

Social Archaeology

Archaeologists have long realized the necessity of going beyond antiquarianism, the collection and study of artefacts for their own sake, and have attempted various forms of historical narrative and social reconstruction, setting artefacts in their context. This has predominantly involved relating material culture to units which subsume the individual - cultures, societies, culture systems: social totalities. This is because archaeology's data have been thought to require a conceptual occlusion of the agents who were originally responsible for producing the past. Before considering this striking absence of the individual social actor in archaeological theory we will examine the project of a social archaeology as it has developed in Britain by examining a series of texts.

SOCIAL ARCHAEOLOGY: A TEXTUAL CRITIQUE

The social narrative of traditional archaeology

A synopsis of prehistory from the first farmers to the Roman empire, Piggott's *Ancient Europe* (1965) is a chronological narrative of archaeological material, selected as outstanding or exemplary. For Piggott the narrative is one of a contrast to Western civilization: aggression and violence, barbarism and brutality, the less endearing attributes of humanity (p. 14ff). And the narrative is the traditional one of change explained by invasions, folk movements, cultural diffusion and warfare.

Piggott's account of the societies acting out this narrative is entirely descriptive, rooted in common-sense categories of the social. He proclaims (p. 7) that prehistorians 'move in a world of anonymous societies, defined by their distinctive traditions in the

style and manufacture of everyday objects'. So the book outlines the ways of life: early farmers' house design (invariably peasant), economy, and when evidence is available, clothing and hairstyles. Examples are given of craft skills and workmanship, and artistic achievement is suitably appreciated:

In Celtic art, 'man is a stranger'. . . attractive and repellent; it is far from primitiveness and simplicity . . . is refined in thought and technique; elaborate and clever: full of paradoxes, restless, puzzlingly ambiguous.

(P. 243)

Temples, henges, cursus monuments, ritual accoutrements - all attest to the limitations of archaeological inference: 'we have no information on the beliefs which prompted the construction of these sacred places, nor of the rites performed within them' (p. 116). Such material expressions of religious or ritual phenomena are shrouded in mystery; they can only be described Occasionally, however, from evidence such as 'the presumed cult-figures of obese women' in Malta (p. 115), a guess may be made of the existence of some divinity.

In the terms of Piggott's empiricism the structure of society cannot be directly perceived, although inference from a diversity in the quality and richness of artefacts and burials may lead to a conception of a ranked society. Social hierarchy is consistently and simply seen in terms of princes or chieftains: this is the extent of Piggott's analyses of social ranking. For example, the rich round barrow burials in Wessex, England are described in terms of princely panoply: '"they are assuredly the single sepulchres of kings and great personages . . ." wrote William Stukeley in the eighteenth century of the barrows on Salisbury plain, and he was right' (P. 129).

A repeated stress on the limitations of archaeological evidence is accompanied by its literary elaboration and enlivenment. Here is Piggott on the Celtic chieftain:

The panoply and equipment of the battle-drunk, screaming tribal chieftain, in his chariot hung with the decapitated heads of his foes, the air raucous with the sound of the baritus and the carnyx . . .

(p. 243)

The values, aspirations and theoretical outlook of such works (for Hawkes (1968) the distillation of history from disparate facts, 'writing of quality and humanity' (p. 256)) are still held today by

many archaeologists. Burgess's work, *The Age of Stonehenge* (1980), aspires to such an example. The first 130 pages of this 330 page book are an artefact-centred chronicle of British prehistory (3200 - 1200 BC) interspersed with rudimentary social sketching, again rooted in common-sense categories. So Burgess comments that far-reaching social, ideological and spiritual upheavals are indicated by important changes in material Culture, in burial practices, and in the fate of the great public centres of the third millennium (p. 79). Artefact change means social change. And, somewhat earlier, 'the bewildering variety of burial customs which emerged in the Meldon Bridge period in part reflects the very complex structure of society at that time' (p. 61). After the chronicle, Burgess presents a description of society in this 'Age of Stonehenge': what the people were like, what they wore, what sort of settlements they lived in, the agriculture, crafts and industries they practised, their means of transport and communication, their burial ritual and ceremony are all featured. For Burgess, such description represents society as available to the archaeologist. Simple statements about social stratification (chiefdoms, paramount chiefs and superchiefs) are elaborated by reference to later literary sources (particularly Irish sagas). This, along with discussion of Celtic origins, amounts to the full extent of Burgess's social analysis.

In this index card (already a floppy disc?) archaeology, the particularity of the past is preserved in descriptive detail: description of hair styles, inventories of cinerary urns, discussions of post hole patterning. The sort of speculation as to the meaning of such variety is, perhaps, encapsulated in Burgess's comments on the reason for increasing deposition of bronzes in rivers, lakes and springs at the end of his period: 'with the increased precipitation and waterlogging after 1500 BC a development of water-cults makes good sense' (p. 351). People were fed up with the

Systems theory

Renfrew's *Emergence of Civilisation* (1972) was the first major application of systems theory in British archaeology. Following Clarke's general programmatic statement of a systems-based archaeology (1968), Renfrew set out to explicitly theorize the workings of Aegean society in the third millennium BC and trace an explanation for the emergence of the 'civilized' palace economies of Crete and mainland Greece.

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Society is conceived as a system, 'an intercommunicating network of attributes or entities forming a complex whole' (Clarke, 1968, p. 42). These entities are subsystems which amount to regularized patterns of social behaviours (figure 2.1). The interconnections are mechanisms of negative feedback maintaining balance or equilibrium. Each subsystem, and the system itself, are kept within assigned limits or maintained in a stable state by homoeostatic mechanisms which counteract any disturbance. So, for example, poor fishing means less fish to eat; negative feedback results in more fishing or use of food other than fish. Relations of positive feedback involve the amplification of an initial deviation, extending and increasing processes already present. Renfrew defines a particular variant of positive feedback as the 'multiplier

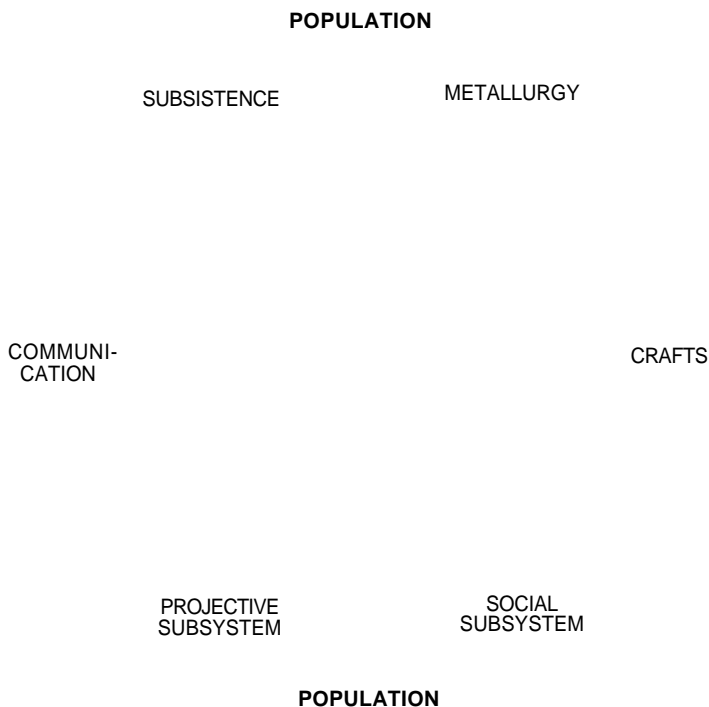


FIGURE 2.1 Renfrew's 'Culture system'

Notes: All the subsystems are linked with each other and the external system environment with relations of positive or negative feedback.

