Archaeology and the Politics of Theory

It is not my fault if reality is Marxist
Sartre quoting Che Guevara
Humanity is by nature political being.
Aristotle, *Politics* 12533

Throughout this book we have been concerned to stress that archaeology is an active production of the past, an intellectual and cultural labour. Archaeology is *to be* situated in the present as discourse in a political field, and as a practice located in relation to structures of power. This has involved reference to the mediation of present and past, theory and data, abstract and concrete, epistemological subject and object in the practice of archaeology. By the term mediation we mean that there can be no radical separation and conclusive definition of these categories in themselves, nor can they be conceived as separate but interacting in some way; the categories are instead held together in a tension in determinate practices. In this chapter we wish to draw out the implications for archaeology of the proceeding discussions, and explore the major issues further. These concern the development of a critical archaeology.

THE EMERGENCE OF A CRITICALLY SELF-CONSCIOUS ARCHAEOLOGY

It has been argued that particular archaeologies reflect contemporary cultural concerns or categories. For example, Trigger has related theoretical changes in Anglo-American archaeology to the changing fortunes (according *to* him, 1960s optimism and 1970s pessimism) of the middle classes:

a sense of helplessness is ... emphasized by framing much of the discussion of evolutionary change in terms of general systems theory ... disillusionment about present day affairs has led many archaeologists to reject the view that cultural progress is inevitable or even desirable . . . What emerges is an eschatological materialism in which human consciousness plays no significant role.

(Trigger, 1981, p. 151)

In another paper Trigger (1984) has described archaeologies as being nationalist, colonialist or imperialist. Archaeology has been, and is still, important in the establishment of national identities. Colonial archaeologies denigrate non-Western societies to the status of static yet living museums from which the nature of the past might be inferred. Imperialist archaeologies (largely those developed in Britain and America) exert theoretical hegemony over research in the rest of the world through extensively engaging in research abroad, playing a major role in training either foreign students or those who subsequently obtain employment abroad, and in the dissemination of texts. The American expression of the new archaeology, advocating high-level generalization and a cross-cultural comparative perspective, 'asserts the unimportance of national traditions . . . and of anything that stands in the way of American economic activity and political influence' (Trigger, 1984, p. 366). At an even more general level, Friedman (1986) has inserted archaeology into what he claims to be world cycles of 'traditionalist-culturalist', 'modernist' and 'post-modernist' cultural identities or cosmologies.

There has been criticism of particular archaeologies as vulgar ideology: that they are distorted fabrications lending support to a system of 'false consciousness'. Kohl (1981, p. 92) has remarked on the connection between ideas of hyperdiffusionism (spread of the Aryan race) and fascism in the 1920s, while other work has focused on ideological distortion in museum presentations of the past (see below). More sophisticated ideology critique has focused on the philosophical and methodological assumptions that lie behind many archaeologies and that work ideologically. This may involve representing particular social or political interests as universal, misrepresenting crucial contradictions in society or theory, or reifying particular categories (assuming that they are natural, objective and concrete, rather than relating them to their social conditions of production). As we mentioned in chapter 1, Rowlands has questioned the validity of the idea of a prehistory of Europe (1984, p. 154) and criticized a prehistoric metanarrative of development of societies from 'simple' to 'complex' forms:

the meta-narrative of simple to complex is a dominant ideology that organises the writing of contemporary world pre-history in favour of a modernising ethos and the primacy of the West. That the political context of colonialism is its natural progenitor. That for these reasons, such constructions of history have formed the dominant ideologies of the metropolitan centres, although changing their content from British imperialism to American neo-evolutionary, multi-lineal trajectories of the Modernisation kind . . . claims to autonomy and independence have taken the form of cognitive apartheid. If the West isn't the only area that has states, cities, writing, rationality etc. you show that you have something similar that is either equivalent or better. A universal dialogue about the nature of universal humanity is sustained but now with a radical emphasis on difference and comparison.

(Rowlands, 1986, pp. 3-4)

Elsewhere (Shanks and Tilley, 1987, ch. 3; Tilley, 1985) we have extensively criticized theoretical perspectives advanced in the new archaeology as lending explicit or implicit support to the value systems of a capitalist society. For example, the projection of present-day economic values such as maximizing returns and minimizing costs to 'explain' resource utilization among prehistoric hunter-gatherers naturalizes what are historically and culturally specific values as universal features of humanity.

The notion that archaeology can be separated from current political events has been challenged: strongly held conceptions of academic freedom have recently come into question. This questioning of a virtually dominant ideology - that archaeology constitutes a neutral academic discipline and its practitioners should have scholarly freedom and disciplinary autonomy - has been precipitated by events surrounding the World Archaeological Congress of 1986. As a result of a ban on South African and Namibian participants by the British organizers, the UISPP (International Union of Prehistoric and Protohistoric Sciences) withdrew its official recognition of the Congress, and set up an alternative congress. Many archaeologists from the West withdrew as a result of the ban. This withdrawal, both of official recognition and of discontented individuals, was justified in the cause of academic freedom, the claimed infringement of the freedom of South African archaeologists to attend the Congress, and in the cause of keeping the pollution of politics out of archaeology. Shaw (1986) and Hodder (1986a) have drawn attention to the complexity of the issues and have effectively criticized a position which would uphold an abstracted, detached and reified value of 'academic freedom', however strong and evocative its connotations.

