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Source: *American Antiquity*, Vol. 56, No. 1 (Jan., 1991), pp. 7-18

Published by: Society for American Archaeology

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/280968>

Accessed: 21/10/2008 09:48

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# INTERPRETIVE ARCHAEOLOGY AND ITS ROLE

Ian Hodder

*This paper seeks further to define the processes of the interpretation of meaning in archaeology and to explore the public role such interpretation might play. In contrast to postmodern and poststructuralist perspectives, a hermeneutic debate is described that takes account of a critical perspective. An interpretive postprocessual archaeology needs to incorporate three components: a guarded objectivity of the data, hermeneutic procedures for inferring internal meanings, and reflexivity. The call for an interpretive position is related closely to new, more active roles that the archaeological past is filling in a multicultural world.*

*Este artículo intenta definir los procesos de la interpretación de significación en arqueología y explorar el papel público que esta interpretación podría tener. En contraste con la perspectiva postmodernista y postestructuralista, el debate hermenéutico incluye una perspectiva crítica. Una arqueología interpretativa postprocesual necesita incorporar tres componentes: una estricta objetividad de los datos, procedimientos hermenéuticos para inferir significados internos, y reflexividad. El interés en una posición interpretativa está relacionado a papeles nuevos y más activos que el pasado arqueológico cumple en un mundo multicultural.*

What is interpretation and why does it seem an appropriate term to use in the archaeology of the 1990s? In this paper I hope to answer both these questions. While I have elsewhere discussed interpretation in terms of a contextual approach (Hodder 1986), I have not situated the latter in relation to wider traditions except the rather outdated views of Collingwood (1946). I intend in this paper to provide a wider definition of contextual archaeology within an interpretive framework.

This article will discuss hermeneutics as an important component in an interpretive or contextual archaeology. For many writers, hermeneutics is more than an epistemology for the human sciences in that it accounts for being. I recently came across a good example of the everyday working of hermeneutic principles while listening to the radio in the United States. I heard the phrase, or thought I did, "it was necessary to indoor suffering." Inspecting these "data" I first thought the phrase was an example of the liberty that North Americans often take with the English language. After all, North Americans often make nouns and adjectives into verbs (as in "to deplane"), so it seemed entirely possible that "to indoor suffering" meant "to take suffering indoors." I did not see why it should be necessary to suffer indoors, but then I know that North Americans, especially if they live in California from where the program came, are willing to try anything. So initially I understood the term as it sounded to me and assumed that the same word had the same meaning. I then corroborated and adjusted this meaning by placing it in the peculiar and particular rules of North American culture. This was the first stage of my hermeneutic interpretation.

Gradually, however, this process of internal evaluation made less and less sense as I continued to listen to the radio program. My interpretation of the sound "indoor" no longer made what was being said coherent. The program was about suffering in general, not just about suffering indoors. Sentences such as "to indoor the suffering I took a pain killer" made little sense. I could only make sense of these examples when I hit upon the idea of another component of my understanding of the North American context: North Americans often pronounce words "wrongly." Coming back from this contextual knowledge to my own general knowledge about English words and their meanings I searched and found "endure." Now everything made coherent sense and the whole had been reestablished. The hermeneutic circle had been closed.

Of course, all this happened in a few seconds. But the speed and trivial nature of the process cannot but emphasize the wide dependence of human communication and understanding on the

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American Antiquity, 56(1), 1991, pp. 7–18.  
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procedures of hermeneutic interpretation. We evaluate many arguments not so much by testing universal, general knowledge against data using universal, independent instruments of measurement but by interpreting general understanding or foreknowledge in relation to our understanding of particular contexts. We place the thing to be understood (in this case the sound "indoor") more and more fully into its context, moving back and forth between "their" and "our" context until coherence is achieved. The emphasis is on part-whole relations. We try to fit the pieces into an interpretive whole at the same time as constructing the whole out of the pieces. We measure our success in this enmeshing of theory and data (our context and their context) in terms of how much of the data is accounted for by our hypothesis in comparison to other hypotheses. This working back and forth between theory and data, this absorption in context and texture tends to be more concerned with understanding the data in their own terms and in using internal, as well as external, criteria for judgement.