Source: From C. Renfrew (1972). Reprinted by permission of Methuen & Co.

effect, where a deviation in one subsystem has the effect of bringing about innovation in another:

Changes or innovations occurring in one field of human activity (in one subsystem of a culture) sometimes act so as to favour changes in other fields (in other subsystems). The multiplier effect is said to operate when these induced changes in one or more subsystems themselves act so as to enhance the original changes in the first subsystem.

(p. 37)

The multiplier effect is Renfrew's explanation of the emergence of Aegean civilization. In what he claims as a 'necessary preliminary' (p. 17) Renfrew produces 160 pages of traditional archaeological discourse specifying and describing details of cultural sequences. This is followed by a description of 'culture process' - a chapter is devoted to the parameters of his system (environment, population and settlement pattern), and individual chapters to the various subsystems (subsistence, metallurgy, crafts, social, the symbolic, trade and communication). For each he summarizes the general patterns and trends: for example, the development of craft specialization and metal working enabling new tools and new weapons and new forms of wealth; transformation of tribe into chiefdom, into principality or state. In the final chapter Renfrew presents two multiplier effects: 'the decisive factor for the development of Aegean civilization was the development of a redistributive system for subsistence commodities. This emerged as a consequence of the intensive exploitation of a new spectrum of food plants/notably tree crops, yielding a new diversity in produce' (p. 480). The second: 'the decisive factor . . . is the emergence of a stratified society, where high status correlates with material wealth and military prowess. These features arose largely as a consequence of the development of metallurgy and of maritime trade' (p. 483). Both are taken as models offering explanation for the emergence of civilization.

Renfrew's systems framework offered many advantages over traditional archaeologies:

- 1 it required explicit theorization of the social.
- 2 It directed attention to social process as lying behind material culture patterning.
- 3 In focusing on social process it involved considering explanation and causality rather than simple documentation of variety in space and time.
- 4 It involved a stress on complex causality: 'no single factor, however striking its growth, can of itself produce changes in the structure of culture' (p. 39).

It necessitated a consideration of subsystem interaction within a cultural whole, rather than permitting concentration on any single cultural phenomenon, such as subsistence or ceramic design.

However, in common with other uses of systems theory in archaeology, culture is conceived as man's extrasomatic means of adaptation (p. 13). The social logic of Renfrew's systems theory is that of function. Each subsystem is 'explained' in terms of its function in maintaining the existence of the whole cultural system, while the system itself is conceived as a mediatory entity, biologically adapting a population to its natural environment. Civilization, Renfrew's ultimate theme, thus becomes a socio-cultural form of adaptation to nature: 'civilisation is the complex artificial environment of man; it is the insulation created by man, an artefact which mediates between himself and the world of nature. Since man's environment is multi-dimensional so too is civilisation' (p. 13). This logic of adaptation and functionalist explanation has long been questioned in the social sciences, and criticism within archaeology is also well established (e.g. Hodder, 1982; Tilley, 1981a, 1981b). Theorizing a cultural entity as adaptive or functional simply affirms its existence and provides little comprehension of its specific form of articulation. To say that institutions and regularized customs of society are artefacts and can be regarded to fulfil functions broadly analogous to those of material artefacts which mediate between people and the natural environment, as Renfrew does, is to say nothing about why the institutions and customs take the specific form they do.

To conceive culture as adaptive means that societies are regarded as primarily conservative - maintaining equilibrium within their environment through homoeostatic negative feedback devices. Change becomes a problem:

This conservative nature of culture cannot too strongly be stressed. In terms of our model it is the natural tendency of culture to persist unchanged... it is change, any change, which demands explanation.

(p. 487)

Stability, apparently, just happens - it does not require explanation. For Renfrew the multiplier effect is 'needed to overcome this innate conservative homoeostasis of culture' (p. 487). The problem of change is solved by reference to a mechanistic relation between subsystems, and the notion of 'relation' becomes reified. The mechanism is conceptualized as existing separately from the entities

it unites: subsystems can be defined independently of their relations with other subsystems. This begs the question of the ontology of both subsystem and relation: what is negative feedback? what exactly is a subsystem? do subsystems and systems exist? how are they to be defined? Patterns of interactions, activities and artefacts would seem to be Renfrew's answer (pp. 19-23). Renfrew accepts that these regularized patterns are arbitrary categories imposed in analysis (p. 20). This throws the burden of their specification on to theory but Renfrew gives no justification for specifying subsystems as 'subsistence', 'technological', 'social', 'symbolic' and 'communicative', other than convenience. Why are they convenient, and for what purpose? Renfrew does not confront the meaning or significance of such categories. He accepts that boundaries are difficult to define: 'Criteria of different degrees of uniformity will lead to the definition of larger or smaller units' (p. 21). But what is to specify the application of different criteria? Intuition? Usefulness? Obviousness? Again, this is not theorized. In Renfrew's book the categories of system and subsystem are descriptive, referring to empirical patterning. The entire procedure of systems analysis is heuristic, its usefulness being its stress on complexity and interaction. Renfrew has realized this (p. 495) and his later work with catastrophe theory (1978, 1979) may be seen as an attempted solution, a solution involving the quantification of culture and the specification of a mathematized social process.

The interactions of negative and positive feedback are, as we have said, reified mechanisms between arbitrary analytical categories, mechanisms derived from cybernetic theory. They are *not* a social logic but based on analogies with machines, analogies which take no account of human agency and praxis (cf. below).

In that subsystems and interactions are defined independently, the synchronic is separated from the diachronic, static analysis from the explanation of change. This relates to society being conceived as naturally conservative, denying change, being naturally timeless, and change being problematic, that which is to be explained (see chapter 5 below).

Renfrew's systems analysis proceeds by successive reduction of empirical detail to categories, a process of simplification. So culture sequence is transformed into systemic categories, subsystems, whose general patterning and trends are isolated. These general trends are then encapsulated in a dual model of emergence of complex society - 'civilization'. The result is an extraordinary redundancy of detail (the redundancy already noted in chapter 1). The relation between the culture sequence of part I and the

processual analyses in part II of Renfrew's book seems to be that the first is chronicle - neutral exposition - while part II is theory *applied* to this data as an explanation. Archaeological remains from over a thousand years of Aegean prehistory are reduced to some 24 pages of multiplier effect (pp. 480-504). Now, of course, simplification and generalization are essential to any analytical or theoretical practice but it is as essential to pose the question of the meaning, significance and character of this generalization. We argue that Renfrew's study is an application, an imposition of pre-defined categories of system and subsystem on to the 'data'. It lacks self-reflexiveness. The categories of system, subsystem, feedback, exist in no 'real' or 'theoretical' relation to the object of study. The only relation is that of application (p. 18); it is purely methodological - theory is held to exist separately from data. This is the corollary to the arbitrary definition of subsystem and the non-social cybernetic logic of the mechanisms of interaction. The concomitant of this is that any complexity claimed for the explanation is entirely a function (sic) of the model of system (the applied theory) and does not necessarily apply to the data which are meant to be explained. This imposition throws into focus the politics of Renfrew's theory - the stress on the conservative nature of society, and the adopted model of *homo oeconomicus* (see esp. pp. 497ff).

Renfrew's *Emergence of Civilisation* prefigures many of the major aspects and developments in the social archaeology of the 1970s and early 1980s:

- 1 Procedures of applying social theories to archaeological data.
- 2 Processual explanation based on an identification of patterned behaviours from archaeological remains and specification of their complex interaction.
- 3 Theoretical use of social typologies: evolutionary sequences of bands, tribes, chiefdoms, etc.
- 4 A related focus on the identification of social ranking.
- 5 An emphasis, often economic, on the general importance of social control of material resources.
- 6 A focus on the analysis of mortuary remains from a structural-functional and role-model perspective.
- 7 The development of models of trade and exchange.
- 8 Use of the notion of prestige goods economies.
- 9 Use of cross-cultural generalizations.

