
Post Processual archaeology and after

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Michael Shanks

Post Processual – after and against Processual?

Its title tells you only that this archaeology came after processual. Implied is a coherent program, approach, method, body of theory. But post processual archaeology cannot be said to have any of these. Processual archaeology is still a dominant orthodoxy in the largest community of archaeologists in the world, in the United States: so even the 'post' is a misnomer. Nevertheless, archaeology textbooks, in their treatment of theory, regularly have a section on this 'archaeology'. As does the one in which this chapter sits!

Post processual archaeology usually poses as a container for all sorts of trends in the discipline since the 1970s, many arising as a critique of the processual orthodoxy in Anglo-American archaeology, and of traditional culture historical archaeology. Included here are neo-Marxian anthropology, structuralism, various influences of literary and cultural theory, feminism, post positivist social science, hermeneutics, phenomenology and many others. This is not the place to deal with these trends in detail.

It is enough to start by saying that post processual archaeology is a matter of controversy. Nor is not difficult to find a caricature of post processual archaeology, in those very textbooks, among the excavators on a field project, anywhere indeed that archaeology is a matter of debate rather than simply a source of information about the past. The caricature takes the form of an archaeology rooted in an abstract body of difficult (and probably irrelevant) theory which, in opposition to processual archaeology, celebrates historical particularity and the individual, and lacks a methodology which can deliver any kind of secure knowledge. The proponents of post processual archaeology, in this caricature, are often seen as overly politically motivated, as much interested in contemporary cultural politics as in developing knowledge of past societies. I call this a caricature because any careful reading of the primary literature will very quickly show that it makes little sense.

One of the lesser aims of this chapter is to correct these misconceptions. And, given this caricature, rather than with a new definition, I will begin with what post processual archaeology is not. If the reader has never come across post processual archaeology at all, they may skip the rest of this section and take the point simply that it is controversial.

Post processual archaeology is not the result of a 'paradigm shift' in the discipline, a revolution from one kind of science to another. There is no new 'normal science' (with a new orthodoxy of method and research agenda) which has emerged among a community of archaeologists to replace that of processual or any other kind of archaeology.

Post processual archaeology is not a coherent theory of the past or of archaeology. Nor is it a body of armchair theory for its own sake, of whatever kind, which has grown in the rarefied atmosphere of some universities and in the absence of any connection with archaeological practice.

The core of post processual archaeology is not a celebration of the individual set in a particular historical narrative, as opposed to the generalizing explanation of processual science.

Post processual archaeology is not the archaeological offspring of a postmodern mentality which denies the possibility of secure knowledge of the past or indeed denies the significance of the past itself in a play upon the meanings of the past for the present, where multiple contradictory pasts can claim equal validity.

I take the caricature seriously because the polarizations of extremes it involves is a quite genuine feature of Anglo-American academic archaeology. By this I mean that many of my colleagues and their committees and institutions act as if this caricature were accurate. I know many archaeologists in the United States who see the only alternative to orthodox processual science (however modified by the demands of contract archaeology) as an extreme and politically motivated relativism – post processual archaeology. The debates in conference halls and in the pages of the professional journals have been heated. Academic and professional appointments have hinged on whether someone is seen as a proponent or not of post processual archaeology. The polarization is real (and parties on both sides have been responsible for the caricatures or 'straw men' as they are sometimes called). It has been and is part of the social and historical

dynamic of Anglo-American archaeology. It is partly also, I think, a particular campaign in the old culture wars between ideologies of the sciences and humanities (see below).

For this very reason my colleagues from other traditions (in India, Japan, France, Germany, Spain ...) can find the debate sterile – their archaeologies have had a different social and political dynamic. Their culture wars have been different. And so too field archaeologists.

It is important to understand the social dynamics and organizational politics of a discipline. But the issues here are at once and have always been much more than this. I think it is possible now to see through the polemics. For me, the case of post processual archaeology is that of a committed quest for a better and more thoughtful, but not more exclusive, archaeology. And the positions argued by archaeologists who might be termed post processual (and usually by other than themselves) have now touched most parts of the discipline and profession.

I find myself here coming too close to an inappropriate definition. Instead I want an understanding of the term to emerge through an outline of some key concepts, debates, and connections beyond archaeology.

Location and practitioners

Where might you find those who can be called post processual archaeologists? It is undoubtedly and mainly an academic phenomenon to be found in university departments of archaeology. Its core community has been in Britain, but there are many also in Scandinavia and the Netherlands. A significant portion of a new generation of anthropological archaeologists in the United States seems to be taking up post processual interests, while there is also a post processual strength there in historical archaeology. There are a few vocal post processualists in the museum profession worldwide, fewer still in professional fieldwork.