It has for some time been argued (Hodder 1986; Trigger 1989) that processual archaeology placed little emphasis on interpreting general knowledge in relation to internal understanding. But it is also appropriate to ask whether postprocessual archaeology has sufficiently engaged in interpretation of the general in relation to the particular. I would claim that, so far, much postprocessual archaeology has avoided an interpretive position, except superficially. On the whole, postprocessual archaeology has concerned power, negotiation, text, intertext, structure, ideology, agency, and so on. Many of these concerns may move us in an interpretive direction but they remain general and theoretical interests that dominate our present thoughts. They represent the interests of a predominantly Western, white, male discourse. There have been very few postprocessual studies that have said "I will put the theory in second place, treat it simply as baggage, and set off to tell a story about, for example, the development of Bronze Age society in Bavaria." On the whole, postprocessual archaeologists, including the author of this article, have been more concerned with showing the validity of our universal theoretical apparatus. The data have been only examples manipulated to demonstrate, often inadequately, some theoretical point. There has been insufficient interpretation.

The tendency to develop a universal theoretical discourse and impose it on the past is common to both processual and postprocessual archaeology. In both cases there is insufficient sensitivity to the independent difference of past contexts and to contextual meanings. This insensitivity derives from two different directions. Processual archaeology put many of its eggs in the basket of methods. A universal method was supposed to allow us to read off dynamics from statics, and so there was little attempt to construct interpretive procedures that were sensitive to internal meanings. Conversely, to a large extent, postprocessual archaeology has been weak on method (Watson 1986). Indeed, it might be claimed that so much emphasis has been placed on theoretical discussion and theoretical criteria that the method of postprocessual archaeology is theory. The rigors of theoretical criteria have replaced those of method but have detracted equally from the interpretation of specific, internal historical meanings.

The scarcity of interest in internal meanings in both processual and postprocessual archaeology also relates to an inadequate concern with the context of archaeologists. The lack of reflexivity in processual archaeology is accepted widely, but the claim in relation to postprocessual archaeology is perhaps surprising. My suggestion derives from the observation made above that in practice, postprocessual archaeological writings largely have concerned theory rather than method. It was mainly at the theoretical level that processual archaeology was shown wanting. The practical result of a purely theoretical debate tends to be posturing. Theoretical debate involves defining terms, defining boundaries, and setting up oppositions. Theoretical meaning is always referential (to other theories) and tends to be confrontational by nature. Argument is over the top of, rather than through the data that become relevant only as examples. The argument is entirely about the present, not about the past. It manipulates the data for presentist concerns, and while postprocessual archaeology successfully has opened up the area of critique it has scrutinized insufficiently its own preconceptions.

I would argue that as a result, as radical as postprocessual archaeology would claim to be, it merely reestablishes older structures of archaeological research. It tends towards doing the same thing in a different way. Perhaps a good example of continuity in structures of power within academic discourse, despite claims for radical change in the content of ideas, is the fact that Grahame Clark, David

Clarke, Ian Hodder, Christopher Tilley, and Michael Shanks, covering a range of different theoretical positions through time, were or are all associated with Peterhouse—one small, reactionary, exclusive college in Cambridge.

Much of what postprocessual archaeology has argued for has not been evaluated critically and the effects of its actions have not been reflexively probed. For example, the new theories and the new ways of writing them often serve to make archaeological texts more obscure and difficult for anyone but the highly trained theorist to decipher. How can alternative groups have access to a past that is locked up both intellectually and institutionally? Subordinate groups who wish to be involved in archaeological interpretation need to be provided with the means and mechanisms for interacting with the archaeological past in different ways. This is not a matter of popularizing the past but of transforming the relations of production of archaeological knowledge into more democratic structures.

One danger of this view, as has been argued by Renfrew (1989) for example, is that if we accept that the past is constructed partly in the present (in the dialectic between past and present, object and subject), and that we must listen to and incorporate other voices and historical meanings constructed by, for example, women and ethnic minorities, where can we draw the lines around legitimate archaeological research? Should we also welcome the voices of creationists, looters, metal-detector users and other “fringe” archaeologists within a tower of babbling? On what grounds is it possible to claim a legitimacy and primacy for the different but universal projects of, for example, processual or postprocessual archaeology?