In the following sections we analyse some of these developments in archaeological theorizations of the social.

Social typologies

The social typology, band, tribe, chiefdom and state (Sahlins, 1968; Service, 1962) has had tremendous influence on social archaeology. While forming the basis of various forms of evolutionary thinking in archaeology it has also, more generally, provided a vocabulary for social archaeology. The static and descriptive nature of the categories has meant that change from one category to another is problematical and has led to the claim that identification of a particular 'type' of society somehow constitutes an explanation. This is clear from Renfrew's 'recognition' of chiefdoms in neolithic Wessex, southern England (1973). He first specifies 20 features of chiefdoms (following Sahlins and Service), including ranking, the distribution of surplus by chiefs, 'clearly defined territorial boundaries', 'frequent ceremonies and rituals serving wide social purposes' (p. 543). There is no discussion of social process, of the working of a chiefdom social system. Renfrew proceeds to identify territorial divisions on the basis of ceremonial monuments - causewayed camps - in the earlier neolithic. He thinks these were emerging chiefdoms coalescing in the later neolithic into one greater chiefdom with constituent tribes. The archaeological evidence is considered to fit into this social categorization: mobilization of humanpower; craft specialization; religious specialization. For example, the Stonehenge area with major ceremonial monuments is considered evidence of the existence of a paramount chief. This checklist archaeology, and the social typologies on which it is based, although much criticized (e.g. Tainter, 1978) for its reductive subsumption of variability, nevertheless remains in use (e.g. Collis, 1984; and see chapter 6 below).

Ranking, resource and exchange

The volume *Ranking, Resource and Exchange* (Renfrew and Shennan (eds), 1982) in many respects represents the culmination of the programme of functionalist social archaeology in Britain, covering almost all of the elements of what is now a virtual theoretical hegemony standing opposed to traditional archaeology. The fifteen essays exemplify three routes for exploring ranking: settlement ranking and political structures involving ideas of co-ordinating political centres and core-periphery relations; the mobilization and organization of surplus labour especially in ceremonial monument construction; ranking and status of

individual social personae identified particularly in the analysis of mortuary remains.

The predominant focus is on resources and their control and management. Sherratt considers agricultural wealth in the Carpathian basin from the sixth millennium BC, proposing regional exchange networks linking nodal lowland areas and highland hinterlands involving domestic cattle. He argues this is a primary feature in emerging social hierarchy. Shennan and S. Champion consider the role of rare exchanged items, amber and coral respectively, in the earlier Bronze and Iron Ages of central and western Europe. Both propose prestige goods ranking systems, hierarchical societies where social position depended on consumption of prestige goods. Haselgrove has an elaborated prestige goods system in the late pre-Roman Iron Age centralized polities of south-east England, elaborated in its incorporation at the periphery of an expansive Roman empire, the core polity and source of prestige goods. Thus one process in social hierarchization is identified as relating to trade, exchange and societal interaction. Another process relates to the intensification and specialization of production of agriculture and crafts and subsequent management and control. Chapman considers control of critical resources - land, water, copper and interregional traded items - as a determinant factor in the development of social ranking in Iberia, 4000-1000 BC. The Rhine Main basin, 1500-500 BC, is considered by T. Champion who derives the pattern of settlement relocation, subsistence innovation, enhanced social ranking, technological development and ritual activities ('Urnfield' phenomena) from an imbalance between subsistence resources and population.

This social logic of giving priority to relations between population, subsistence and environment is frequent in such 'processual' studies. So Halstead and O'Shea present a self-styled 'adaptive model' for the emergence of redistributive economies and apply it to the 'palaces' of Bronze Age Crete. Accumulation of tokens of value which may be exchanged for foodstuffs in times of shortage is termed social storage - an adaptive response to periodic failure in food supply. The tokens used in social storage - craft items, durable and convertible - 'would have permitted the sustained accumulation and manipulation of wealth and power and so have facilitated the emergence of institutionalised social inequality' (p. 98) - the Cretan palace civilization. Gamble relates settlement nucleation and political developments in the Bronze Age Aegean (Melos) to agricultural intensification and control.

There is no doubt that this volume of studies represents a considerable advance over traditional archaeology in its concentration on the patterning of social process. But this is conceived in purely descriptive terms (cf. Whallon, 1982). The relations between a limited number of cross-cultural variables are described in their various combinations (figure 2.2). These variables amount to resources and the mechanisms of their control as is indicated by the reduction of social ranking to the effects of two processes: those of exchange and societal interaction, and intensification of production.

The functionalist logic of such processes is very apparent in many of the studies. So, for example, T. Champion talks of the strain on subsistence resources in late second-millennium BC Germany:

The particular strategy adopted to meet this strain was to minimise risk and provide a buffer against subsistence failure. This required increased levels of managerial control internally and of exchange relations externally, and had an inbuilt predisposition towards growth.

(P. 65)

So the different parts of the system - production, ranking, exchange, ritual - interact coherently in a whole adapted to its particular environment. The task of archaeological explanation has become that of describing the workings of such systems which are held to account for patterning in the archaeological record. Analysis of ranking is reduced to tracing the development of complexity.

This emphasis on descriptive process is in accordance with the structure of the whole book - the attempt to develop a coherent narrative of the emergence of hierarchical structure: appearance of salient ranking; discussion of the resource base of early states and post-collapse resurgence, the first millennium BC and post-Roman dark ages. This background narrative to the individual studies is foregrounded in the editorial introductions to each section. The relations of this project to neo-evolutionary theory are also clear in the functionalist frame of reference adopted and the use of cross-cultural comparison associated with the identification of particular instances of general processes claimed to have universal relevance (Halstead and O'Shea, p. 98; Renfrew, p. 91). Hence it is possible to reduce several thousand years of prehistory essentially to the particular manifestations of the two processes outlined above.

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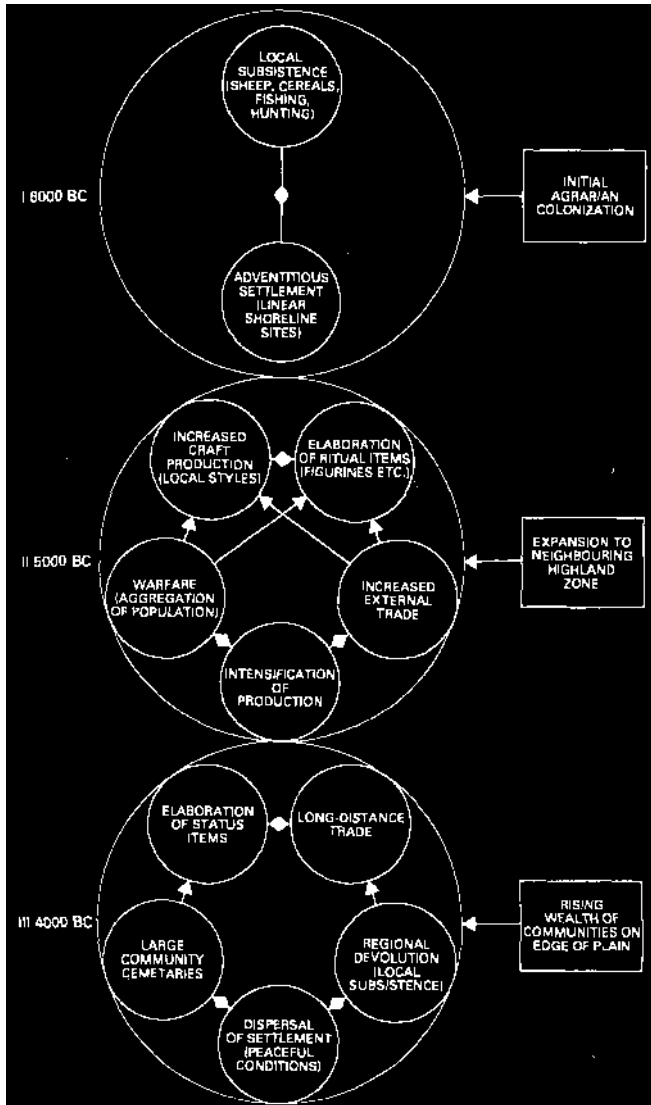


FIGURE 2.2 Sherratt's social model for the Great Hungarian Plain 6000-3500BC

Notes: Rectangles represent external factors.