A key point is that perhaps only a minority of post processual archaeologists would accept the label. And the ideas have spread far further than the practitioners. This is very clear from some of the main series of conferences held in archaeology, those of the World Archaeological Congress, of the Theoretical Archaeology Group in Britain (TAG), Nordic TAG in Scandinavia. All are thoroughly informed by post processual agendas. So too, many of the latest textbooks, though not claiming themselves post processual, are permeated with the issues I will outline in this short sketch and which have come into archaeology through what has come to be called post processual

archaeology (see Thomas 1999, Johnson 1998, Preucel and Hodder 1996, Gamble 2001, Hodder 2001, Gamble 2001).

Emergence and distribution

What prompted the emergence of post processual archaeology?

It first appears as critique, rooted in dissatisfaction with the way archaeology was going in the 1970s. In the United States this was the consolidation of a certain kind of scientific research methodology tied to a systemic conception of society and culture. Specifically the critique aimed at a redefinition of social practice, social units and groupings, and of the nature of culture, all seen to be the heart of a social archaeology aiming at the reconstruction of societies on the basis of their material remains.

Society was seen not as an extrasomatic means of adaptation (the premise taken up in processual archaeology), but a communicative medium. The first studies in post processual archaeology were of symbolism - interpretations of the meaning of things, of prehistoric burial practices, of house design, of pottery decoration. This was a cognitive archaeology of mind. And symbolism demanded not a fixed specification of singular meaning but a more subtle exploration of the range of possible meanings. This interpretation was not the outcome of a processual method of testing hypotheses and subsuming particular cases beneath generalizations. It proceeded more tentatively, building connections through archaeological data. It was clear from the beginning that post processual archaeology had a very different overall agenda, often aiming less at knowledge of the past for its own sake, than a knowledge that linked intimately with contemporary issues and interests, such as different values placed upon the past.

In spite of the differences, post processual shares a great deal with processual archaeology:

- an outlook critical of the prevailing status quo;
- this outlook based upon a traditional notion of reasoned critical debate as the cornerstone of the academy;
- hence both find their location primarily in the research oriented academy;
- an enthusiasm for reflection upon the procedures and concepts of a discipline. superficially an enthusiasm therefore for theory (though I hesitate to call this simply theory because processual archaeology strictly was interested primarily in methodology);
- an intellectual optimism – that it is possible to have a social archaeology which can say something significant about past societies and cultures rather than simply document their remains;

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- in this project of a social archaeology they share an anthropological, or, more generally, a sociological outlook.

Right from the beginning the different components of the dissatisfaction and different modes of critique comprised a diversity which has not diminished but increased. If we speak of post processual archaeology at all, it should really be in the plural.

Concepts and interests

In this section I will outline some of the key concepts that have attracted interest in post processual archaeologies. Like a lot of the social sciences and humanities now, the level of quite abstract discussion can be disorienting. This is therefore also something of a checklist according to which you might spot post processual work. If you read something archaeological which agonizes over one or more of these terms you are probably entering the post processual!

The concepts group around the following.

- Social theory – Just what is the object of an archaeology which aims to explain and understand past societies? The possibility of a social archaeology depends upon an adequate conception of what comprises society and culture.
- History and historiography. Basic issues again of time, social change, the event, and narrative.
- Science. What is the character of adequate knowledge and the conditions under which it might be achieved?
- Reflexivity. The self understanding of a discipline.
- Creative practice. Across all these fields there is an interest in the nature of creative productive practice. Both in the past – the people and their remains that archaeologists study, and in the present – archaeological work itself.

I cite an example for each which works through the concept in relation to an archaeological case, and/or contains further discussion and bibliography.

Social structure and social practice

Culture historical archaeology referred its finds to higher order assemblages and *cultures* in order to describe and explain (structuring effected by cultural norms) and as a means of generating narratives of the past. Processual archaeology relates the patterning of finds to the workings of socio-cultural *systems* – groupings of structured behaviours in social totalities which operate as systems.

Theory since the 1970s has struggled to rethink the character of cultures and systems, these structures, and particularly how they come into being. Post processual archaeology has not been at all satisfied with the cultural systems of processual archaeology. The criticism is that the systems of processual archaeology are too one sided, too deterministic, too inflexible. It has seemed that the explanations that processual archaeology has generated are dominated by general overarching social forces and entities. How did real people fit into them?

The issue is actually an old sociological conundrum of social reproduction – people are born and socialized into pre-existing social norms, organizations, structures. These structures only can be said to exist in the actions and thoughts of individuals, yet clearly extend beyond. How does this work? How are we to understand how people are both determined by social structures, yet also act in ways that work to change those structures?