The domination of the UISPP, a supposedly internationally representative body, by unelected authority figures of European archaeology, brings up the issue of the relationships between an academic West and non-Western 'developing' countries in a post-colonial world capitalist economy. Rowlands (1986a), Sinclair (1986) and Ray (1986) have considered the issues of a decolonialized archaeology in non-Western countries. This was also a feature of many papers at the World Archaeology Congress. Sinclair notes that:

> Differences between development strategies which attempt to reproduce capitalist relations of production in the Third World and those which attempt to support economic and cultural disassociation from the capitalist system directly influence the context in which archaeological research is carried out. On the one hand, forms of archaeological practice based on neo-colonial dualistic conceptions of 'traditional' and 'modern' society can often result in a preservationist and academically exclusionist attitude to the remnants of 'traditional' society. On the other hand, the focus on the 'traditional' can also lead to biases emerging against the 'modern'. This differs markedly from a programme of research which seeks to recover and present archaeological data in a form relevant to the widespread extension of an historical consciousness as part of a non-capitalist development strategy.
>
> (1986, p. 81)

Another focus for discussion has been the relationship between archaeological research and minority interests. The distortions and political implications of archaeologies of the Native Americans (Trigger, 1980), Australian Aborigines (Langford, 1983; Ucko, 1983), Norwegian Saami (Olsen, 1986) and the black community in Britain (Belgrave, 1986), have been discussed. This, and other work, (e.g. Hall, 1984; Fawcett, 1986) has involved a consideration of the politics of ethnicity and the issue of nationalist archaeologies. Academic archaeology, as often as not, operates as part of a wider cultural discourse serving to reproduce the relationship between the dominant and the dominated.

The controversy surrounding the World Archaeology Congress highlighted the conventional relationship between archaeology and politics as entirely exterior, concerning government and educational policy, administration and funding, public archaeology and the 'rescue' and 'preservation' of the past, and what has come to be termed cultural resource management. Here again the dominant ideology emphasizes neutrality, consensus with regard to conservation goals, and the disinterested pursuit of

knowledge in the hands of professional administrators and academics: archaeology as a public service (cf. Cleere (ed.), 1984; Green (ed.), 1984). There has been a notable lack of critical reflection resulting in calls for archaeology to be explicitly marketed to an uneducated public (Macleod, 1977), and the specification of administrative and management strategies for max-imizing archaeological productivity (Stephenson, 1977). Such a perspective turns the past into the cultural capital of a supposedly enlightened elite, who then may disseminate it at will to a passive, and ultimately alienated, public (see Shanks and Tilley, 1987, Chs 1 and 3).

The relationship of archaeology to the present necessarily involves that between archaeology as an academic discipline and its wider societal context. Hodder has reported preliminary results of an attitude survey of what people think about archaeology. The results are not surprising: 'certain groups of people in contem-porary Britain know more about the past than others . . . these people have often had more education . . . often have higher valued jobs with more control over people and resources . . . are more likely to be male' (1986, p. 162). Popular representations of archaeology in books and magazines have also come under scrutiny. Gero and Root (1986), in an analysis of the *National Geographic Magazine,* illustrate the manner in which the past of 'exotic' countries becomes systematically incorporated into the American imperialist present, a conception involving an utterly materialistic and commodified conception of the past. The past is frequently enlivened by reference to contemporary categories and social relations, ultimately becoming homogenized and connected to the 'rise' of Western 'civilization'. Photographs of modern natives humanize the archaeological landscapes depicted, connecting past with present and offsetting the present-past of exotic countries with contemporary America. In the pages of the *National Geographic,* 'archaeology contributes to the rationalisation of imperialism, legitimating these activities with a congruent view of the past' (Gero and Root, 1986, p. 9).

Investigations have also been made of the major institutional relationship between the public and the discipline, the museum. Many criticisms have been made of distorted representations of the past (e.g. Leone, 1981, 1981a; Horne, 1984). Leone shows how the representation of Shaker society at the outdoor 'living-history' museum at Pleasant Hill, Lexington, Kentucky imposes the values of contemporary American capitalism. Efficiency, calculating rationality, industry, export, profit, innovation and inventive

ingenuity comprise the major organizing themes in the displays. That Shaker society was based on an utterly different set of values in which they laboured to avoid sin, rather than for profit and 'the only efficiency they knew was the kind. created between self-mortification and a hair shirt' (Leone, 1981a, p. 312) is almost entirely 'forgotten'. We have produced an extended ideology critique of the museum's aesthetic (see chapter 1; and Shanks and Tilley, 1987), concentrating on the way it produces its message in a number of individual museum exhibitions in Britain.

Finally, an important but surprisingly undeveloped focus in the emergence of a critically self-conscious archaeology is feminist archaeology, work that has raised the consciousness of the absence of women in archaeology, both conceptually in archaeological discourses and substantively in terms of a male-dominated pro-fession (Conkey and Spector, 1984; Gero, 1985).

Despite growing awareness of the relationship between archaeology and present-day national and global structures of power and social domination, a great deal of critical work in archaeology remains political but without any politics. For so many the relation between present context and archaeology as disciplinary practice is neutral. The purpose of critique is thus regarded as one of consciousness raising and the correction of bias. Ideology, a concept central to so much of this work, is often regarded as false consciousness to be expelled by enlightened reason. A view of ideology as false consciousness depends on the classical empiricist conception of knowledge. In such a view knowledge is to be derived from the subject's experience of an external object. The *telos* is a better version of the past, the inculcation of critical judgements. Another view underlying some of the studies is a notion of ideology as related to class or social position. This raises the question of why critique should be accepted. Might not the critique also be socially determined? If the epistemological issues are not considered the prospect is of infinite regress and relativism, each group having its own legitimate past.