Source: From Renfrew and Shennan (eds), (1982). Reprinted by permission of Cambridge University Press.

The separation of process and its manifestation in the archaeological record relates to the separation of theory and data, the general and the particular, a separation which is frequently duplicated in the structure of the essays themselves: general points followed by empirical illustration. However, a more serious criticism must be the lack of theorization of archaeology's primary data - material culture. Identified patterning in material culture is conceived as an immediate expression of social process; it is not (see chapter 4).

Peer Polity Interaction

The effects of the simple descriptive basis of much processual archaeology are very evident in the recent volume, *Peer Polity Interaction and Socio-Political Change* (Renfrew and Cherry (eds), 1986). The concept of peer polity interaction refers to a series of empirical observations which have been noted to occur together in several instances. They are: (1) polities occur in regional clusters; (2) organizational changes occur not singly within these clusters but in more than one polity at about the same time; (3) changes in, for example, conceptual systems for the communication of information in artefacts associated with high status and in ritual activities occur together and seem to be attributable to no single locus of innovation (Renfrew, pp. 7-8). It is proposed that the changes are the result of interaction between autonomous polities within a single geographical region. These interactions include competition; warfare and competitive emulation; symbolic entrainment (adoption of a more developed symbolic system upon contact with a less developed one); transmission of information; and exchange of goods. The book consists of a series of illustrations of these generalizations and processes in Aegean city-states, Minoan palaces, complex chiefdoms in the European Iron age, Classic Mayan centres, the Midwestern Hopewell, USA.

The concept of peer polity interaction usefully emphasizes societal interaction and complex processes of transformation rather than synchronic analyses of the workings of a single polity. Attention is also drawn to interactions which might be termed symbolic or stylistic. However, as with the systems approach, there is the very real problem of defining the units of interest - here peer polities. Such a concept is clearly much easier to apply to early civilizations with literary evidence available (Cherry and Renfrew, pp. 150-1; Champion and Champion, p. 63). Elsewhere there is the usual reliance on social typologies. Again the descriptive nature of

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the concept is evident, leaving untheorized so much of the social logic of the phenomenon, in particular the role of material culture. Renfrew and Cherry clearly think that peer polity interaction allows consideration of the symbolic and the stylistic as well as the economic and technological in a processual rather than an 'idealist' context (p. viii). But the recurring assumption is that symbolic entrainment, symbolic interaction, would be manifested as stylistic similarity or homogeneity. We have already commented that the relation of material culture to the social is not such a simple matter. We might agree with Sabloff: 'we must be able to tie the interactions of the hypothesized peers to specific features of the archaeological record' (p. 116).

Analysis of mortuary practices

The pioneering work of Saxe (1970) and Binford (1972a) opened up the analysis of mortuary practices as a primary means of investigating past social systems. They developed the general argument that mortuary practices need to be analysed in the context of variations in types of society and social complexity. In his paper Binford argued that:

We would expect that other things being equal, the heterogeneity in mortuary practice which is characteristic of a single sociocultural unit would vary directly with the complexity of the status hierarchy, as well as with the complexity of the overall organization of the society with regard to membership units and other forms of sodalities.

(1972a, pp. 221-2)

It is proposed that there are two general components of the social situation to be evaluated . . . First is what we may call, with Goodenough (1965, p. 7) the *social persona* of the deceased. This is a composite of the social identities maintained in life and recognized as appropriate for consideration at death. Second is the composition and size of the social unit recognizing status responsibilities to the deceased. We would expect direct correlations between the relative rank of the social position held by the deceased and the number of persons having duty-status relationships vis-a-vis the deceased.

(Ibid., pp. 225-6)

According to Binford, the main features which archaeologists may be able to detect with regard to prehistoric social organization from

an analysis of mortuary practices are: (1) the type of organization present, whether or not it was essentially egalitarian or stratified, whether or not the presence of distinct and/or competing corporate groups is indicated; (2) the complexity of past social systems or, in other words, how much structural differentiation there appears to be. The main dimensions of social persona or roles which might be recognized are age, sex, social affiliation and position as well as, in certain cases, the conditions and locations of death.

The volume, *The Archaeology of Death* (Chapman, Kinnes and Randsborg (eds), 1981), fleshes out this position and succinctly summarizes the theoretical position developed in the archaeological literature at the outset of the 1980s. As Chapman, Randsborg and Brown comment, effort has predominantly gone into analysing the variety within the mortuary practices of a particular social unit in attempting to identify social ranking. Attention has thus focused on the range of artefacts deposited with the dead, assuming that certain artefacts will symbolize social status (e.g. S. E. Shennan, 1975). Effort expenditure on the treatment of the deceased has also been proposed as a key variable: greater expenditure correlating with higher rank (e.g. Tainter, 1975, 1977, 1978). Other analyses have considered the demographic structure of skeletal populations searching for physical indications of social difference (e.g. Buikstra, 1981). Analyses of mortuary practices have relied heavily on the utilization of a range of statistical techniques, many computer based, ranging from simple tests of statistical significance to multivariate techniques such as cluster analysis and principal components analysis.

The general strategy in such studies is the identification of pattern and its correlation with social complexity. Questions asked of the data include: do certain artefacts regularly occur with others in individual graves, or with sex or a particular age set of the burial population; are certain burials orientated in a particular direction as opposed to others; to what extent is the arrangement of burials in a cemetery random or regularly patterned; how does the spatial organization of burials differ within and between cemeteries; what are the demographic parameters of deceased populations and what symbolic dimensions (e.g. use of burial monuments as territorial markers) might be inferred. Attention has also centred on the arrangement of artefacts in graves and attempts to calculate measures of effort expenditure. Such work has drawn heavily on cross-cultural ethnographic 'tests' or surveys, with attempts being made to set up more or less directly deterministic links, or 'behavioural correlates' between people, resources, and mortuary

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practices. These surveys are of dubious value and can hardly be considered to vindicate the overall approach. A correlation is a very different thing from an explanation, and there is no reason to suppose that ethnographically documented cases of mortuary practices provide a representative sample of forms of prehistoric social organization.

There has been increasing awareness of the complexity that might be encountered and a call has been made for investigation of processes of the formation of the archaeological record, processes which may complicate the expression of social organization in mortuary practices (O'Shea, 1981, 1984). In his study of 5 Plains Indian cemeteries O'Shea reaffirms the direct expression of social organization in burial practices but focuses on the additional relationship between the practices and their archaeological observation. It has also been noted that status need not be directly reflected in burial but may be suppressed as a form of ideology (Chapman and Randsborg, 1981, p. 14). However, rather than directing attention to the need to theorize such aspects of material culture they have been conceived primarily as just adding further complexity, distortion to be counteracted in the derivation of social pattern from the patterning of mortuary practices: 'what matters here is that the archaeologist evaluates the degree to which the mortuary data do reflect the social structure by means of complementary data (e.g. settlements and settlement patterns, metal hoards etc.)' (Chapman and Randsborg, 1981, p. 14).