Post processual archaeology has followed a great deal of social theory in positing much more dynamic social structures. The issue is one of balancing determinism and free-will when clearly people do not make history as they will, but nevertheless are not wholly determined in their actions by transcendent social structures and historical forces. It is about how action is to be conceived. Here post processual critique has come to depend heavily upon social theory after Giddens and Bourdieu who both posited notions of social practice rooted in dynamic relationships between structure and the actions intentions of knowledgeable *social agents*. This is sometimes described as a contrast between an interest in social behaviour (what people do) such as that found in processual archaeology, and an interest in social practice (what people do but understood as conditioned by their knowledge, aims and intentions).

Overall this matter of *agency* has been sometimes caricatured as a post processual search for the individual in prehistory. It is not actually about this at all, but rather about how we are to conceive of society in a way that allows its constituent people to be active and creative in reproducing and changing their society.

Processual archaeology has seen social system predominantly as a set of standard types of society drawn from cultural evolutionary thought – bands, lineages, chiefdoms, states (and derived and related forms). The main features are horizontal and vertical divisions, particularly class and ranking, and the distribution of resources, through social groupings, via exchange and other economic mechanisms. Indeed much processual thought has been seen as focused upon economics.

This too has been deemed inadequate by archaeological theory since the 1970s. First, issue has been taken with the general categories of band, tribe, chiefdom, state – again seen as too general and inflexible. Second, the internal dynamics of society have been alternatively conceived. Neo marxian thought, for example, has given different emphasis to the fundamental features of the social totality (usually focusing upon relations of production).

More generally the notion of a type of social totality plays a much less prominent part in post processual archaeology.

Example: Barrett 1994.

Power

Agency can be defined as the creative potential of human subjects. It refers to their capabilities to realize their projects, to act as knowledgeable subjects. Human agents have intentions and motivations. They rationalize and reflexively monitor the world around them.

This immediately implicates power at the micro level of action, and complements the standard treatment of power as a feature of institutions and top-down application (in the hands of elite individuals, for example).

Again then attention is focused upon local archaeological contexts rather than upon broad social categories.

Example: Miller and Tilley 1984.

Communication, categorization and cognition

With an emphasis upon knowledgeable agents as the subject of history, cognition and communication have come to be at the heart of the social and cultural – people classifying and signifying in different ways. The need to account for cognition and communication has been the rationale behind a great deal of post processual archaeology. Indeed the most long standing of post processual archaeologies has been a cognitive archaeology 'of the mind'. The interest is not just in what people did but what it meant – from the meaning of pottery design, to what mortuary practices are 'saying'. Those disciplinary fields which deal with symbolism and with the 'grammar' of culture are

much in evidence – structuralism and semiotics, for example.

Example: Hodder 1982a, 1982b.

The embodied subject

So instead of social systems and other social totalities, post processual archaeology is much more interested in social subjects, thinking and plotting agents who work their way through society and history seeking goals, constantly sending out signals and signs, constantly interpreting the cultural signification around them,

But as well as thinking, sending out and receiving signs, some processual archaeology has emphasised how subjects are corporeal – feeling and experiencing. There has been a sustained attempt for over ten years now to develop an archaeology of the body which deals with matters such as treatments and conceptions of the body, emotion and aesthetics of self and body.

Example: Meskell 1998, Shanks 1999

A sense of place

This conception of the subject also means that space is lived and meaningfully constituted, as well as being the neutral setting for social practice and change. Drawing upon cultural geography, a post processual landscape archaeology has emerged which focuses upon landscape as a cultural realm of experiences and meanings. Prehistoric monuments have been interpreted as nodes in cultural landscapes of choreographed experience and material cosmologies, as well as containers for the bones of the dead.

Example: Tilley 1994a.

History against cultural evolution

The critique of social totalities and stress upon human agency has thrown considerable post processual suspicion upon cross-cultural generalization (types of society) and upon schemes of cultural evolution. Again this is part of a post processual focus upon local context and a past that features historical difference rather than similarity (the similarity implied by the broad categories of evolutionary

thought).

Post processual critique of evolutionary thought has also involved its logic of adaptation and selection, concepts far from the characterization of social practice found in sociology and cultural anthropology, post processual archaeology's cognate disciplines. Evolutionary thought has little interest in agency and semiotics, and clearly operates at a different scale.

Example: Shanks and Tilley 1987, 1992.

Against metanarratives

The cross-cultural generalizations so often employed in processual archaeology have intersected with a variety of metanarratives, overarching narrative schemes under which particular archaeological sequences may be subsumed or accommodated. These are the very familiar accounts of the development of social complexity, including the rise and fall of civilization, the origins of agriculture, the development of the state. Other metanarratives deal with the roots of contemporary political forms such as the nation state (metanarratives of European origins, for example).