Critique and contextual archaeology

Hodder has presented a critique of the concept ideology in proposing a 'contextual' archaeology. He objects to the cross-cultural connotations of the concept, that it may be taken to be a historical universal and consequently fail to account for historical particularity. He regards the concept as being incompatible with a view of social actors as knowledgeable, who are not necessarily

fooled by ideologies into a relation of false consciousness with regard to their social conditions of existence. He backs up this argument with the findings of public opinion surveys showing that people do not believe everything they are told about the past. Instead, Hodder argues all ideologies both mask and reveal: 'ideology can be socially active, revealing rather than masking, enabling rather than repressing' (1986a, p. 117). Here the concept of ideology is neutralized and depoliticized. It is simply regarded by Hodder as a 'world view' or conceptual structure, linked to knowledgeability on the part of social actors and power. This knowledgeability, according to him, allows the possibility of critical debate, and social change through social debate (ibid., p. 113). For Hodder, the solution to the problem of the verification of a critical theory which would criticize on the basis of the social and historical determination of truth and meaning is to abandon both the project and a conception of ideology as tied to the reproduction rather than the transformation of the social order.

As an alternative Hodder stresses a particular and determinant historical context within a structured cultural field produced by knowledgeable social actors. There remains the problem of relativism: if archaeological knowledges are contextual, with a sub-jective dimension, and tied to the negotiation of power, how are different archaeologies to be evaluated? Hodder's answer seems to be to refer to a project of self-knowledge and debate. Debate operates on a real, but not objective past. This allows critical evaluation, but no right answers, no certainty:

> There is no finishing position since there can never be any way of evaluating whether the 'right' interpretation has been arrived a t . . . But better and better accommodations and new insights can be achieved in a continuing process of interpretation.
>
> (Hodder, 1986, p. 155)

Hodder has faced issues vital to the emergence of a post-processual archaeology of the 1980s and 1990s, but there are problems. He states that 'since the past cannot be known with certainty, we do not have the right to impose our own universals on the data and to present them as truth' (1986, p. 102). But this argument appears to come close to a disabling relativism. Hodder argues in the same context that universals deny people freedom, but such a statement has no *epistemological* relevance. Hodder's only resistance to relativism is the material reality of the past and a faith in the effectivity of liberal and critical debate.

All archaeology is contextual and archaeologies in opposition to mainstream academic archaeology are possible: non-Western indigenous archaeologies, feminist archaeologies, 'fringe' archaeologies. Hodder's answer to the compatibility or incompatibility of these different archaeologies is rightly to resist methodology - the specification of a universal method. Instead he relies on epistemology, the manner in which we can hope to *know* the past. He takes some points from a reading of Collingwood (1946): data are not objective but they are nevertheless real and are constituted in theory; they are activated by questions involving a historical imagination giving insight into particular historical circumstances. This is a process of thinking ourselves into the past, reliving the past (Hodder, 1986, p. 94). Such insights can be evaluated according to the internal coherence of an argument and the manner in which they correspond to evidence.

The result of such a position is a vision of an ideal of a discipline of archaeology characterized by open debate and operating in a pluralistic society; archaeologists creating better and better accommodations to the past in a continuous process of interpretation, aiming at self-knowledge of the present. Hodder's references (almost nostalgic) to the value of traditional archaeologies and his affirmation of the personal roots of his approach to archaeology (1986a, p. 171) become simply symptoms of his desire for civilized academic debate, the right to choose one's own past (within reason), an affirmation of the particularity of the lived past. But such a position seems all too readily to embrace a regressive liberalism and a fragmentary relativism - consequences of a shaky epistemology. Here we must ask whether a contextual archaeology will really change anything; can it act as social critique as Hodder seems to believe (1984,1986a, p. 113)? He has admitted that critical debate seems, in the context of the events surrounding the World Archaeological Congress, to have had little effect on established ideologies and views even among supposedly enlightened intellectuals (1986a, pp. 118-19).

The vital question to be faced is the real implications of power to the discipline of archaeology. Here we need to consider the power relations between the academic community and the power interests of educational and governmental state apparatuses, and their linkage with a capitalist economy. These decide which educated and creative individuals are *allowed* to exercise and publicize their historical 'imaginations' in pursuit of *their* 'self-knowledge'. The corollary is that no matter how many subordinated individuals, minorities, classes or groups may realize, for example, the nonsense

of a museum's representation of the past, it makes no difference. A contextual archaeology, as Hodder conceives it, runs the very real danger of disguising the reality of contemporary relations of repressive power and social domination behind a spurious plurality of archaeologies, neutralizing social objection, transforming it into a point of liberal and critical debate. Such a position also overlooks the contradictory relation of critical debate to contemporary society. Critique may be highly valued and yet matters little in reality as a feature of capitalism's hypocritical acknowledgement of 'civilized' values.