One alternative to hermeneutic approaches within the humanities and social sciences emanates from writers—precursors and champions of postmodern and poststructuralist thought—who raise similar questions about the boundaries of legitimate research by seeking multivocality, fragmentation, and dispersal. These writers, including Nietzsche, Foucault (Tilley 1990b), Kristeva, Barthes (Olsen 1990), and Derrida (Yates 1990) suspend meaning within chains of signifiers, and emphasise the openness of interpretations within our dependence on language. Poststructuralist work is having an increasing influence in archaeology (Bapty and Yates 1990; Tilley 1990a; see also Hodder 1989b) and is important because it opens up a central issue. What is the boundary between an open multivocality where any interpretation is as good as another and legitimate dialogue between “scientific” and American Indian, black, feminist, etc. interests?

In my view, the nonhermeneutic, noninterpretive strands in postprocessual archaeology and in all postmodern social science, serve further to reestablish positions of dominance that are threatened by the same openness to alternative, nonscientific perspectives as is feared by processual archaeologists (e.g., Renfrew 1989). The influence of poststructuralism (Bapty and Yates 1990; Hodder 1989b; Tilley 1990a) is towards multivocality and the dispersal of meaning. Truth and knowledge are claimed as contingent and multiple, and relativism is to some extent entertained. At first sight, this development toward a nonhermeneutic, poststructuralist position seems benign. It opens up the past to other voices and deconstructs the universality of truth claims. But the feminist critique of postmodernism (e.g., Mascie-Lees et al. 1989) is particularly revealing here. Dominant theorists and specialists have, since the excited certainties of the 1960s, increasingly lost the monopoly to define archaeological truths as alternative positions have been argued by women, ethnic minorities, and by all the different perspectives in archaeological theory, never mind all the fringe archaeologies. As identified by Mascie-Lees et al. (1989; see also Eagleton 1983), the poststructuralist response to this loss of authority is subtle. The notion that truth and knowledge are contingent and multiple undermines the claims of subordinate groups. It *disempowers them* by alienating them from the reality they experience. Irony and relativism appear as intellectual possibilities for dominating groups at the point where the hegemony and universality of their views is being challenged (Mascie-Lees et al. 1989). In effect, a new, more subtle universal claim to truth is produced out of the critique of truth. The poststructuralist emphasis on multivocality, metaphor, and fragmentation may be constructed to capture the complex and contradictory nature of social life. But in fact what is provided is a resolution of conflict into a pleasing whole in which the author is scarcely present. He or she also is fragmented, distanced, uncommitted, disengaged; powerful but always absent and therefore not answerable to criticism.

The postmodern theoretical discourse, then, subtly disempowers critique and establishes a new distanced authority. Its radical political claims are undermined by the insecurity and multivocality of knowledge claims. Poststructuralist archaeology becomes a movement without a cause. As a result of its links with poststructuralism and postmodernism (Hodder 1989b), postprocessual archaeology has not always been concerned with opening dialogue with "other groups." There has been little incorporation of alternative claims on the past in a multiethnic Britain or United States. There has been little dialogue with feminist archaeology in for example the writing of Shanks and Tilley (1987a, 1987b), despite the fact that it can be claimed plausibly that the growth of postprocessual archaeology depended on the growth of feminism and feminist archaeology. But this "other voice" often has been appropriated and dominated within postprocessual archaeology (M. Conkey, personal communication 1990).

Rather than embracing poststructuralism, postprocessual archaeology should grasp an interpretive position in order to avoid the above problems and to break from established relations of dominance in the production of the archaeological past. In this initial discussion I have begun to identify three essential aspects of an interpretive approach in archaeology.

First, a guarded objectivity of the past needs to be retained so that subordinate groups can use the archaeological past to empower their knowledge claims in the present and to differentiate their claims from fringe, ungrounded archaeologies. By "guarded" objectivity I mean that the "data" are formed within a dialectical relation. In the example I gave of the radio program, I heard, *or thought I did*, the phrase "to indoor suffering". The sound I picked up from the radio only became sound data through my interpretation of voice from crackling background and through my (incorrect) recognition of certain words. My interpretation was based on objective sound waves but it also penetrated into their definition as data. The data are produced dialectically. Second, an internal, hermeneutic component needs to be retained in interpretation. We need to be sensitive to the other. The attempt to understand the past in terms of the experiences of social actors allows the past to be released from abstract specialist theory into the realms of everyday human understanding and simultaneously provides a basis for the critique of universal propositions in the present. It allows for a relevant human story to be told. There is a need to move away from theory and get on with interpreting data, by which I mean move away from an assumption of the primacy of theory towards relating theory to data as part of a learning process. Third, a reflexive consideration of the production of archaeological knowledge will lead to a critical engagement with the voicing of other interests, by identifying the causes for which the past is constructed, and by locating the mechanisms that make it exclusive.