While some post processual archaeology has been interested in narrative, it not an interest in these grand schemes, which again seem to gloss over local contexts, specific archaeological histories.

Example Rowlands 1989, Pluciennik 2000

Epistemology and ontology

Processual archaeology has developed methodologies of hypothesis testing which aim to bring about a tight relationship – epistemological closure – between the accounts offered by the archaeologist and observed data. The efforts of post processual theory have been mainly in a different direction, exploring the character of what archaeologists are interested in – the ontology of society. The critique of generalization has intersected with suspicion of this closure. Post processual archaeologists tend now to see their endeavour as interpretation – a never-ending process of exploring cultural pasts that are seen as indeterminate and open networks rather than contained systems.

Example: Tilley 1994b, Thomas 1998.

Discourse

Archaeological interpretation itself is carried out by 'knowledgeable agents' – archaeologists. Accordingly, it is less easy for post processual archaeology to treat itself as a set of neutral algorithms for producing knowledge of the past. Archaeologists too are motivated, interested, located, strategizing. Hence there is a conspicuous absence of methodological prescription in post processual archaeology. Instead the discipline is seen much more as a political field– archaeologists located in institutions and society, working, like many others upon material finds under a project of establishing knowledge of (past) society and culture. The concept of *discourse* refers to this notion of archaeology as a mode of cultural production. It has enormous implications, most notably that archaeologists don't so much discover the past as produce accounts of it, and that their attention is drawn as much to contemporary values and attitudes as the past itself.

Example: Shanks 1996.

Debates and tensions

This check list of post processual concepts and interests is not meant to imply a unity or orthodoxy. Far from it, they are embedded in these following debates and issues.

The politics of the past

That data are theory laden and not just neutral finds of a discovered past has long been accepted. An early argument of post processual archaeology was that facts cannot be separated from values. The past is endemically about value (what is preserved, what is chosen for study). And this point has been taken further. The notion that knowledge is discourse means that all inquiry is interested, all interpretation is located in the projects of particular archaeologists. These are complex articulations of power and knowledge (the power and resources necessary simply to mount a professional field excavation). Values and selective interest are embedded. Whose and what past to keep and study. This is a political field.

The debate is how to proceed. Is there a possibility of neutral science at all? Is it a matter of securing a methodology? Is it a matter of correcting political bias, or of representing different interests? Is it a matter of tolerance?

Example: Shanks and Tilley 1987, Leone 1992, Leone et al 1995.

Multiplicities, pluralism and relativism

That knowledge is discursive and located in particular projects is related to holding that the link between past and present is inseparable.

This further entails another argument – that there is not just one past, but many, dependent upon particular interests and values.

For some this undermines any authority that the post processual archaeologist might want to claim. Surely the past happened and is over, cannot be changed? It cannot be invented at will, and if it can what makes any account of the past better than another?

The counter is to hold that the past is and was not ever singular, that the sociocultural fabric is multiple, slippery, undecidable, always more than any representation that is made of it.

The issue is also that of relativism, that accounts of the past are always relative to something else. All those points under the politics of the past undermine the notion of an adequate explanation that seeks validity through closure. There are always more and other interpretations. But how do we judge these? Are all accounts dependent upon cultural location, in which case should cultural difference not always be respected? This is a complex debate. But a key is to note that, to my knowledge, no archaeologist has ever argued that anything goes and that all accounts of the archaeological past are equally valid.

Example: Lampeter Archaeological Workshop 1997.

Threat or complement to science?

The idea of multiple pasts and multiple accounts of the past seems to run counter to a scientific archaeology, that there can be a tight relationship or closure between scientific account and its object of interest, that this closure constitutes validity, at the expense of other accounts. Here science is sometimes pitted against relativism, post processual archaeology against those who overtly claim their

scientific status.

But it depends on how archaeological science is conceived. Is it really so singular?

Archaeological research might be seen as a process of simplification which aims to understand the inner workings of its object of interest. This process of modeling, in aiming at a tight relationship between explanation and that to be explained, may actually result in a representation or account that looks little like the original, but which grasps and explains some of its essential working. Research here focuses in a convergence upon the object.

Alternatively research may operate in a less reductive way, taking its source material as a resource for constructing a model which aims to elaborate and amplify. Research might here aim to enrich its object of interest through a disclosure of connections and associations, in a divergence away from the object of interest.

Whether or not one or the other is called science, both strategies may be rigorous and empirical, open to critical scrutiny and assessment. Post processual archaeology has tended (with notable exceptions) to look like the latter.

Example: Shanks 1999.

Past meanings – making sense

The cognitive archaeology of mind has found it very difficult to assign specific meaning to things like mortuary rituals or iconographies.

There are many ethnographic and historical cases which caution against it.