Marxist archaeology and political critique

Most Marxist approaches in archaeology have remained just that -alternative approaches to the past. They have a strong tendency to scientism. They may introduce different perspectives on the data which are claimed to be truer or better representations of society or the past than those produced by conventional archaeologies. This also applies to those predominantly Marxist inspired critical archaeologies which depend on a distinction between science and ideology: Marxist science dispelling the false consciousness of ideology, correcting the bias of those archaeologies remaining rooted in present ideologies.

There has been little serious consideration of what may be termed Marxism's critical tradition which does not emphasize a science/ideology distinction. Kristiansen explicitly discounts the critical theory of the Frankfurt school as being irrelevant to archaeology (1984, p. 96); Hodder's discussion of it, condensed into a few pages (1986, pp. 164-6), is inevitably somewhat lacking. We consider this critical tradition of Marxism as one of the most important and essential sources for reconstructing archaeological theory and practice (Shanks and Tilley, 1987). It would be a serious matter if archaeology remained content to simply borrow from alternative definitions of the social, as found for example in Marxist anthropology, while making the odd rhetorical gesture to critical radicalism. Spriggs astonishingly claims the French 'situationists' Vaneigem and Debord and the black leader Marcus Garvey as precursors of the contributors to *Marxist Perspectives in Archaeology* (1984, p. v: dedication)!

CRITICISM AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL PRACTICE

Gouldner (1980) has discussed at length the dual aspects of Marxism we mentioned above which stand in a relation of

considerable tension: Marxism as science and Marxism as cultural critique. For scientific Marxism in traditional or structural Marxist form, the emergence of socialism depends on a prior set of objective economic conditions produced through an accumulation of antagonistic contradictions in the capitalist mode of production. In aspects of Marx's own formulations impersonal and necessary laws supposedly guarantee the organic evolution of socialism. Such a position is subject to the criticisms made of evolutionary theories discussed in chapter 6. However, the critical side of Marxism has never been content to sit back and permit blind historical forces to come to fruition but has been concerned to actively incite people to change the course of their history. If capitalism really is doomed to suffer a cultural demise there would seem to be little point in preparing its graveyard.

In situating archaeology as a social production taking place in the present we wish to draw on the Marxist critical tradition and stress the practice of critique. The past is a reconstruction, a cultural product, an artefact. And as Benjamin remarked, every document of civilization is at the same time a document of barbarism (1979, p. 359). Critique is essential but it is not to be conceived as the criticism of a theory we don't like. It is not simply open debate. Critique does not arise from method but from *objection* (Faris, 1986, p. 4), political and social objection. Critique breaks with established epistemologies, abstractions and totalities in the service of present social change.

Marx's eleventh thesis on Feuerbach states that 'the philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways; the point is to *change it'* (Marx and Engels, 1970, p. 123). We will elaborate several aspects we may take from this. The point of archaeology is not merely to interpret the past but to change the manner in which the past is interpreted in the service of social reconstruction in the present. There is no way of choosing between alternative pasts except on essentially political grounds, in terms of a definite value system, a morality. So, criteria for truth and falsity are not to be understood purely in terms of the logic and rationality, or otherwise, of discourses but require judgements in terms of the practical consequences of archaeological theory and practice for contemporary social change.

Critique: past, present, future

Hodder has talked of the aim of archaeology being self-knowledge, knowledge of the present. Such a view is not very different from the traditional justification of archaeology as forming part of the

human pursuit of knowledge. We will clarify some important points.

The study of the past as an end in itself seems to amount to an antiquarian desire to escape from the burden of living in the present, perhaps for personal self-gratification; it may also amount to a nostalgic yearning for values, social structures and social relations that are, and can be, no more. The historian, or the archaeologist, becomes a kind of 'cultural necrophile', as White puts it (1978, p. 41). We challenge this traditional view of the discipline which would represent it as a disinterested study of the past for the sake of 'knowledge'. Such a position has the effect of concealing the work of archaeology as a contemporary cultural practice. Hodder's notion of archaeology as self-knowledge includes an awareness of archaeology's location in the present (see above); but we go further in arguing for a mediation of past and present, held in tension in the practice of archaeology, involving a temporality of 'presencing' (see chapters 1 and 5).

A critical archaeology involves us in a reading of the past which at the same time invites us to shape a different future. The study of the past is a means of providing a medium for a critical challenge to the present. It becomes an operation to change the world as we know and experience it. The study of archaeology is not something done to 'remind' men and women of the past but is a form of cultural action that attempts to forge a transition from our present to a different future. This involves an awareness of history as the outcome of human agency. Humanity creates its own history and so can change, or alter, the consequences of this historical development through specific forms of social action and intervention. This does not imply that the course of history is solely to be regarded as an intentional production, a function of the desires of individual agents, but such a perspective does stress the sociality of that history and that no future is assured or inevitable. The future is always open to construction and reconstruction in the present. There is no iron cage of historical inevitability. The only inevitability is that people make history with an awareness of history, and may extend or rupture it through their day-to-day praxis in the world. A critical archaeology is an invitation to live this awareness of our historicity, this potentiality.

Knowledge, hegemony, truth

The knowledge derived from archaeology can be regarded as a means and an instrument for carrying out work in and on the

world. Such a position regards knowledge as being a form of power, being constituted in definite material circumstances, and having specific material effects. Archaeological knowledge has material effects by virtue of the fact that it arises from the situated practices of individuals living and working in society. In this sense we can say that all archaeologists live a dialectic between their life and work and the social order in which they find themselves. Knowledge, characterized by a particular material mode of production is always a production of positioned agents situated *X'* within classes, institutions and disciplines.