The search, then, within postprocessual archaeology is for an adequate integration of these three aims with clearly defined methodological procedures. There is a need to give science a context in archaeology as methodology, not as a final goal or as the only relevant body of theory. I have already argued that this scientific component of archaeological work is necessary to avoid ungrounded undermining of knowledge claims by interested groups and in order to avoid a subsuming of the past within a homogenised theoretical present. But how are we to integrate such scientific concerns for a guardedly objective past within a nonpositivist archaeology? How are we to accept the commitment to process that is broader than ecological and adaptive relations and that incorporates human action? In my view, answers to these questions can be gained from developments in the debate surrounding hermeneutic studies.

### HERMENEUTIC PROCEDURES

Beyond the trivial example given at the beginning of this paper, what does a hermeneutic, contextual approach involve and how might the inferential methods be employed in archaeology? Does the approach allow us to get at internal meanings while maintaining a guarded commitment to objectivity and independence and while remaining reflexive?

It may be helpful to outline the main ideas and problems of a hermeneutic archaeology by discussing briefly the history and development of hermeneutic ideas since the founding work of Friedrich Schleiermacher and Wilhelm Dilthey (Ormiston and Schrift 1990). Their starting point was the principle that understanding and knowledge depend on the dialectical relation between part

and whole—the hermeneutic circle. Dilthey extended Schleiermacher's concern with the intentions of the author in producing texts to include a wider hermeneutic circle such as historical background, social customs, cultural and political institutions, and so on. Martin Heidegger (1958) dealt with some of the problems of this approach. In particular, he emphasized that our understanding of the past “other” is dependent on prejudice and tradition. In other words, the past hermeneutic we are trying to interpret is dependent on, and may be enclosed by, the hermeneutic circles within which we work as archaeologists and members of society. Shanks and Tilley (1987a) identify four hermeneutic circles within which the contemporary archaeologist works when trying to understand past material culture “texts.” Although Heidegger claimed that the enclosing hermeneutic circles are not vicious, in that they do not involve hermetically sealed “circular arguments,” it is difficult to see how, within his version of hermeneutic procedures, it is possible to do more than interpret the past in our own terms. The same criticisms have been made of contextual archaeology (Binford 1987).

Although I have argued (Hodder 1991a) that Hans-Georg Gadamer (1975) tried to deal effectively with these problems of circularity of argument it can nevertheless be claimed that he retained a subjectivist position. Indeed, this is the criticism of Emilio Betti (1955, translated 1984), who argued for a hermeneutic methodology that would safeguard the objective standards of interpretation. Betti's approach is of interest to the current debate in archaeology in view of the call that is made frequently, particularly by North American archaeologists, for postprocessual archaeologists to define their methods (e.g., Earle and Preucel 1987; Watson 1986). Betti's methodological guide involved the following principles: (a) the autonomy of the object—the idea that a past context should be judged in its own terms; (b) the notion of coherence (see also Collingwood 1946) or the principle of totality—the idea of part-whole relations and the notion that the “best” hypothesis is the one that makes sense of most of the data; and (c) the fact that the past “other” has to be appropriated and translated in the present so that (d) the aim of the analyst should be to control prejudice while bringing his or her subjectivity into harmony with the data.

The latter parts of this proposal remain ambiguous so that Gadamer was able to respond by questioning the validity of the subjective-objective opposition and showing that understanding is not a matter of a subject confronting an alien object (Ormiston and Schrift 1990). Rather it is a dialectical process of question and answer. Thus the past object and the present subject constitute each other in the hermeneutic process of interpretation. Thus, in my analysis of Neolithic Çatal Hüyük I interpreted the site in my own terms, but in the experience of trying to understand the “other” of Çatal Hüyük “my own terms” changed (Hodder 1990). For example, my assumptions about the roles of women were contradicted by the evidence for the roles of men. I had assumed that the dominance of representations of women in the earlier Neolithic could be read as a subordination of women and as a misrepresentation of their roles. In the later Neolithic, however, I found I was using the evidence for dominant representations of men as a straightforward indication of male power. I was using a double standard in relation to the evidence for women and men. As a result I changed my views on the nature of female powers (Hodder 1991b). I had in the end both changed my own position and changed the past so that a new hermeneutic circle was produced that made more complete sense of both past and present.