Post structuralist thought too has thrown doubt upon the ultimate 'decidability' of meaning. It is clear that in the realm of culture there are multiple rather than single meanings. Culture itself has come to appear more as a very slippery 'semiosis' or process of signifying and interpreting sense. Hence an interest in exploring the meaning of things is actually less about attributing meaning than a process of understanding, making sense, or understanding the conditions under which meanings were established.

Example: Hodder et al 1995, Buchli 2001.

Postmodern irrelevance?

Why all this introspection and self reflection in archaeology? Is this introspection and agonizing just a postmodern confusion/ideology, pointless navel-gazing. It may even be harmful in detracting from the scientific authority held by a unified science with a secure sense of its aims and methods. Some have felt that the urgent and important issue in archaeology is not theory at all but the rescue of a fast disappearing past. Academics may have the luxury of ruminating upon the relative philosophical merits of hermeneutics and critical realism, whereas real world professionals have to find a way of stretching their budget in doing a good job on the recovery of a prehistoric hunter-gatherer camp.

Others point out that such a pragmatically oriented and conservative technics actually has little to offer in the way of intellectual comment and has abrogated its responsibility of judgement and expertise to other agencies that will determine policy.

The point embedded in post processual archaeology – thinking about archaeological approaches to the past and experimenting is not a dispensable luxury.

Example: Bapty and Yates 1990, Walsh 1993.

Method – doing Post Processual Archaeology

Post processual archaeology has no methodological texts, outlines of how to do it. It has often been commented that no new field methods have arisen. This is partly because its interest has been in exploring the nature of its object of interest and elaborating the conditions under which this encounter takes place. While its conceptual toolkit or body of theory is extensive and abstract, key features almost preclude a general methodology. These are:

- its sensitivity to specific location of research and study;
- the emphasis upon the multiplicity of the past;
- the complementarity of different approaches (pluralism);
- the model of open ended interpretation, the hermeneutic stance favoured by many.

The contrast I drew above between convergent and divergent research outlooks is relevant here – post processual archaeology implies open exploration and elaboration rather than a reductive and efficient simplification.

Nor is there any necessity for a radically different methodology. Science studies have shown that laboratory science is far from the philosophical model of hypothesis testing and the experimental method, and there is far less of a fit anyway with field archaeology.

Example: Lucas 2001, Hodder 2001.

Post processual theory and empirical research

From the very beginning post processual critique was rooted in studies of archaeological material. It has never been simply a body of theory or critique.

The key concepts listed above, while often belonging to debates in social theory that reach far beyond archaeology, occur primarily in attempts to develop more adequate archaeological accounts of past societies, that, for example, embody a more dynamic notion of social structure, recognizing the creativity of human agency, or which avoid the generalizing determinism that was seen to be associated with the society types of culture evolution.

The collection *Symbolic and Structural Archaeology* (Hodder 1982), right at the beginning of the post processual project, focused on case studies of European prehistory. Since then British and European prehistory has been profoundly changed by post processual prehistoric archaeology. Included here can be the projects of John Barrett (1994), Chris Tilley (1994, 1996, 1998) and Julian Thomas (1999). There are now many readers which display a range of empirical work (Miller and Tilley 1984, Hodder 1986a, 1986b, Whitley 1998, Thomas 2001). Some are focused on particular aspects of the post processual project, for example the major collections of work in gender archaeology (beginning with Gero and Conkey 1991). There are experiments in writing (Spector 1992, Shanks 1992, Schrire 1995, Edmonds 1999, Campbell and Hansson 2000, Pearson and Shanks 2001). There are major empirical works in the archaeology of Graeco-Roman antiquity (Shanks 1999) and medieval studies (Johnson 1996). Historical archaeology in the United States is inconceivable without the postprocessual critique at its heart (Leone and Potter 1988, McGuire and Paynter 1991). An archaeology of the contemporary past has

emerged as part of a broader material culture studies (Buchli and Lucas 2001, Buchli 2001, Pearson and Shanks 2001, Campbell and Hansson 2000).

More generally it is increasingly being recognized that post processual critique has worked its way through much academic archaeology. Key topics that indicate this are reflexivity, politics and ethics, stress upon the importance of cognition and communication, explorations of pluralism, gender, and open experiment.

Post Processual archaeology in context

The diversity of post processual archaeologies is very clear when the connections are considered with the social sciences and humanities and with institutional and political cultural change since the 1970s.