The entire theoretical perspective on which this work is based draws heavily on structural-functionalist and role theory, as developed in anthropology and sociology (Firth, 1971; Dahrendorf, 1968; Merton, 1957; Nadel, 1957; Radcliffe-Brown, 1952). However, the theoretical basis of this work remains scantily discussed. In the *Archaeology of Death* volume discussion of the theoretical basis underlying the archaeological approaches and analyses is virtually absent, apart from a few passing references to the work of Goodenough. Within the perspective offered in this book the notion of social structure implicitly employed is more or less equivalent to pattern. Significantly, the concept does not even appear in the index. Social structure (referred to in processual archaeology predominantly in terms of ranking) is considered to reside in the network of patterns of interactions between individual agents, arising either from an analysis of empirically given realities in social life, or abstractions based on these, such as the notion of social persona or role. Such a conception is directly analogous to that of anatomical pattern in biology, where the skeleton and

organs may be held to provide a physical support for the body. Radcliffe-Brown considered social structures in terms of three basic problems: What kinds of structures are there and how best may we categorize them? How do they function and maintain themselves? How are the structures of different form constituted? For him, the basic unit of structure was the 'elementary family' from which other structural relations or kin ties could be deduced (1952, pp. 178-80). In role theory a number of different roles forming an actor's social persona are held to be enacted in different situations, with the roles changing according to whether they have been ascribed or achieved, and in terms of temporal enactment and context. Various roles may be acted out by any one person (e.g. a bank manager may also be a father and a Conservative Party official).

In any role system there may be various degrees of role summation, coherence, dependence or independence, within society or with regard to other roles. Such a theory provides an implausible and deterministic model of the relationships between individuals and groups. As Giddens notes, 'the actors only perform according to scripts which have already been written out for them' (1976, p. 16). A person's role is regarded as given rather than negotiated and renegotiated in practice. Actors merely slot into a number of prescribed roles and act in conformity with them. But it is people and not roles that actually constitute society. A serious debilitating effect of this conception of social structure adopted in processual archaeology is that it lacks any explanatory significance. Conceptions of role, social persona, or social structure only have significance as redescriptions of the archaeological evidence, they are not explanatory. Function, rather than structure, plays the explanatory role as human society can exist only in its activity; but as we have argued, the specification of function is yet another form of redescription of social practices and similarly remains non-explanatory. The possibility that underlying principles of social conduct exist in social forms, not directly discernible in terms of perceived social relationships or roles, does not exist within the framework of processual archaeology (cf. the consideration of social structure below and in chapter 3). This lack may go some way to affording an understanding of its predominantly descriptive emphasis and lack of explanatory content.

Marxist archaeologies

From an explicitly Marxist outlook, Rowlands in his later work (1982, 1984a) has outlined an alternative programme for a social

archaeology. With Gledhill (Gledhill and Rowlands, 1982, pp. 162-4) he has proposed a conception of the social totality which differs markedly from the mechanical interactions of a systemic perspective, or the largely untheorized concepts of 'society' used in traditional archaeological narrative. Avoiding the formalism of Althusser's conception of the social formation with its determinate levels of economic base and superstructure and ultimate economic determinism and functionalism (see chapter 6), Rowlands has emphasized the necessity of theorizing total social systems with no implied hierarchy of determination:

theorising about long term socio-economic change in prehistory involves us in the construction of models of total social systems in which ideological, political and economic processes are linked to each other in a dialectical interplay rather than as determinate levels in a social formation.

(Gledhill and Rowlands, 1982, p. 145)

But rather than an indeterminate interplay of relations Rowlands gives weight to the political:

History, in a concrete sense, emerges as the resolution of continuous antagonisms existing between social subjects. What defines the social whole, therefore, is the form of political articulation that constitutes the totality of social relations . . . it has no particular locus (in the state, for example)... It follows that politics is not definable in any institutional form but refers more generally to power struggle and to the idioms, symbols, and other means used to define relative status and position.

(Rowlands, 1982, p. 167)

We shall take up these points in more detail below (pp. 57-60; 72-8). Rowlands has also raised the issue of the boundaries of units of analysis. First, in advocating world systems analysis, inter-societal exchange and interdependency, involving especially the development of core and periphery areas (e.g. Frankenstein and Rowlands, 1978). So,

The distinction between 'internal' and 'external' relationships is therefore only a viable one in a limited sense. At given moments of time, existing societies can be linked together in new ways, and the results of this linking are not predictable without understanding how this change in external conditions of reproduction bears on internal structures.

(Gledhill and Rowlands, 1982, p. 148)

Secondly, Rowlands points to the analytical process of classification and categorization. So the notion of society 'forms a category only because archaeologists classify it as such, as part of the taxonomic space within which they operate and as part of the definition of their own discipline' (Rowlands, 1982, p. 164). Ultimately notions of society relate to the emergence of nation-states in Western Europe in recent times (ibid.) He also emphasizes the importance of analysis of contradiction within social forms or totalities - the internal generation of processes of transformation. This is associated with a call for a genuine theory of history 'centred on social dynamics and transformation processes' (Gledhill and Rowlands, 1982, p. 14S), a denial of the opposition between the synchronic and the diachronic found in systems theory and functionalist archaeology more generally.

Rowlands stresses the materiality of the political and the ideological and, therefore, that both are written into the archaeological record. The dialectical conception of social relations and social totalities advanced (as opposed to mechanical articulation) means, for example, that the economic and socio-political cannot be separated. It also means that the conception of totality is inseparable from its place in analysis. In Rowlands' words:

Analysis proceeds from the abstraction of the whole to that of its parts and back to the whole again and from the abstract to the concrete at each of these levels. Such a view is always partial in the sense that some things are always left out, and the whole may or may not correspond to what may be isolated empirically as a concrete 'society'. The totality is therefore a conceptual entity that has reality only in the sense that it forms a mental appropriation of a real world that exists separate from thought process. In this sense, population, society, or a mode of subsistence could all be totalities and abstractions at the same moment, the validity of their application depending on how they relate to each other in the analysis of concrete situations.

(Rowlands, 1982, p. 163)

This forms part of Rowlands' rejection of the categorical opposition between materialism and idealism, facts and values, the objective and the subjective, and the concept of reality (Rowlands, 1984a), replacing these with a recognition of the active intellectual production of the past, with a critical awareness of the insertion of archaeological categorization and theorization within a Western political and intellectual context. This is, of course, in accordance with his conception of the political.

SOCIAL ARCHAEOLOGY

It will be clear from the discussions which follow in this book, and elsewhere (Tilley, 1982; Shanks and Tilley, 1982; Miller and Tilley, 1984a, 1984b; Tilley, 1984, 1985; Shanks and Tilley, 1987), that we fully endorse Rowlands' programmatic statements concerning a true 'social archaeology'. However, we must reserve criticism for the specific form of the development of models of general processes of social transformation (Friedman and Rowlands, 1978) (see chapter 6).

Those archaeologists drawing inspiration in particular from recent Marxist anthropology (see Spriggs (ed.), 1984, for a bibliography) have made significant advances over competing social archaeologies. They have produced more sophisticated conceptualization of social totalities, extending consideration of the political and ideological issues of legitimation from a narrower focus on subsistence adaptation and interactions between technologies, environment and population found in processual functionalist archaeology (see above). However, most of Rowlands' aims for a Marxist social archaeology have unfortunately not yet been achieved.