This relation of power and knowledge can be refined by considering the concept of hegemony. From a classical Marxist perspective consciousness was always determined by social being and this was conceived in terms of determinance by the economic base. In other words, consciousness of social reality was deemed to be a more or less automatic reflection of deeper socio-economic processes. In elevating the role of consciousness in the constitution of the social Gramsci stressed the key role of hegemony or ideological ascendancy, arguing that class-bound social control is not simply dependent on brute force but that another vital and equally material element for the dominant class to exercise power was the establishment of its own political, moral and social values as supposedly self-evident and conventional norms for living. For Gramsci, a hegemonic order is one in which a common coded value system is expressed in which one conception of social reality is dominant, affecting other modes of thought and action. Hegemony is quintessentially ideological power, or power over others achieved through consent rather than brute force. The coercive power of the capitalist state is derived in part from intellectual and moral leadership enforced through 'civil society' or the entire ensemble of educational, religious and cultural institutions. Gramsci cogently notes that

> One of the commonest totems is the belief about everything that exists, that it is 'natural' that it should exist, that it could not do otherwise than exist, and that however badly one's attempts at reform may go they will not stop life going on, since the traditional forces will continue to operate and precisely will keep life going on.
> (Gramsci, 1971, p. 157)

We stress the working of hegemony as a nexus (not necessarily coherent or singular) of encoded value systems, working through institutions and the day-to-day practices of individuals and groups,

involving the acceptance (not necessarily in its entirety) of the social and political order as being right, just, or at the very least legitimate. So, yes, people are knowledgeable and may not be fooled by ideology - no one may be fooled by that museum exhibit - but the important feature is that people 'know' it doesn't matter: it is only a museum, or a television programme, a book. The 'working classes' do not generally go to museums, and anyway museums are places you visit on rainy days, just one *leisure* activity among others. But, precisely, this is the working of hegemony. The point is that the past does matter; that story of the past or that museum exhibit does matter. This is not because it educates the public, teaches them critical awareness or whatever, but because it forms part of our present, part of our conception of the present which always involves the past. We are not born free of this connection between past and present.

There are no essential and obligatory foundations for making truth claims which are not themselves the product of *a politics of truth.* We must be concerned to investigate what kinds of power and determinate social conditions make the truth of a text or a museum's representation of the past appear plausible. Truth in archaeology is always to be related to the kinds of vision of material culture that are relevant to us, that respond to our social need. So a critical archaeology is an invitation to engage in a transformative practice. We must aim to detach the power of truth from all repressive forms of class-bound social hegemony.

Archaeologists, for example, have established a hegemony over the distant past, a hegemony currently being reinforced by a populist discourse of heritage, of communal tradition: a past that 'belongs' equally to everyone and yet at the .same time is to be ordered and preserved by the trained professional, applying his or her knowledge. We must investigate the meaning and significance of such discourses, their power effects, whom they serve and to what end. In terms of society as a whole archaeology obviously has very little economic or political significance, but it does constitute a cultural practice, integrated in the general hegemonic regime of power in society. As such, archaeology is nothing if it is not cultural critique.

Any notion that academic archaeology has its own sectional apolitical concerns and interests by and large irrelevant to, and untainted by, contemporary social processes is impossible and dangerous to attempt to sustain. Such a position amounts to containing whatever might be deemed 'archaeological' within its own limited academic space. But any attempt to artificially

separate archaeology from politics only serves to benefit existing power structures. A 'neutral' archaeology serves to sustain the existing social order by its failure to engage actively with it and criticize it. Thus any advocacy of an apolitical archaeology remains itself a form of political action.

The position we are taking involves the inscription of a fresh politics of truth, itself a form of power. This is a struggle waged in terms of the production of alternative regimes of truth. Truth is to be conceived as a series of coded rules which permit divisions to be drawn between various types of discourses in terms of a polar truth/falsity opposition. We should not do battle 'in favour of truth' but, rather, situate truths in relation to the social, economic and political roles they play in society. Our aim is not so much to change people's consciousness as to change the manner in which truth is produced and becomes accepted. Power can never be detached from truth; but we can work to subvert the power of truth being attached to the existing social order and instead link truth to a political future.

Critique and pluralism

This emphasis on the relation of truth and power, on the location of the truth of the past in the contemporary cultural practice of archaeology, an emphasis on the politics of theory, does not open the way for an anarchic play with meaning, a profusion of archaeologies each rooted in their own politics. Hodder is right to stress the material resistance of the past: not just anything can be said about it. But a simple reference to the materiality of the past does not explain its facticity, that it is fact in the present. Such an ontology requires a mediation of subject and object, a subjectivity and objectivity constituted in social practice. Fabian, in another context, notes:

> The object's present is founded in the writer's past. In that sense, facticity itself, that cornerstone of scientific thought, is autobiographic. This, incidentally, is why in anthropology objectivity can never be defined in opposition to subjectivity.
>
> (Fabian, 1983, p. 89)

And social practice always implies a politics (where the political refers to debate as to how social relations should be arranged). This begins in the present and ends in a future. It must form the arena of any critical debate concerning the archaeological past. It goes far

beyond the narrow forum of archaeology as academic discipline. A critique of traditional, 'new' or standard 'Marxist' archaeologies in terms of their deficient understanding of the past may be necessary, but is by no means sufficient. Such archaeologies require not just intellectual challenge but active displacement. This displacement, we suggest, is a matter of condemning or supporting particular archaeologies according to social and political values. Here it is important to note that value is not something inherently residing in archaeology as a whole or in some forms of archaeology as opposed to others. It is, rather, something *produced* for archaeology and in the *practice* of doing archaeology.