Nevertheless it can be argued, following Jürgen Habermas (1990), that Gadamer did not sufficiently critique the tradition within which preconceptions and prejudices about the data are formed. The tradition needs to be subject to the critique of ideology and needs to be examined as distorted communication within certain historical conditions. It is Ricoeur (1971; 1990; see also Moore 1990; Thompson 1981) who has dealt most effectively with the linking of hermeneutics and Marxist critical theory. In archaeology, the relevance of various forms of critical theory has been brought increasingly into postprocessual discussion (e.g., Leone 1982; Leone et al. 1987; Shanks and Tilley 1987a). Ricoeur points out that the Marxist critique of ideology is itself founded on a hermeneutic (see also Hodder 1986:168) in the sense that any critical reflection makes claims for a privileged understanding and makes claims for universality which appear dogmatic. In other words, the Marxist critique is locked into its own hermeneutic circle. Indeed, Ricoeur sees hermeneutics and the critique of ideology as necessarily complementary.

According to Ricoeur, not only are critical approaches dependent on hermeneutic circles, but hermeneutics retains within itself the basis of critique and a way out of the circularity of interpretation. In this, in my view, he emphasizes the partially objective nature of other contexts as suggested by Betti. Ricoeur argues that rather than only emphasizing prejudice in the process of going to the past with questions, we can place emphasis on the return from the past with answers. He shows that any "text" (written or material culture) is distanced from its "author." It is the product of meaningfully organized activity, and it is itself patterned by those activities. This patterned organization, distant from its original meanings, has an independence that can therefore confront our interpretations. In attempting to understand the past "other" it is possible to suggest hypotheses (about past cultural rules and meanings) that make more or less coherent sense of the objectively patterned remains by moving back and forth between whole and part. The answers we return with can be unexpected. As a result no horizon (viewpoint or perspective) is universal because the tension between self and other is not surmountable. Only by placing myself in relation to the independent (objectively organized and different) other can I confront myself and my society with its taken for granted. There is a need for the "creative renewal of cultural heritage" (Ricoeur 1990:332) as the basis for the critique of contemporary ideologies.

The moment of critique in the hermeneutic process is the interaction with data to produce "possible worlds" (Bruner 1986) or stories that open up possibilities beyond the conventional. Always the distance of the "text" defines and critiques my subjectivities and opens my closed "false consciousness." Material culture as excavated by archaeologists is different from our assumptions because it is organized partly at least according to other cultural rules (from social organization to refuse deposition). But past material culture also confronts our interpretations and assumptions in so far as it is not only meaningfully but also pragmatically organized (Hodder 1989a). In other words, we *are not just interpreting interpretations*, but dealing with objects that had practical effects in a noncultural world—an ecological world organized by exchanges of matter and energy. These universal, necessary relations confront the tendency of our interpretations to "run free" as has been shown, for example, in Binford's (1983) reappraisal of hypotheses of early hominid behavior through a consideration of the universal nature of scavenging animals and their "signatures."

So we need to retain from positivist and processual archaeology a guarded "objectivity" of the material "other" that provides the basis of critique through the reality of difference. The supposed viciousness or closure of the hermeneutic circle resides in the view that in "fitting theory to data" in the search for coherence we enclose the data entirely within our prejudices. But the organized material remains have an independence that can confront our taken for granted. The notion that the data are partly objective is an old one in archaeology, and it was the basis for processual and positivist archaeology. But the trouble with positivist and processual archaeologists was that they did not incorporate hermeneutic and critical insights. From a hermeneutic point of view, the failure of the processual archaeology of the 1970s and early 1980s was that it too often took a cavalier, externally based approach where the data were simply examples for the testing of universal schemes, with too little attention paid to context and to understanding the data in their own terms (Hodder 1986; Trigger 1989:348–357). The possibility that radically different processes might be encountered was thus difficult to entertain. From the point of view of critique, the failure of processual archaeology was its blindness to its own ideologies (e.g., Conkey and Spector 1984; Patterson 1986; Trigger 1980).