Theory

A general expansion of academic research in the humanities and social sciences in the 1960s and afterwards was associated with disciplinary diversification and, by the 1970s, with increasing introspection. A simple indication of this is the increase in academic books and journals devoted to theory. Curricula adapted to include new courses in theory. Academic publishers like Macmillan and Hutchinson, and the university presses like Cambridge introduced series to service the new academic industry. Waves of new approaches, rethinking, doctrines, critiques swept through literary studies, sociology, geography, history, and other disciplines – structuralism (coming out of linguistics and anthropology), neo-marxism (after a revitalization of the new left in the late 1950s and 60s), and a series of philosophies like phenomenology and realism. It seemed no longer enough simply to study a body of material; the study itself, its methods and assumptions needed justification in more or less careful philosophical grounding.

The diversification, the sometimes rapid succession of new ideas, and the context of critical academic debate made for vigorous and often belligerent theory wars. Processual archaeology had been part of the enthusiasm for a rethinking of anthropology along social science lines. It has clear affinities with 'new geography' (David Clarke made a great deal of them). It was intensely critical of other archaeologies (read Lewis Binford) and in turn received the intense attention of post processual critique.

The polemic of theory wars encouraged rhetorical polarization of differing positions, like processual and post processual – the straw men

of debate mentioned above, caricatures of an opponent easily knocked down. But it is possible, I think, as the diversity becomes more established in university departments, to see a general increase in sophistication. The pluralism this has entailed is being more recognized as a strength of a discipline like archaeology rather than a problem.

See Hodder 2001.

The linguistic turn in the humanities and social sciences

One of the waves of rethinking in the humanities and social sciences focused on the character of culture. Building upon structural linguistics, structuralism, poststructuralism and related fields like semiotics proposed culture as communication. It became possible to treat any kind of cultural manifestation as a signifying field, with underlying rules of grammar and pragmatic expression. This has sometimes been called the linguistic turn. It had a great deal of influence on archaeology, particularly post processual. The renewed interest in cognition and symbolism from the mid 1970s is archaeology's own linguistic turn, with a project of establishing systems of meaning in bodies of material culture seen as analogous to text. For some post processual archaeologists the archaeological project became one of interrogating sign systems.

What emerged in the 1990s was a modification of the initial thesis (objects as text), and a realization that (material) culture, one of archaeology's prime interests, is indeed meaningful, but meaning is inherently slippery, negotiated by makers, users and interpreters. The words used to express this include polysemous and undecideable.

See Hodder 1986.

Critical theory

For some, the term critical theory refers to the fertilization of literary studies by continental thought, particularly deconstruction (after the work of Jacques Derrida). For others it is almost synonymous with theory itself.

But it is also useful to be more specific and connect the term with a strand of western Marxism (that is outside of the Soviet Union and China) within which the work of the Frankfurt School (in Germany in the 1920s and after the 50s; in the United States in the 30s and 40s)

is prominent. Practitioners include Adorno, Horkheimer, Marcuse, Benjamin, and Habermas.

The general outlook of critical theory has been very influential. There is a branch of post processual archaeology that calls itself critical archaeology (Leone 1986 and 1987). Critical theory is rooted in notions of critique, a practice that crystallized in the work of Kant.

Critique is reflection on the condition of possible knowledge and involves a rational reconstruction of the conditions which make language, cognition and action possible. Critique is also, after Hegel and Marx, distinctively suspicious of orthodox systems of thought. Critique tends to oppose neat systems of thought on the grounds that they are always inadequate to reality. It asks questions of people's identity, their subjectivity, how they come to be subject to powers beyond them. Critique is also associated with a political project of liberation from distortions, constraints and traditions via insights into the working of power.

This articulation of knowledge with empowerment and liberation is a notable issue in the politics of archaeology. Critique, in connecting study and research to its contexts is a constituent of any discipline that thinks reflexively about itself.

Material Culture Studies and the interdisciplinary

The boundaries of traditional disciplines have become increasingly permeable, again since the 1960s and especially in the humanities and social sciences. Geography, for example, redefined itself in the 1960s as the study of space, a dimension in just about all of the humanities and social sciences. Comparative Literature, Womens' Studies, Cultural Studies, Media and Communication Studies, and, of late, Performance Studies are interdisciplinary fields that have emerged.

Archaeology has never been one of the traditional disciplinary fields like History. It sits uncomfortably between Classics (itself only coherent because of the cultural capital invested in Graeco-Roman antiquity), history, art history, cultural and biological anthropology, and indeed also earth sciences. Arguably archaeology has never become an interdisciplinary field like those listed above, though there are signs that attempts are being made to deal creatively with the diversity of archaeology, helped by deeper appreciation of theoretical agendas (see Hodder 2001). Post processual archaeology has encouraged diversification and has contributed to the emergence of another interesting interdisciplinary project – material culture studies, which ranges from design and art history through anthropology and cultural studies to materials science. One department in the United Kingdom, at University College London, has made material culture the core of its mix of anthropology and archaeology. The question of integration and diversity is a key to the disciplinary future of

archaeology.