We have already discussed the notion of a radical pluralism in archaeology and counterposed this to a repressive pluralism (see chapter 1). A realization of the social conditions underlying archaeological practice must shatter the illusion, fostered in the new archaeology with its emphasis on cross-cultural generalization, that the results of archaeological research are applicable to the whole of humanity. Archaeology, as the product of social conditions and forms of social existence, is always produced in terms of specific interests and values. There is not, and cannot be, one correct archaeological view of the past, one indivisible archaeology. There are instead many archaeologies, and frameworks for understanding them must become sites of struggle. Hence archaeology is always dependent on the political and social position of the investigator and his or her awareness of the social conditions in which archaeological production takes place. But we must reassert that this is an issue itself with no necessary or final solution. Rowlands has warned against the vitalism that might be involved in supporting local knowledges, 'authentic' knowledges deriving from a life-world organic and specific to those it encompasses. He also remarks that a fragmented past may discourage collective identity and reinforce hierarchization in that while 'the subordinated and the powerless may have identity, the powerful will have science' (1986a, p. 4). Rowlands is arguing in the context of relations between the developed West and the third world: 'a stress on radical heterogeneity and cultural difference would . . . be more compatible with the aims of dominant elites in an industrialising third world seeking autonomy and identity in order to obscure and mystify the sources of their own power' (ibid., p. 4). This serves again to emphasize the importance of the politics of theory and the manner in which such a politics need to be situated in relation to a determinate social context.

INTELLECTUAL LABOUR AND THE SOCIO-POLITICAL ROLE OF THE ARCHAEOLOGIST

Il faut etre absolument moderne.
Baudelaire

Intellectuals and power

What is to be done? What is the role of the individual archaeologist? We have defined archaeology as a cultural practice and referred to the mediation of the individual and the social in practice. The question that follows from this is the nature of what actually is involved in the production of cultural or intellectual work.

Traditionally, in Marxist thought, the intellectual has been regarded as being a bearer of universal truths, acting in the role of the political consciousness of the masses. The intellectual spoke in the name of freedom, equality and social justice. For Sartre, the role of the thinker was, in the last analysis, a class situation with the mode of production providing a horizon for thought undermining the pretence that reason alone could somehow be in itself the final arbiter of knowledge: reason is historical and class-bound. Sartre's definition of the intellectual is provocative:

> *someone who attends to what concerns him* (in exteriority - the principles which guide the conduct of his life; and in interiority - his lived experience in society) and to whom others refer to a man *who interferes in what does not concern him.*
>
> **(Sartre, 1983, p. 244)**

The relationship of the intellectual to the powers that be in society is an *oppositional* one. The role of the intellectual is to call into question the established socio-political order. The intellectual must ceaselessly combat his or her own class (usually petty bourgeois), itself moulded by hegemonic culture, thought and sentiment. Reason must be related to the life and situation of the researcher, and it is only in this manner that the limits that ideology pose on knowledge may be questioned. It is at the level of concrete situations in which the intellectual finds himself or herself that Sartre's dialectic of exteriority and interiority operates. So the radical intellectual combines life and work, seeking

> to produce, both in himself and in others, a true unity of the personality, a recuperation by each agent of the ends imposed on his

activity, a suppression of alienations, a real freedom for thought - by defeating *external* social prohibitions dictated by the class structure, and *internal* inhibitions and self-censorship.

(Sartre, 1983, pp. 250-1)

The intellectual must be entirely modern, of his or her own time, constantly aware of and concerned about events in the society in which he or she lives.

Radical and intellectual commitment are vital components of critique. Here we can say that those archaeologists who seek simply to preserve and transmit information about the past are forced to adopt a conservative position. If other archaeologists step out of line and relinquish this role by criticizing the relationship of the discipline to society they will probably be accused of mistaking their proper role and purpose. Conceiving of archaeology as, in part, an act of socio-political intellectual struggle will, no doubt, be denounced as scandalous or denigrated as misrepresenting the true goals of the discipline. Another means of coping with such a perspective may be to attempt to neutralize it by integrating it with mainstream archaeology as yet another facet. A third strategy may be a conspiracy of silence; time will tell.

For Foucault, intellectual knowledge is itself inserted within a system of power and may serve either explicitly or inadvertently to block or invalidate lay discourse and knowledge. Consequently, the intellectual's role is

no longer to place himself 'somewhat ahead and to the side' in order to express the stifled truth of the collectivity; rather, it is to struggle against the forms of power that transform him into its object and instrument in the sphere of 'knowledge,' 'truth,' 'consciousness,' and 'discourse.'