Consider, for example, Parker Pearson's work on the early Iron Age of Denmark (1984a, 1984b); He makes a series of reasonable abstract statements about the implications of a Marxist archaeology:

- 1 Marxist theory has practical (political) implications.
- 2 Central to social analysis are conceptions of contradiction and conflict.
- 3 The role of ideology of articulating action and belief is another key concept requiring theorization and analysis (1984, pp. 60-3).
- 4 This last point implies that artefacts cannot simply be categorized according to economic, social or ideological criteria: a hoe may be as ideological as a law code.
- 5 Institutions may embody the social, economic and ideological; the economy conversely may be considered religious or ideological practice. (1984b, p. 71)

However, this theorizing appears quite separate from its application to the Iron Age of Denmark. In fact, what is 'applied' to the data is Friedman's model of social change among the Kachin of Burma (Friedman, 1975, based on Leach, 1954). Parker Pearson correlates and compares patterning in conventional classes of data in prehistoric Denmark (burial, votive and settlement evidence),

tracing the supposed expressions of Friedman's transformational cycles leading to the emergence of states. He claims that his study has attempted to outline one way of transforming material remains into social insights (1984a, p. 69). This involves a consideration of legitimation - conspicuous consumption, manipulation of ancestors and consciousness of social identity in ritual practices. So Parker Pearson produces some interesting comments on the possible relations between the living, the dead, ancestors, gods, tradition and spiritual sanctioning (1984a, p. 64). But the relation of material culture to practice is predominantly, for him, one of exemplification or expression. The particularity and detail of votive deposits, grave goods, bronze forms, pot designs, are simply absorbed into the general model.

Parker Pearson fits together a coherent social logic of transformation, one of competitive aristocracies, inflationary spirals, appropriation of surplus production and its legitimation (1984, p. 89). The only significant difference between this and the processual archaeologies outlined above is its emphasis on relations of production, their structuring effects on the social totality, and their ideological legitimation. However, this consideration of ideology needs to be taken much further (see chapter 3 below).

The reduction of vital insights and principles of Marxist theory to the status, of just another approach to be applied to archaeological data is even more clear in Kristiansen's work on prehistoric Denmark (1984). Marxist theory is to supply an evolutionary and systemic explanatory superstructure able to cope with all forms of archaeological data (1984, pp. 74-5). For Kristiansen, in effect, Marxism simply provides different boxes and connecting arrows (figure 2.3). The real strength of approaches derived from structural Marxist anthropology lies in the attempt to overcome a functionalist separation and reification of religion, politics, economics etc. as separate interacting subsystems. However, in practice, in the process of writing an account of the past, this seems to have made very little difference, hence the frequently adopted economic models and 'applications'. Kristiansen places great emphasis on the distinction between cultural form and material function. Basically this amounts to saying that it is necessary to consider the material function of cultural manifestations: so Kristiansen regards megalithic monuments as an extension of the organization of production; this is their material function (pp. 80-1). Religion may have an economic role (p. 76). This highlights ideological legitimation: cultural form may have a legitimating (ideological) material function. This, of course, gives

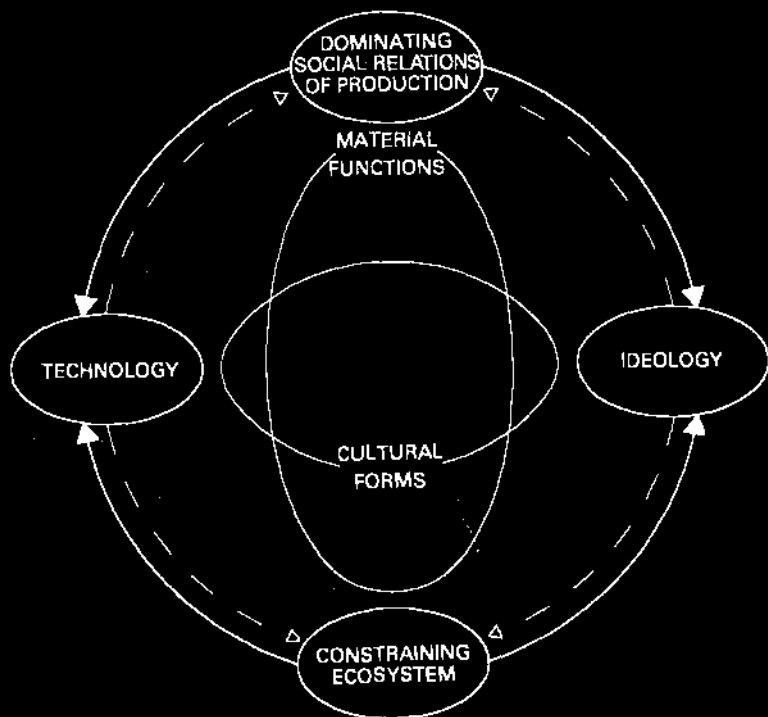


FIGURE 2.3 Kristiansen's 'Basic theoretical concepts' for the analysis of the social formation

Notes: The solid lines represent selective pressure; the broken lines represent adaptive response.

Source: From K. Kristiansen (1984). Reprinted by permission of Cambridge University Press.

primacy to the social relations of production - that which needs legitimation. For Kristiansen ideology thus becomes a 'subjective' representation of the 'objective' - that which pertains to the social relations of production (settlement, subsistence, technology) (p. 78).

A functionalist logic and economism are quite evident here. Kristiansen proceeds to apply his general social model to the data, assuming the well-worn distinction between territorial megalithic chiefdoms and segmentary tribes of the Battle-Axe culture (social typologies again) (p. 77). It turns out that these represent an 'agricultural' as opposed to a 'pastoral' tribal economy (p. 85). This, apparently, is the essence of 1,200 years of Danish prehistory. The different categories of data are mobilized around this distinction, described as 'very different cultural manifestations of

rather similar material functions of production' (p. 77); that is both belong to the category of tribal economy.

As with the processual social archaeologies, Parker Pearson and Kristiansen present us with a complex and often ingenious and imaginative interplay of social process involving more or fewer institutional categories such as economy, ritual, technology, ideology. This interplay is held to account for patterning identified in the archaeological record.

SOCIAL ARCHAEOLOGY: A SUMMARY

While we acknowledge that the developments in conceptions of the social advances in archaeology since the early 1960s represent an immense theoretical improvement *vis a vis* traditional archaeology, we wish to follow Hodder (1982a, 1982b, 1985, 1986) in his summary critique of social archaeology. Hodder draws the fundamental distinction between social system and structure. System refers to the patterning and organization of social relationships; structure refers to the rules and concepts which give meaning to system. He argues that social archaeologies have been almost entirely concerned with the workings of social systems. This focus on system has several aspects and implications:

1 The concept of system emphasizes relations of power (dependence and authority and hierarchy, the movement and control of resources), exchange and trade, the character and control of subsistence, and in Marxist-influenced work strategies of ideological legitimation.

2 This conception of the social has been mobilized in archaeology as research strategies of the recognition and description of pattern. This has involved classification and ordering of artefacts according to their attributes, definition of types and styles, and correlation with other features of system; analysis of artefact distributions for possible correlations with social groups, activities, exchange networks; site locational analysis, searching for site hierarchies; analysis of the patterning of mortuary remains for correlation with original social context; societal categorization - the description of the past in terms of bands, tribes etc., its degrees of complexity; the description of subsistence strategies. These research aims have provided justification for the utilization of a wide range of statistical and mathematical techniques (e.g. Hodder and Orton, 1976; Doran and Hodson, 1975).

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3 In its descriptive emphasis the focus is on what people do (although Marxist archaeologists may also focus on the structuring effects of social relations of production). The recognition of system (not necessarily implying the explicit adoption of a systems theory framework) is the recognition of regularized patterns of behaviours. There is little or no theorizing of social *action*, the intentional and meaningful practice of knowledgeable social actors.

4 The focus on *behaviour* rather than social *action* reduces material culture to an epiphenomenon of the social relations within which it is inserted - a product of social behaviour; a material resource to be controlled, exchanged; a sign of social interaction or difference; or a technology mediating population and environment. Hence the relative lack of theorization of material culture.

