yet is subject to future transformative activity at a material or interpretative level The positioned agent or subject is always a social subject and in precisely the same way material culture is a social and socialized production even if the work of a single individual

Material culture as an objectification of social practice and social structure does not directly reflect these practices and structures, but it may serve to mediate them via the logic of its own form Material culture may operate simultaneously in a number of social fields It may

- (1) facilitate interventions in the natural and social world as technology,
- (2) provide a communicative medium of symbolic significance in a structure of difference and signification,
- (3) provide a medium for social domination as an expression of power and ideology

Meaning in material culture

the major challenge confronting archaeologists is that of being able to confer meaning and significance to a world of otherwise meaningless and non-significant objects in terms of the social the traces of the past are meaningless in the present and they require decoding (see Chapters 1,5, and the discussion above and in Chapters 7-8) We argued above that social practice engraves meaning in material culture and structures it and that

material culture is active (it affects practice) and may operate three dimensionality In this section we wish to build further on this conception

Material culture as a social objectification is charged with meaning and structured in relation to social strategies People symbolically construct and organize their activities in a pre-constituted social field and simultaneously effect an ordering of the representation of those activities in language and in material objects as a symbolic scheme or modality for action in the world, activities can neither be understood nor explained apart from these Meanings are not simply ethereal essences or reflections of the extant material conditions of existence and the social relations necessary for social reproduction and/or transformation, but are embedded in the materiality of day to day existence The ability to use, meaningfully constitute, and manipulate systems of signification is a distinctively, human quality which makes ideation and consciousness possible, the basis for all social interaction

Material culture, as a structured and structuring resource, as an integral element actively and recursively involved in social life, plays an important role in the constitution and transformation of meaning frames Any determinate social totality is characterized by distinctive practices, strategies and structures which are temporally, spatially and socially situated and articulated Material culture is part of this articulation This means that material culture can only be realistically interpreted once it is contextually situated in a double moment First, explanations must be related to the field of internal relations of individual social totalities, and this invalidates cross-cultural approaches Secondly, they must be contextually situated in the spatio temporal moments of the totality There is no point in attempting to formulate a highly specific general model of the significance of particular aspects of material culture patterning such as types of burial practices, good for all time and all places Material culture only has significance within the context of a particular social totality and the structures, structuring principles, conditions for social action and the nature of social practices which will differ from one particular case to another People in particular situations operate in a form of life which needs and requires no justification other than that it has been tacitly agreed upon, and play different kinds of material culture games

I was asked in Cambridge whether I think that mathematics concerns ink marks on paper I reply in just the same sense in which chess concerns wooden figures Chess, I mean, does not consist in my pushing wooden figures around aboard If I say 'Now I will make myself a queen with frightening eyes, she will drive everyone off the board' you will laugh It does not matter what a pawn looks like What is much rather the case is that the totality of the rules of the game determines the logical place of a pawn

(Wittgenstein in Kenny 1973, pp 160-1)

The agreement in 'game rules' is not, in essentials, a decision open to any individual agent and neither is the form, content and nature of material culture and the significations it embodies These are pre-given but may be transformed in a field of political and social strategies The rules, then, of the material culture game are not fixed like those of chess but mutable and continuously subject to the possibility of change even

though for the most part they may tend to be reproduced. Meaning is not a matter of an immutable relationship between signifier and signified but the spatio-temporal fixation of a chain of signifiers to produce an interpretable meaning.

Material culture can be considered to be a mode of non-verbal communication, at one and the same time both simpler and more complex than written or spoken language. The syntactic links are likely to be more explicit and fewer in number, and differences between right and wrong more clearly defined than in speech acts. At the same time material culture is more complex because it is polyvalent and can act in multidimensional channels. Material culture as a sign system serves power in social strategies as a producer and organizer of consensus and thus takes on an ideological dimension. The domination effected through ideology does not consist in the control of ideas by a ruling social class or group with particular sectional interests. It rather is effected as a result of the positioning established by agents in various social strategies in relation to meaning. A materialist theory of material culture as an embodiment of power and ideology involves an analysis of the processes by which fixed relations of meaning are produced in a symbolic field *for, in and by positioned subjects*. Material culture, as a structured and structuring sign system may be particularly productive in serving power strategies at a practical or non-discursive level of consciousness. That which is contingent may appear to be natural. Social actors may not realize in many instances that they are employing a series of embedded codes and in this case the sign system will use them rather than vice versa. Concomitantly, consensus may seem not only to be natural but actually spontaneous. Hence contrasts and relationships can be exploited as part of a semiotic code to structure, restructure and reproduce specific sets of social practices and relations.

What is present to the senses in the symbolization of material culture has to be actively produced by agents and therefore the conditions, context and form of its production and subsequent use will relate strongly to phenomenal form. So, material culture should not be conceived of as something passive merely reflecting social relations but as dialectically related to these social relations. Once created, produced, material culture forms a powerful medium for acting back and restructuring social practices. Material culture may be a particularly effective medium through which to legitimate the social order precisely because of its materiality, its fixation of the practice embodied in it allowing a relative permanence and efficacy in the structuring of subsequent practice.

As material culture is polyvalent acting in multidimensional channels any simplistic interpretation of it (e.g. as an extrasomatic means of adaptation) is bound to be inadequate. Material culture can neither be taken to be a direct mirror of society, nor are different aspects of material culture-patterning necessarily compatible with each other in terms of what they represent. We need to deal, ideally, with a wide range of different types of evidence in order to work out in precisely what manner they operate together or contradict each other in a field of social, economic, political and ideological relations. Differing representations may, as often as not, relate to contradictory ways of structuring social reality in relation to power strategies. In some contexts, as opposed to others, material culture may be used to create on an imaginary plane a universe whose content and form differs entirely from social reality, but whose components are akin, recognizable and therefore acceptable.

Conclusions

It is important to realize that in this chapter we have not been concerned simply to provide an alternative conception of the social and of material culture. We are instead asserting a social field which is thoroughly historical in the sense that definition of 'society' must be particular, related to particular historical conditions and events. There can be no universal definition of society (or any other object of archaeology) which would apply across history and across geography. Any such definition is the equivalent in theory of an absolute state fixing the place of every phenomenon in a totalitarian order, to a hegemonic paternalism, a repressive pluralism, an incorporative conservatism which effects a closure of the social in a monumental formalism. Through the denial of the search for essence we open up meaning and the question of the particular object of archaeological theory and practice. Through the notion of structuration and an active conception of situated or positioned practice we affirm the social negotiation of meaning in a destabilization of the supposedly concrete and solidly stable positivity of the world, affirm the permanence of the potentiality for social change, and the agency of individuals and that it is stability which requires explanation and understanding as much as the trajectories of any particular social transformation.

Material culture is the result of productive activity; it is an objectification. As such it is always actively implicated in the structuring of social practices. It is not a simple reflection of the totality or extant social relations but forms a set of resources, a symbolic order within practice, drawn upon in political relations, activated and manipulated in ideology. Chapters 7 and 8 further examine the role of material culture and situate it within both past and present social practice and structural relations.

The object of study of a fully social archaeology is, then, on the basis of the framework advanced above, the relation of material culture-patterning to social practices, social strategies and social structures in determinate social totalities in the past and in the present.