(Foucault, 1977a, p. 208)

The *universalizing* intellectual has, in such a perspective, to be replaced by the *specific* intellectual. The specific intellectual fights against repression and carries this work on in the determinate social situations in which he or she is located in society and on the terms of his or her expertise in a certain field. The specific intellectual, then, is one who works at a particular node within society inevitably involved in what can only be a localized and regionalized struggle. The work of the specific intellectual is intimately related to class position, the conditions of his or her personal life and work and particular area of research and expertise. The intellectual fights and struggles in all areas of society against prevailing power-

knowledge-truth strategies, and engages in concrete and real every-day struggles. This is a process of undermining or burrowing away in the midst of a multitude of different sectors, points and intersections within the social system (Foucault, 1977b, 1980).

This conception of the specific intellectual corresponds with Foucault's view of theory:

> theory does not express, translate, or serve to apply practice: it is practice. But it is local and regional. . . and not totalizing. This is a struggle against power, a struggle aimed at revealing and under-mining power where it is most invisible and insidious. It is not to 'awaken consciousness' that we struggle . . . but to sap power, to take power; it is an activity conducted alongside those who struggle for power, and not for their illumination from a safe distance. A 'theory' is the regional system of this struggle.
>
> (Foucault, 1977a, p. 208)

Power is not simply coercion and social order is not just a creation of force. Hegemony is vital to maintaining order. Hence any attempt to transform society cannot just concentrate on altering that which appears to be most obviously economic and political: the economic and the political are not at all to be considered as strictly delimited 'subsystems', 'spheres', 'levels' or 'instances' but pervade and permeate every aspect of living from the micro-context of familial relations to the macro-institutional context and affect everything from poetry and plays to sport and patterns of food consumption, and not least the work of the archaeologist.

Gramsci distinguishes two fundamental dimensions of social change, the organic and the conjunctural (1971, pp. 210-76). The organic component is a 'war of position', the establishment of a counter-hegemony. The conjunctural component involves the physical contestation for state power. A war of position on the cultural front necessitates the penetration and subversion of the complex and multifarious channels of ideological diffusion through which hegemony becomes sustained and is bolstered, but hegemony is never total but riddled with inconsistencies and fissures. This means that we need to question educational objec-tives, archaeological, courses and archaeological practices so as to challenge the relation of the archaeologist to society.

A 'radical' archaeologist might become involved in a trade union, a party political organization, in demonstrations in the streets or organize extra-curricula discussions about, say, radical discrimination, or the violation of human rights. These may be, of course, genuine and important political acts. The problem is that

they have no *necessary* relationship to the archaeologist's day-to-day work. The most powerful political work the archaeologist is able to produce will be likely to be in that field he or she knows best - archaeological theory and practice. It is vital not to forget that archaeology forms part of contemporary culture. It works and acts upon, influences and informs opinion in the present. Hegemony has to be constantly reproduced, and one of the main sites of this reproduction is located in educational institutions. As Lentricchia puts it:

> struggles for hegemony are sometimes fought out in (certainly relayed through) colleges and universities; fought undramatically, yard for yard, and sometimes over minor texts of Balzac: no epic heroes, no epic acts.
>
> (Lentricchia, 198S, p. 10)

It might be suggested that a critical archaeology must, firstly, take up an oppositional role to contemporary society; secondly, embrace a conception of the archaeologist as specific, or at times universal, intellectual fighting at his or her institutional site against the prevailing regime of the production of truth; this involves, thirdly, taking up a notion of archaeological discourse as being part of a war of position. This will be a value-committed archaeology.

Value-committed archaeology

Contemporary academic archaeology determines effectively both what archaeology is and *how* it should be taught and learnt; i.e. what archaeological questions, problems, means, methods and modes of analysis are. This certainly has a profound effect on the entire gamut of secondary and tertiary education and the teaching of archaeology in these sectors of the educational system; on fictional writing about the past (e.g. Auel, 1981); and on presentations in museums and the media - areas of hegemonic culture. Unless its challenges extend this far, a critical archaeology is likely to amount to little more than a self-congratulatory stance that we are aware of biases and distortions in our work and that this heightened consciousness will lead to better work being done in the future.

Discussions about the form and nature of archaeology in academia inevitably filter back in one form or another to affect the manner in which millions of people make sense of, or have sense made for them, of *their past,* and its connection with the present. It

is quite evident that the past may be used for expressing a wide variety of supportive ideas and values for a capitalist society, naturalized and legitimized through an emphasis on tradition and long-term time scales: myths of genius; individuality; patriarchy; humanity's essential economic nature; the universality and inevitability of technological development as progressive; the naturalness of social stability as opposed to contradiction; the inferiority or superiority of certain forms of social organization, etc. Such views may be strongly supported by archaeological texts (they usually are), or they may be challenged.

There is no possibility of a neutral and autonomous 'middle way'. The effect of archaeology in socio-political terms depends on the place that it chooses to occupy within a wider socio-cultural field. A value-committed archaeology is one rejecting any position which would suggest that research merely mirrors the past. Instead it insists that research forms part of a process in which the archaeologist *actively decides* upon one past rather than another. Interpretation in archaeology constructs a *socio-political position* in the process of engagement with the artefactual traces of the past. Anything 'discovered' about the past is not a passive reflection of what the 'facts' may or may not tell us. Archaeological texts which re-present the past have an expressive, rhetorical and persuasive purpose. They are not, and cannot be, neutral expositions of the facticity of the past (see chapter 1). What is their influence on those who read them?