5 The descriptive emphasis involving behaviours rather than social action and reduction of material culture to epiphenomenon allows the fragmentation of theory. Economy may be theorized separately from ritual because it refers to different sets of behaviours (compare the outline of archaeological theory at the beginning of chapter 1).

6 The reduction of material culture to epiphenomenon also allows the development of levels of theory. Binford's 'middle-range theory' (1977, 1983, chs 17, 23-5, 28), as opposed to high-level social theory, depends on it being possible to predict artefact deposition without reference to social process.

7 The aim of processual archaeology is the specification of relations between variables such as subsistence, environment, technology, social ranking. These variables are the regularized patterns of behaviours just mentioned. Hence such social archaeologies can often be reduced to synoptic diagrams of social process: boxes and arrows, flow diagrams such as those illustrated above. A function of the emphasis on description, this reifies the variables and relations. There is little questioning of the meaning of the variables which remain essentially arbitrary: why subsistence, technology, ideology, rather than another categorization? There is a lack of theorization of the location of these variables in the *practice* of archaeological analysis. Usually their choice depends simply on the acceptance that the variables are analytical.

8 These variables are defined prior to analysis and, as just mentioned, are reified categories. This permits and encourages cross-cultural comparison and generalization. But historical particularity then becomes a problem: why any particular subsistence strategy?

9 The emphasis on description of system as relations between variables of patterned behaviours results in a radical occlusion of the individual. The individual social actor is reduced to a support (theoretically absent) for the patterns of behaviours or becomes aggregated into just another variable - population.

10 A specification of the relations between variables, the working of the system, and its correlation with, or identification in, archaeological data is held to constitute an explanation. This is often implicitly or explicitly functionalist: a variable is held to be explained if it functions in the working of a whole. But this singularly fails to explain anything about the particularity of any variable. Again: *why* this subsistence strategy, this form of burial rather than another? Function is not an explanatory concept when applied to the social; it remains descriptive. Function also tends to be separated out from style which then becomes a problem: why this pot design rather than another? (See chapter 4.)

11 The other problems of functionalism are also present; concepts such as homeostatis or adaptation mean that change becomes a problem originating necessarily in dysfunction or alteration of parameters external to the system, in the society-environment relation. This separates statics and dynamics: specification of the workings of a system is separated from processes of change.

12 Processual social archaeologies have treated the theorization of social totality as an issue of definition or specification. The problem of social units and their boundaries and interaction has been recognized with the development of concepts of world system and peer polity interaction. However, there has been little theorization of the structuring of the totality: what structures the whole; what is the meaning of the particular relations between the constituent variables and the wider question of the meaning of categories such as band, chiefdom; and theorization of societal boundaries.

13 Social change tends to be conceived purely descriptively as the empirical rearrangement of the variables of patterned behaviours. In that these variables are reified and defined prior to analysis, neo-evolutionary cross-cultural frameworks of cultural change are facilitated. These are extensively criticized in chapter 6. We simply comment here that the particularity of the historical event and context becomes a problem, occluded in the description of social process.

Hodder has stressed the necessity of considering social structure - the context of meanings of any social act; the generative rules

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which form structured sets. A question such as why one subsistence strategy existed in a particular social totality rather than another, equally 'adaptive', can only be answered by considering the meaningful context of the subsistence strategy, the rules which generate any particular social action - this is the question of structure (cf. the notion of structure adopted in processual archaeology in the analysis of mortuary practices discussed above). It is necessary to consider the meaning context and structure of, for example, a particular system of ranking or a particular subsistence strategy, not least because 'behind the social system is a structure of meaning which determines the relationship between material culture and society' (Hodder, 1982b, p. 153). As archaeologists we are concerned with how social system extends into material culture; this requires a theorization of material culture which must take structure into account. We take up the concept of structure in more detail in chapter 3 and consider it in relation to material culture in chapter 4.

SOCIAL ARCHAEOLOGY AND A LOGIC OF NECESSITY

In extending our critique of social archaeology we now take up some ideas developed by Laclau and Mouffe (1985) and consider two assumptions which lie behind most social archaeology:

- 1 That the social constitutes an intelligible totality, conceptually explicable and definable (in whatever senses).
- 2 That the history of society has a rational substratum (this is, of course, the rationale for evolutionary archaeology of whatever sort).

We argue that both of these assumptions involve a *logic of necessity*. Key elements of 'society' or the social totality are defined in the abstract and related by some form of social logic: descriptive, cybernetic, economic, functionalist etc. These elements become the metasubject of History. The concrete, the particular is subsumed beneath the abstract categories; the mass of data is brought to order, classified, reduced to its essentials.

There are two basic arguments in this process:

- 1 An argument from appearance: surface appearances, differences can be *reduced* to identity.

- 2 An argument from contingency: if surface data or differences cannot be easily incorporated into a category, they do not matter, or at the very least are irrelevant, contingent to the social model being used.

A logic of necessity defines the necessary categories, the necessary character and relations of elements of the social. It specifies which things are necessary for society to be society. A logic of necessity involves a research strategy of *recognition* - recognizing pattern in the data which relates to elements or categories or concepts defined and related in the assumed social model. Pattern becomes an emanation of the pre-defined and eternal *essential*: what necessarily constitutes the social totality. History and the social totality are conceived as having essences, essential features, which operate as their principle of unity. They have something in common: the essential, the necessary. History itself is ordered according to processes of selection (of that which supposedly pertains to its essential meaning), incorporation into general abstract and necessary categories, and exclusion of that which is deemed irrelevant. History is brought to order. Everything is to be accounted for, whether in terms of incorporation or exclusion, conceived as representing the necessary or the contingent. So the *telos* of a logic of necessity is totality: everything in its place. Selection, incorporation and exclusion thus become a legal system behind the order; they represent reason's pretension to legislate and control history, bringing order to an anarchy of dispersed particularity and difference.

Consider Bradley's book, *The Social Foundations of Prehistoric Britain* (1984). This is a thematic synopsis. It brings the mass of data to order through the literal application of models drawn from anthropology and anthropologically informed archaeology. Each chapter takes a theme as a means of explaining a particular stretch of chronology. Hence in chapter 2, entitled 'Constructions of the dead', scenarios are sketched for the period 3500-2500 BC involving the possible relation of farming communities to economic resources and ancestors and focusing on the construction of communal tombs. Test implications are drawn (how to recognize each scenario or model); then the patterning in the data is assessed against the model. It is, again, a search for empirical patterning directly representing social process. But there is a remainder to Bradley's effort: variety. He comments: 'within the general framework suggested here [chapter 7: a general synthesis], there are numerous variants... I doubt whether this book has come to terms

with the sheer complexity of the evidence' (p. 166). The range of explanatory models appearing in the book are very limited: prestige goods economies (some with core/periphery distinction); ritual in agricultural society; conspicuous consumption. Bradley ends up with three cycles of prestige goods economies explaining 4,500 years of prehistory in Britain.

But what happens to all the detail? It is all subsumed? Does it simply support the models? Will there always be this remainder? This contingency? The irrelevancy of so much detail? One answer offered to this problem is that of pluralism. It is accepted that different archaeological approaches emphasize or select different aspects of the data base. So subsistence studies supplement social evolutionary work supplemented by palaeoenvironmental studies (e.g. Rowley-Conwy, 1986, p. 28). Such pluralism is considered healthy, fostering debate, adding to the richness of archaeology as a discipline (Renfrew, 1982, 1983) and covering a wide variety of aspects of the archaeological past.