Both processual and hermeneutic approaches accept that every assertion can be understood only in relation to a question. But in hermeneutic archaeology, prejudice and tradition are not opposed to reason without supposition. Rather they are components of understanding linked to the historical nature of being human. We need a perspective to understand the world. Archaeology poses meaningful questions, does meaningful research, and gets meaningful results only in terms of a perspective or a set of questions. Processual and hermeneutic approaches of course differ in their approach to the validation of hypotheses, emphasizing external and internal criteria of judgment respectively, but both have suffered from the same blindness to the conditions that make their different perspectives possible. Both fail to explore the way in which the asking of questions and the expectation of certain answers are situated in historical processes. There is thus a need to retain the Marxist

emphasis on critical reflection. We can only understand the past in its own terms if we understand our own context in the dialectic between past and present. The past can only inform the present through the dual endeavors of understanding present and past as different but dependent. Objectivity may help us to define the past as different, and hermeneutics may help us to understand what it meant through the part-whole, question-and-answer method, but it is critical reflection that shows most fully what it means to us.

So far I have identified three directions within archaeology that also are found throughout the social sciences. These correspond to the spheres of interest identified by Habermas (1971) (see Preucel 1991). The first is technical or instrumental interest and corresponds with what most North American archaeologists identify as the “science” of processual, ecological, evolutionary, behavioral, and positivist archaeology. The second concerns the historical or hermeneutic sciences dealing with communication, understanding, meaning and action (cf. Patrik 1985). The third concerns emancipation, critical social science and self-reflection (e.g., Leone et al. 1987).

These three directions each have roles to play in archaeology, but modified in relation to the others. Thus processual archaeology needs to be subsumed within a relation to critique and hermeneutics, and postprocessual archaeology needs to react to the charge of methodological naiveté. An integrated but diversified approach needs to incorporate three perspectives. (1) The past is objectively organized in contexts that differ from our own. It is in the experience of this objective and independent difference that we can distinguish among competing hypotheses to see which fits best. (2) However, if the present is not simply to be imposed on the past we need not impose external criteria but must accommodate our external knowledge to internal relations. We need to understand the past partly in its own terms by using the criterion of coherence in part-whole relations. This internal understanding includes symbolism, meaning, the conceptual, history, action as opposed to behavior, people as well as systems. This is not a cognitive archaeology (Renfrew 1989) because the latter does not deal with the central question of meaning, and it does not involve getting into peoples’ minds. Rather, the hermeneutic approach involves getting at the public and social structures of meaning through which people make sense of the world. It is recognized that these secondary, conceptual realms of meaning are historical and arbitrary, but it is argued that they nevertheless can be interpreted, using the part-whole hermeneutic approach, because the secondary, abstract meanings were used in social action and thus produced repeated patterned effects in material culture and the organization of spatial and temporal relations. Returning to point (1), these objective patternings allow us to distinguish between hypotheses about which secondary conceptual meanings were operative in producing the archaeological remains.

(3) The third component of interpretive archaeology is the self-reflexive aspect of new ethnographic and some emerging archaeological writing (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Hodder 1989c; Tilley 1989). This perspective involves being aware that writing has an audience to which it needs to be critically responsible, and a rhetoric that acts to persuade. It involves introducing the “I” into archaeological accounts, dialogue between co-workers or between researchers and indigenous “owners” of the past, and it involves telling the story of the contingent context of work in which hypotheses were formulated.

We might gloss these three points by saying that interpretive archaeology is about constructing narratives, or telling stories. Of course, all archaeology always has told stories about evolution, diffusion, maximization, adaptation, survival, and so on. But in these stories the rhetoric of the story line was not acknowledged or criticized as contributing to the construction of the message or hidden agenda. The stories were often not told at the human scale, and were not inclusive of the viewpoints of the actors. The accounts were validated through external science rather than internal meaning, and they lacked the narrator, who was mysteriously absent. In all these ways, the stories were not interpretations.

## INTERPRETIVE ARCHAEOLOGY AND CULTURAL HERITAGE

In many ways, the calls for an interpretive archaeology mirror contemporary concerns for heritage and the environment. It is no accident that more interpretive or heritage “centers” rather than



museums are appearing on the landscape in both Britain and North America as interpretive approaches are discussed increasingly within the discipline. These new centers often are more concerned with telling a story and may contain few artifacts. They often involve a narrator, whether it be a recorded voice at the Yorvik Centre, York, England, or cardboard cut-out Asterix and Obelix figures in the reconstructed Iron Age huts in the Bois de Boulogne, Paris. Increasingly emphasis is placed on showing sequences of activities and involving the public in experiencing the past.

In order to understand these relations and the need for an active interpretive archaeology within environmental and heritage management it may be helpful to return to the traditional goals of anthropology. The latter may be described as the salvage of distinct forms of life from the processes of global Westernization, the recognition of the non-Western as an element of the human just as crucial as the Western, and skepticism concerning Western claims to knowledge and understanding.