Culture/Science wars

In my university they are called the fuzzies and the techies, and the difference is institutionalized in the separated departments of Cultural/Social Anthropology and Anthropological Sciences. It is the old division, after C.P. Snow in 1905, between the two cultures of the sciences and the humanities. This distinction is one of the main battlefields of the theory wars. Some post processual archaeologists have explicitly rejected science as a spurious rhetorical strategy in archaeology (see Tilley 1990).

More generally and particularly in the United States the sociological and anthropological study of science, science studies, has generated enormous controversy over its characterization of science as a social construction (hence constructivism). The debates are again spoiled by extreme polarization. What I think is clear is that this inspection of science reveals it to be so much richer than the philosophical distillations of scientific method, which, for example, lay behind the reformulations of archaeology as science in the new archaeology of the 1960s and early 70s. This work is for me laying down conditions for a deeper understanding of a diverse multidisciplinary archaeology (see Lucas 2001).

Postmodernism

Another culture war still runs between those who have championed a new cultural outlook called postmodernism, and those who oppose it as an abandonment of good reason. This is quite an enormous cultural issue, revolving around the very character of the contemporary world order and our understanding of it.

Archaeology, as well as cognate disciplines, is certainly implicated. Archaeology has been a prominent agent in the establishment of the identities of modern nation states and in an evolutionary understanding of the diversity of human culture generally. It is intimately connected with the growing sector of cultural tourism, people visiting the past in their leisure time. Professional archaeology and museums are subject to major cultural policies, usually involving conservation, the inventory of items deemed heritage, and public education. More generally archaeology is part of a cultural field of understanding that includes the privileging of empirical research over traditional and spiritual understanding of the past, of systems of inspection, management and discipline. Archaeological metaphors of excavating deep to reveal origins vital to rational senses of identity extend far beyond the discipline.

Some have connected post processual archaeology with postmodernism. We are again in a world of caricatures. Postmodernism might be described as a set of movements in the arts, philosophy, the social sciences, style and popular culture which have moved away from the features of a modernist aesthetic and practice. Some connect it with the changes in the modern political economy of flexible capital accumulation. Both are characterized as fragmented, referencing different pasts and cultures without regard for traditional forms of authenticity, working upon the demise of the old certainties of class culture, ethnic identity and the institutional forms of the nation state. Fundamentally in the hands of the postmodern intellectual, theory and method aims to elaborate the multiple relations between culture, class, ethnicity and gender positions and their effects upon cultural production and consumption, destabilizing easy singular readings of cultural products.

This celebration of diversity and critique of the authorized outlook of a cultural high ground is unsettling to many, especially when neutral abstract reason itself seems to be challenged. Postmodernism has been seen as anti-reason and relativist.

This part of the culture and theory wars is an intellectual minefield. Potentially, archaeology is deeply involved in vital cultural agendas that are redefining contemporary culture. Potentially because many archaeologists see no connection at all, particularly if they see their role as one of producing knowledge of what happened in the past.

See Walsh 1992, Bintliff 1993.

Post colonial ethics and politics

The ethnographic encounter which for a century and more has defined anthropology as a discipline, the fieldwork conducted in another culture, has been an issue that has brought the discipline to a crisis. In our post colonial times, it has become clear that ethnography and anthropology are seriously compromised by their intimate association with colonializing imperial powers – in their regimes of knowledge of ‘other’ subordinate societies. The question now is not how do we rescue disappearing other cultures, nor even how do we represent other cultures, but how do we get on with other people when we find the notion of the distanced neutral and scientific observer untenable.

Many archaeologists may see this as irrelevant to archaeology which deals with the past. But the separation of synchronic present, the

subject of ethnography, and diachronic past, the subject of archaeology, clearly arose in the same cultural project of locating other cultures in relation to a superior inspecting agency which aims, in an unreciprocated project, to generate knowledge of them.

The issue of the study of Native American archaeological remains is one that throws this connection into focus. There is genuinely felt opposition from some people to an external agency inspecting them and their past for knowledge which is claimed to be good for its own sake, or in the service of an abstract epistemology which has little respect for traditional beliefs.

There are crucial questions here of the ethics and politics of archaeology. Is there just one archaeological method applicable to all cultures no matter where and when they were? Can there really be more than one archaeological science?

See Meskell 1998.

Globalism and heritage

Uses of and references to the material past have increased with modernity and since the formal inception of archaeology in the eighteenth century. There is a growing culture industry centered on preserved and packaged pasts, featuring in tourism, the entertainment industries which frequently implicate interpretations of the past, and in all sorts of negotiations of identity and belonging. The material past is articulated in various ways, as the prehistoric origins of a nation state, the historical roots of the United States, the experience of an exotic and lost civilization, of monuments seen to represent all that is cherished or despised in a culture.