However, the different approaches may well imply different totalities conceived as explanatory context for archaeological data: for example, the ecosystem for palaeoeconomy as opposed to social formation for Marxist archaeologists. How are these different totalities to be reconciled? One answer has been the search for a metasystem, a totality, theoretical or substantive, which can incorporate all approaches. Clarke's project of an analytical archaeology (1968; cf. 1973) can be viewed as such a totalizing systematics. More recently, Kristiansen (1984, p. 74) has claimed that Marxism (or, at least, his version of it) provides an integrative framework which supposedly incorporates all archaeological aspirations (for him a systemic and evolutionary outlook). On the other hand, we have already argued that any approach may be deemed to be acceptable so long as it conforms to the canons of what is presupposed to be rational method (see chapter 1). Hence different approaches are simply irreconcilable; their sole unity is simply that they have been used by those individuals who label themselves archaeologists.

None of these answers challenge a logic of necessity. The result is as we described in chapter 1: archaeology labouring under an extraordinary redundancy of detail, so much apparently irrelevant particularity, theoretically fragmented, a labyrinth of borrowed approaches and levels of theory.

We have described a logic of necessity as involving a set of categorical oppositions:

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Totality	Fragment
Necessity	Contingency
Essence	Appearance
General	Particular
Abstract	Concrete
Identity	Difference
Incorporation	Dispersal
Legality	Anarchy

The left hand column is given priority over the right. Ultimately this relates to the general conception of the archaeological record (mentioned at the beginning of this chapter) which involves an occlusion of the individual; social actors are conceived as essentially lost in comparison to the social unit or whole of which they were a part. The social whole is thus split, theoretically and substantively, from the individual. As in chapter 1, we shall use the strategy of mediation as a way forward. First, we shall outline a logic of contingency, and then in the next chapter present a theory of the individual and social practice.

A LOGIC OF CONTINGENCY

We argue that 'Society', in the sense of the social totality of a logic of necessity, doesn't exist. There can be no general and abstract categories nor systems of logic which coherently represent social totalities or history. Nothing exists in itself, self-identical, a full presence to itself in a relationship of total interiority. Such existence is by definition transcendental; so involving a metaphysical assumption, an appeal to foundational legislative authority, *substantia*, the Cartesian *cogito*, a legal system (such as rational method), a logic of essences. There is no ultimate literality, literal existence, objective substance, 'society', from which artefacts, social relations etc. can be derived; there are no identities fixed for all time. It is therefore not possible to specify society as the object of archaeology (Rowlands had made this point in advocating 'world systems', stressing the problem of the edges of 'society'; cf. also Giddens, 1981, pp, 23, 82-3, on societal space-time edges). Instead, we wish to stress internal relations (relations which have no existence separate from the entities they relate, being part of those entities). On the question of identity - the identity of anything does not consist of a list of attributes (to what would they belong?), but

must be referred to a relational order. As we argued in chapter 1, identity presupposes a relation of difference to something else. Identity is differential, depending on systems of difference, relational sequences. Identity is always incomplete, never final because of the potential infinity of relations of difference. There is always a surplus of meaning because the presence or trace of some things in others (their internal relations) prevents total fixation, prevents meaning being pinned precisely down. And that identity is regularity in a relational system presupposes a practice of establishing order. Identities are established in practice. All this means that every identity - social, conceptual or material - is negotiated in practice. This act of negotiation is a political practice.

To adopt such a position is to assert that the social is open. Social *order* is an achievement of practice, it is a domestication of difference, a political project of creating order, fixing identity, cutting down the surplus of meaning. 'Society' is not a datum, an abstract given, but a construction. Hence 'necessity', as we have used the term, doesn't refer to underlying principles or essences (that which is necessary for 'society' to be 'society'), but refers to a practice of fixing contingency. This is also to accept *over-determination* (Althusser's use of the term) of entities - the 'economic' may be overdetermined by the 'religious' because the economic has no essential identity, no automatic necessity, its meaning is established in social practice.

At this point it is instructive to consider another 'remainder' in Bradley's book (1984): the series of epigraphs heading the chapters. What is their purpose? Entertainment? They appear unnecessary, contingent; some seem to be held to convey eternal truths about the human lot, but none are discussed or taken up in detail. The epigraphs punctuate the text, punctuate history. As literary devices, they are a presence of textuality. They draw attention to the book as text; but textuality, discourse, is an absent theoretical presence in Bradley's synopsis. Bradley's discourse is one of plenitude - compilation, the filling out of a theme, a position. The text fills a gap. Its presence presents the past; it conveys the past more or less transparently; language is conceived as a neutral vehicle to present the past. That discourse itself is an event is eclipsed (existing only in the gaps, at the margins - in Bradley's epigraphs). But, as we have stressed, we write archaeology now. Discourse is not identical with the past; concepts are not identical with the past. It is essential to realize this. There is no necessity about doing archaeology or writing archaeological texts; archaeological discourse is a contemporary event, not abstract plenitude. Knowledge is not a

recognition of the eternal (as implied in a logic of necessity) but is fundamentally part of contemporary social practice, rooted therefore in political relations of power.

We can now draw some points together:

1 We argue against social archaeologies which are reductionist or essentialist, reducing the particular to an abstract social logic, to a priori categories, defining and searching for essential features of society and history.

2 This means there can be no hierarchy of determination: for example, that the economic, or more general relations between population and environment, determine the general form and trajectory of society as opposed to other institutional forms such as the 'political' or the 'religious'.

3 Concomitantly, there are no universal series of social units, such as band, tribe, lineage, mode of production, available for use in archaeological analysis. Such over-generalised concepts need to be abandoned.

4 We wish to stress not a better definition of 'society' as a layer cake or flow diagram, but rather the construction and constitution of social order in social practice. The social is an overdetermined relational whole, an open field of relations, an indeterminate articulation. Social order is constituted in the practice of individual social actors which relates to historical context, not an abstract universal pattern. This is to stress the primacy of the political: practical negotiation, strategy and power in the structuring of social reality.

5 A corollary of the fourth point is the need to stress the practical constitution of the past in the discipline of archaeology. Archaeology is a discursive event; its practice is a mediation of archaeological subject and object, present and past. Neither can be reduced to the other. The archaeological object cannot be precisely and conceptually captured. Past and present can only be held together in their difference, in their non-identity in the event of interpretation. Rather than a totalizing systematics of precise self-contained concepts, this requires a different and critical set of concepts themselves rooted in the event of interpretation. For example, 'totality' is not to be regarded as an affirmative, but as a critical category - the idea of critique finds its roots in the Greek *krinein*: to separate, distinguish, judge, condemn, contend, struggle. This is to affirm the importance of polemic; only polemically, we might also say politically and rhetorically, does reason present itself as a total reality. Hence a total system is a political project of fixing

everything in place, a legal system of control. In this sense we need to convict totality of non-identity with itself, to deny a totalizing systematics, the final solution to all archaeological ills. But at the same time material culture can only be understood through teasing out its relations with other entities, setting it within a relational whole, tracing its dispersal, its meaning within social practice.

6 We need also to appreciate the *materiality* of the archaeological object. The artefact is a material fragment, a riddle neither directly revealing nor concealing 'the past', 'society' or whatever category. Artefacts do not represent the past, they are not a property of the past. Artefacts signify. Signification requires reading, interpretation, not an application of 'method' which produces its object in advance. Consequently, there are no progressive stages through which analysis must pass, for example moving from the more general to the particular, or incorporating data in wider and wider scales of categories. We conceive interpretation as an act renouncing finality, as a denial of universal history, the idea of coherent unity and completed development. Interpretation is associated with a strategic knowledge (Shanks and Tilley, 1987, ch. 5), not abstracted from its social conditions of production, but polemically responding to specific conditions, attending to historical and political circumstances, a knowledge rooted in contemporary structures of power.

In the chapter that follows we present a set of concepts which we intend as a contribution to this programme of a critical social archaeology, beginning with the concept of the individual or the subject.