These traditional anthropological concerns have been reasserted in postmodern anthropology (e.g., Clifford and Marcus 1986), and they imply that anthropology has a countercultural potential. It can be argued that the current increases in student enrollment and job openings in sociocultural anthropology in the United States relate to a switch from the "me" generation to one more concerned with green issues (Roy Rappaport, personal communication 1990).

The rise in the centrality of global environmental issues has a double effect on anthropology. On the one hand, many of these global effects are ecological and involve a world of universal measurements, energetics, causes, and effects. On the other hand, the realization that we are destroying each other on a global scale leads to a greater concern with other cultures. In order to arrest the environmental impact of oil spillage, pipe lines, the use of fossil fuels among the growing populations of the developing world, and rain-forest depletion we are forced to understand the needs and practices of other cultures and to enter into dialogue with them. The cost of destruction of societies by the agents of development cannot simply be *counted* numerically. It is not only a question of numbers and of survival but also of values and morality. In such a context, the call is for a qualitative anthropology that can inform on and assist dialogue with other cultures that we might destroy or that might destroy us.

Archaeology readily fits in here, as several of the "One World Archaeology" volumes have shown (e.g., Gathercole and Lowenthal 1989; Layton 1989a, 1989b). A concern for the archaeology of a region is a concern for the environment of that region—not just a physical environment but a *peopled* environment—given cultural values and meanings. Peoples around the world use archaeology to help maintain their pasts in the face of the universalizing and dominating processes of Westernization and Western science. The physical archaeological remains help people to maintain, reform, or even form a new identity or culture in the face of multinational encroachment, outside powers, or centralized governments. Related arguments concern the use of the past by ethnic minorities, women, and other groups to define and reform their social positions within national boundaries in relation to the dominant culture.

The past that is used by subordinate voices in this way is not just a resource, and here is the link to the need for an interpretive archaeology. Subordinate groups do not necessarily want to fit their archaeologies into universal schemes in Western academic institutions. Rather, subordinate groups may wish to explore, perhaps archaeologically, the meaning that their monuments have for them. The past is not a resource that can simply be quantified, tabulated, or otherwise manipulated at arm's length within our theoretical frameworks. Rather than that terrible term "cultural-resource management," what is needed is a qualitative archaeology, sensitive to context and meaning, open not to multivocality for its own sake but to dialogue that leads to change. Many peoples do not want a past defined as a scientific resource by us but a past that is a story to be interpreted. In these ways the public debates about the contemporary role of archaeology and the dissemination of archaeological knowledge run parallel to the call for an interpretive archaeology.

In North America the confrontation between desires to tell different stories, as in the reburial debate, has a particular form. In Britain archaeology plays a role in a different context of great public interest and nationalist concerns for, for example, an "English Heritage." But even here, in this cocoon that denies the multiethnic nature of "our" past, archaeology may be playing a countercultural, interpretive role. The heritage boom that we have witnessed in Britain over recent years

(Merriman 1989) has included a massive increase in numbers of so-called museums. In fact, as already noted, these often contain few objects and are devoted more to interpreting the landscape or the past and/or telling a story about a local area, giving it a meaning to local inhabitants and visitors. In England, archaeologists increasingly are employed by environmental and planning consultants. Developers need to take account of local desires and senses of place if planning authority is to be achieved. Archaeology is literally the price that often has to be paid for development. In some cases developers are keen to provide means not only for archaeology to be conducted but also for the results to be displayed permanently. Thus the past is being used to give a sense of local identity and place in the face of universalizing large-scale development and destruction of the environment. The heritage or interpretive centers tell a story that links people into communities that increasingly are being threatened and fragmented.

Clearly there is a danger that I present a romanticized view. Archaeology in Britain is being manipulated by big business to make money, to buy development, and to excuse its activities. Many of the interpretations are commercialized, fragmented, and unconcerned with local or any social issues (Shanks and Tilley 1987a). Nevertheless, in the negotiation that occurs between developers, planning authorities, and local inhabitants, the archaeology can play an active role. The past can sometimes be used by people to tell a story about themselves in the face of external pressures. In my own involvement with excavating and displaying information from prehistoric sites near Cambridge, I was impressed by the attempts of a local village community to retain access to its own past. I also had to confront the fact that the community did not want an abstract past defined by me. Rather, the local people wanted me to engage with them in working out a set of stories, told at the human level, which they could enter. In a regional Fenland context of community fragmentation, high residential mobility, and destruction of traditional farming employment, the archaeological remains helped in practice to form a local community.