Some have discerned a latest cultural phase, belonging with postmodernity and termed globalism. It refers to the expansion, especially after the fall of the eastern bloc in 1989 and after, and with the opening up of communist China to market forces, of the capitalist market across the globe. And with this have come new movements to celebrate and protect the local and regional in the face of standardization promoted by faceless multinational corporations for the sake of profit. And the local and regional are always in historical setting.

Heritage is a key concept. Archaeology, as the mobilization of material fragments of the past, is there.

This is most often happening without any reference to academic archaeology. For some this is the way it should be. Many archaeologists would make quite a radical separation between research and interpretation for a wider non-professional and popular audience, between

the production of knowledge of the past and its subsequent use. But these distinctions have been blurred by post processual archaeology with its notion of archaeology as the mediation of past in the present. This gives tremendous credence to projects which aim not only to set archaeology in historical and cultural context, but which aim to develop ways of intelligently commenting upon these globalist issues.

See Hodder 2001.

Cultural Resource Management

There is already a professional interface between the discipline and the wider community – the field of cultural resource management. This sector is by far the largest employer in archaeology, yet it is only just beginning to enter into a creative dialogue with archaeological researchers. It has been and still largely remains a service sector for a conservation ethic promoted by state interests and in the context of development projects. The conservation ethic, that some parts of the past are of cultural value, is a direct mobilization of the past in the present through its structured continuity.

Though clearly there would be no future for archaeology without policies that ensure the protection of the remains of the past, the worlds of academic research and cultural resource management remain distant. Whatever priority and authority is given to research for the simple sake of knowledge of the past, an effective dialogue through the agendas unfolding within this wider context of postcolonial and globalist postmodernity seems urgently required. Post processual archaeology has something to say. It is up to the archaeologists themselves to act.

Archaeology with attitude

The roots in critique and the focus upon the character of social practice means that there is thus a core that can be called post processual archaeology, though strictly it is plural and we should refer to post processual *archaeologies*. Some have been content to redescribe post processual archaeology as interpretive archaeology – rooted in interpretation. But then a range of centripetal and centrifugal interests and issues immediately carry us off in all sorts of ways. Here it is better to think of post processual archaeology as a field of discourse – a field of matters and controversies which are connected but have no necessary unity.

Alternatively, one can see the post processual as an attitude central to cultural creativity. These are the features of this attitude:

constant questioning and critical skepticism;

working with the indissoluble articulation of past and present in the archaeological project;

asking how can we understand cultural difference, past and present;

imagining that difference.

Post Processual futures?

I prefer to emphasize this attitude described in the previous section. Because, for me, it better enables the discipline to deal with the crucial issues that it is now facing.

I have written of a notable split between academic archaeology and the contract sector of archaeologists who serve the demands of development and conservation legislation and values, excavating and publishing to order. Professional contract and cultural resource management often has little scope for the experiment and reflection which has so concerned me in this sketch of post processual archaeology.

Archaeological agendas are clearly set far beyond the academy, as well as within. Indeed it is the disciplinary self-reflection promoted by post processual archaeology which has helped understand how this works, with studies of the history of the discipline as well as ideas of archaeological heritage, and the politicization of the archaeological past. My sketch of the contexts of post processual archaeology shows how archaeology is increasingly implicated in vital and contemporary cultural shifts.

One trend that is clearly affecting cultural resource management and archaeology is globalism. Let me add to my comments above by way of a concluding example. We are in the post colonial world of global interconnection. It is a paradoxical articulation. On the one hand is a unifying force of the abstract commodity form (the capitalist free market), together with its associated culture industry (predominantly western and American). On the other hand is an infinity of individual and local points and moments of consumption – both real and alienated abstractions. An example is of the ubiquity of western popular culture, such as music, consumed in an infinity of individual ways in the 'mix' of songs on an MP3 walkman.

In this globalism the mobilization of the material past seems to figure larger and larger. Material archaeological roots give a real sense of

local identity in contrast to global culture. This different past happened here. Yet the sites and finds remain joined in a global system of value and accreditation – notions of the world heritage site, or through standard notions of cultural value embodied in the culture ministry's inventory and tourist itinerary of cultural sites worth preserving and visiting. This is the real dispersal of what I have called the field of discourse that is archaeology.

One response might be to emphasize archaeology as a professional science with a standard set of procedures. Yet even my brief sketch here should indicate that this will not enable an effective engagement with the cultural energies in global archaeology. What I think is needed is an archaeology able to cope with the globalist agenda. For me this can only be a cultural resource management made flexible in its own articulation with a cultural sensitivity and sophistication afforded by a reflexive discipline such as that that has developed in post processual archaeology.