> Any specialized activity participates in a larger unit of action. 'Identification' is a word for the ... activity's place in this wider context, a place with which the agent may be unconcerned. The shepherd *qua* shepherd, acts for the good of the sheep to protect them from discomfiture and harm. But he may be 'identified' with a project that is raising the sheep for market.
>
> (Burke, 1969, p. 27, cited in Lentricchia, 1985, p. 88)

The shepherd's concern for the sheep, although it may appear genuine enough, when set in its. wider context is hardly disinterested. Placing academic archaeology firmly within its social context as a cultural practice in late capitalist society in the West brings into focus the inadequacy of a 'disinterested' concern with the past. Such an educational role for archaeology may go quite some way towards fulfilling the goal of socializing individuals both to accept and wish to participate in the reproduction of the

capitalist market. By contrast a value-committed archaeology is one that situates disciplinary practice critically within its present social context. There is no disinterested interpretation of the past because it always makes a *difference* in what manner it is represented.

A value-committed archaeology inevitably demands personal commitment on the part of the archaeologist who must be wary of being incorporated into upholding the established institutional framework. Such an archaeology would require a reorientation of power structures within archaeological institutions. At present the academic world all too faithfully mirrors wider social processes in capitalist society with its emphasis on competition between individuals for academic prestige and power in the framework of a hierarchical professorial structure; the 'ownership' of ideas as if they were equivalent to television sets; pressures to publish; the maintenance of strict disciplinary boundaries hindering understanding; and the often ritualized paying of homage to authority figures in acknowledgements, prefaces, citations and references. Here we can do no better than to refer to Gouldner's passionate denouncement of the petty personal aspirations held by many self-styled radicals:

> The man who can voice support for Black Power or who can denounce American imperialism in Latin America or Vietnam, but who plays the sycophant to the most petty authorities in his university, is no radical; the man who mouths phrases about the need for revolution abroad, but who is a coiled spring ready to punish the rebels among his own graduate students, is no radical; the academician who with mighty oaths denounces the President of the United States, but subserviently fawns upon his Department Chairman, is no radical; the man who denounces opportunistic power politics, but practices it daily among his university colleagues, is no radical. Such men are playing one of the oldest games in personal politics; they are seeking to maintain a creditable image of themselves, while accommodating to the most vulgar careerism. Such men are seeking neither to change nor to know the world; their aim is to grab a piece of it for themselves.
>
> ,   (Gouldner, 1970, p. 503)

A radical value-committed archaeology involves a way of living that requires that intellectual struggle be carried into the heart of the discipline, on a daily basis as a willed personal act, and irrespective of the possible personal consequences of the reactions of those in authority.

Writing the past

How is the past to be written? It may be dominated by a style of textuality that either claims it has arrived at some truth in the past or is groping towards this ultimate aim. This is almost exclusively the position taken in archaeology at present, irrespective of differences in the specific frameworks advanced. The object of archaeology, then, is the production of knowledge about some aspect of the past. However, this knowledge is generally conceived in purely informational terms. 'Knowing' the past is to collect together more and more bits of information about it by inductive or deductive research strategies, or whatever. The information so derived is pieced together into what basically amounts to a pictorial statement. Such a knowledge of the past is at the same time a form of domination and control. It is ill-suited to an increase in self-awareness on the part of the investigator, the discipline, or society at large. No doubt it satisfies those for whom the primary rationale for archaeology is to provide either privatized or disciplinary intellectual pleasure.

Another way in which the past may be written is to provide a position on it which does not establish closure in a picture but dispels finality in a creative juxtaposition of past and present. Sartre states:

> this is the measure we propose to the writer: as long as his books arouse anger, discomfort, shame, hatred, love, even if he is no more than a shade, he will live.
>
> (Sartre, 1950, p. 238)

We might argue that what is needed is not the production of archaeological texts that provide and permit a passive understanding of the past, texts to be simply 'absorbed' (see the discussion of archaeological texts in chapter 1), but texts that challenge the reader: *writerly* texts (Barthes, 1974, p. 4) that have the effect of dissonance creating and actively inviting discussion, debate, 'completion'. Polemic and rhetoric should be an essential part of archaeological textual production to stimulate the reader to be a producer of the text's meaning and its relation to the meaning of the past, not a passive consumer of a bland and smooth narrative, or unapproachable information report inviting acquiescence rather than critical reflection. A critical archaeology will produce texts which interrogate the past in the form of a social document forged in the present, stimulating a reply, a reaction, another text. This

raises a whole host of questions such as how should a site be represented? what is the significance of a measured pot drawing? is a list of artefacts objective? what is the origin, the meaning of a list? Whatever the answers, a politics of archaeology is also an aesthetics and a poetics, a production of texts which interrogate the past but do not pin it down to a set of mechanical and reified essences, texts which subvert those archaeologies that would deny the study of material culture as being fundamentally a study of power, the mediation, representation and articulation of power strategies through material forms.

CONCLUSION

An oppositional role for archaeology; the archaeologist as specific or universal intellectual; war of position; establishment of a counter-hegemony; value-commitment; the question of how reality is to be represented, written according to a radical aesthetic and poetic: we might also make reference to the idea of an avant-garde, or the debate over socialist realism, or the emergence of a so-called post-modernist culture. All are issues in a cultural practice, in a politics of archaeology. These issues need to be faced - archaeology must embrace a commitment to the present through a consideration of the present's past. Archaeology should be conceived as acting as a catalyst in the transformation of the present, for without commitment to one's own historicity, the discipline becomes little more than an escape from our own time and place.