## CONCLUSION

This experience of mine is just a small example of the way the archaeological past is being used by social groups—including ethnic minorities, women, and non-Western peoples—to find a voice. My claim is that an interpretive approach in archaeology is more able to articulate this voice than are processual or poststructuralist archaeologies. This is because, to answer directly the first question posed at the beginning of this paper, interpretation is translation. It involves the archaeologist acting as interpreter between past and present, between different perspectives on the past, and between the specific and the general. Interpretation therefore involves listening, understanding, and accommodation among different voices rather than solely the application of universal instruments of measurement. This response leads directly to the answer to my second question posed at the beginning. The role of interpretive archaeology is to facilitate the involvement of the past in a multicultural present. This function is integral to the three aspects of the definition of interpretive archaeology that I have given in this paper.

(1) The partially objective, grounded, and material nature of the past allows subordinate groups to empower themselves through the evidential aspect of archaeology. For example, it is possible to show unambiguously that indigenous communities inhabited South Africa before the arrival of white settlers. Equally, the objective component of archaeological data means that the analyst can be confronted with the otherness of the past. Since argument is through, rather than over, the data, we have to shift our positions in the experience of the data. The data and I bring each other into existence dialectically. The past then allows the possibility for a sense of other that is increasingly being eroded in an expanding, homogenized Western ethic.

(2) Interpretive approaches at least try to understand the other in its own terms in that they look for internal rather than external criteria of plausibility in order to support their arguments. They thus encourage other groups to develop their own senses of past. In addition, interpretive approaches incorporate the conceptual, i.e., the way people made sense of the world. They therefore bring the past to the human scale rather than locking it up in distant, abstract science or theory. To interpret is therefore to act because the interpretation releases the past into public debate. It forces us to

translate the past into a story we can understand. Interpretation forces us to *say something*, and therefore to engage with others who would tell different stories. It forces us to unlock the abstract ivory-tower theory and show what it means in practice, in relation to the data.

(3) Interpretive approaches encourage self-reflexivity and dialogue. The past always is “owned” by someone in some sense. But ownership is always an interpretation. Archaeologists need to retain the authority to be able to say that a particular interpretation does not fit the data (point 1 above), but they also need to be open to dialogue and conflicts with vested interests other than their own and to understand the social implications of the knowledge they construct. And they need to realize that subordinate groups can be provided with the mechanisms (the material and educational possibilities) for engaging with the past in their own ways. A critical position recognizes that the telling of stories grounded in the data depends on the relations of production of archaeological knowledge.

As indigenous, different interpretations of ownership increasingly develop, there is a real concern, both in the United States and in other parts of the world, about whether archaeology as it has been defined scientifically will be able to continue to exist (Kintigh 1990; Lovis 1990). Archaeology must change if it is to exist in the contemporary multicultural world. The issue is not just one of getting American Indians to change or of teaching them “our” archaeology. Rather, it is one of involving them as we change ourselves and our concepts of science. There is a need to break the mold in archaeology, discussing not from within a closed science, but opening up that science to dialogue, narrative, rhetorical analysis, and meaning. These are the topics now being debated in sociocultural anthropology. But there is also a need to build interpretations of the archaeological past informed by these issues. We cannot continue to cling to a narrow science.

Interpretive archaeology can be an active, “doing” archaeology. We need to see postprocessual archaeologists launching into coherent and sustained interpretations of the past, involving themselves in whatever contemporary issues those interpretations raise. In my case the relevant interpretations may involve the nature of Neolithic burial near Cambridge, or the nature and origins of the concept of prehistoric Europe after the events of 1989 and as the unification of 1992 approaches. In the United States the relevant debates may concern interpretations of slave quarters on a South Carolina plantation or the interpretation of American Indian remains. There is a direct link between these calls for interpretations in archaeology and reburial issues, land claims, public archaeology, the presentation of the past, and so on. Postprocessual archaeology should not involve going into an ivory tower of abstract theory and slamming the door. The way postprocessual, in fact all archaeology, will endure is by not remaining indoors.

*Acknowledgment.* I am grateful to Bob Preucel for discussions on some of the key points in this paper.

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*Received July 17, 1990; accepted November 12, 1990*