9 Post-processual archaeology

Processual archaeology made contributions to archaeological theory by encouraging the notion of culture as adaptive, and by applying systems theory, information exchange theory and a host of other general theories. Many of these ideas had existed in some form in earlier approaches in archaeology, and the extent of this continuity will be further examined below. Yet perhaps the major contribution made by the New Archaeology was methodological (Meltzer 1979; Moore and Keene 1983, p. 4). Archaeologists became more concerned about problems of inference, sampling and research design. Quantitative and statistical techniques were used more frequently; procedures were questioned and made more explicit. Contextual archaeology is an attempt to develop archaeological methodology further.

In the realm of theory, there have been a number of developments since the early 1960s which, it can be argued, indicate movement from the initial stance of processual archaeology as represented by the early papers of Binford (1962; 1965) and Flannery (1967). In the 1980s, what we now call post-processual archaeology encouraged an engagement with the theoretical turns taken in other fields, particularly anthropology, which had explored many new directions not foreseen by the first wave of anthropological archaeology in the 1960s. In the new millennium, as the debate between processualism and post-processualism gives way to a thousand archaeologies (Preucel 1995; Schiffer 2000), the usefulness of this debate is as questionable as the demand for a resolution (Hutson 2001; cf. VanPool and VanPool 1999). In this chapter we summarise the ways in which archaeology benefits from the dismissal of this and other dichotomies and suggest areas in which archaeology can export theory to fields from which it once only imported.

Beyond engaging with new theories, post-processual archaeology also valued engagements with society. The centrepiece of the positivist methods introduced into archaeology in the 1960s and 1970s was a strict separation between the object of research and the social context of the subjects conducting the research. Theory could come from anywhere but if it contaminated the data, any chance of clean hypothesis testing would be ruined. As mentioned in chapter 1, most archaeologists have since backed away from this stance. In the previous chapter, we stressed how understanding comes from the mesh between present political contexts and past 'data'. The politics of the present are therefore part of archaeological inquiry. We must therefore dissolve one final dichotomy: that between subject and object. To show how archaeology is a contemporary social process, we conclude the chapter by illustrating a series of recent engagements between archaeologists and other communities who have a stake in the archaeological record.

Variability and materiality

Throughout this volume it has been noted that most current archaeological theory, of whatever hue, retains a normative component, in that explanation assumes ideas held in common and rules of behaviour. Adequate accounts of individual variation and perception were encountered most frequently in those studies based on modern theories of social action and practice (chapter 5), embodiment (chapter 6) and history (chapter 7).

This finding is in direct opposition to the commonly stated aim of the New Archaeology to be concerned with variability. Certainly in some of Binford's later work (cf. 1984) the notion of expedient, situational behaviour comes to the fore. As was noted in chapter 2, such interests have not made their way into archaeological consideration of ideology and symbolic meanings. Even in Binford's studies, individuals appear bound

by universal rules concerned with what individuals will do 'if other things are equal'. Because Binford does not recount a meaning-laden process, the ability of individuals to create change and to create their culture as an active social process is minimized.

Norms and rules do exist. The argument here is rather that, in order to allow for change, innovation and agency, the relationships between norms, rules and individuals need to be examined more fully. In the practice of daily life, 'other things' never are 'equal'. It is always necessary to improvise expediently, yet through the framework of the norms and rules, changing them in the process (see p. 91). In this volume such questions have been discussed in the context of the relationships between the individual and society, and between practice and structure.

The first development that is found, then, in the post-processual phase, is the inclusion, under the heading 'process', of an adequate consideration of agency. For example, it is necessary to develop approaches to typology which are concerned less with defining 'types' and more with describing multi-dimensional surfaces of variability on which the 'type' can be seen to vary with context. More generally, archaeologists tend to force their material into styles, cultures, systems, structures, preferring to ignore the 'random' noise of individual variability. Leach's (1954) insight that various stages of development may be expressions of a common underlying structure is an important one for archaeologists who have tended to disregard variability: for example, there has been little account of how individual sites in a region may go through similar trajectories but at different, overlapping times (but see Frankenstein and Rowlands 1978).

The concern with variability is of particular importance in relation to social and cultural change. For example, it may prove to be the case in a particular area that most individual variability is allowed in areas outside the direct control of dominant groups.

The recognition of variability in individual perception leads to a curious twist in the tale of the reconstruction of

the content of historical meanings. In chapter 8 we discussed meaning content and how it can be attained in contextual archaeology, but we also showed that there is not *one* meaning in the past. The same object can have different or conflicting meanings along different dimensions of variation and from different perspectives. Ethnographers too often assume that there is some authoritative account of meaning that can be achieved. Certainly one has to allow for different perspectives from different interest groups in society (chapter 4), yet the problem goes far deeper than this. If material culture is a 'text', then a multiplicity of readings could have existed in the past. An example is the varied meanings given in British society to the use of safety pins by punks. It seemed to Hodder (1982d) that individuals would create verbal reasons for such items but that these verbal reasons were not 'correct' or 'incorrect' – they were all interpretations of a text in different verbal contexts, and in different social contexts. Individuals seemed to be making up the verbal meanings of things as Hodder talked to them, contradicting and varying their responses as a social ploy.

The fragmentation of holistic notions such as culture, society and origin, and the dispersal of meaning along chains of signifiers (p. 67) provide the main thrust of much post-structuralist archaeology (e.g. Tilley 1990a; Bapty and Yates 1990). Much of the post-structuralist critique emphasizes the different pasts we produce in the present and the plurality of views that should be opened to debate. We will return to this point below, but for the moment we can focus on the plurality of meanings within past societies. At first sight this notion of cultures as heterogeneous assemblages of overlapping, conflicting interpretations and representations of those interpretations, in an endless spiral of movement and variation, is disturbing to the archaeologist. Given the difficulty of interpreting *any* meaning in the past, how can the archaeologist ever approach this complexity of meaning? In fact, however, the potentials introduced by this insight are considerable. Archaeologists no longer need to force their data into well-bounded categories, and overlapping multiple dimensions of

meaning can be sought using a contextual methodology. The *real* complexity of the archaeological data can be faced. An example of the way in which material culture can be interpreted as having different meanings to different groups, at different times in the past, is provided by Greene (1987).

Perhaps more important is the link between variability of text interpretations and the discussion of power in chapter 4. The potential of individuals to 'see' things from different and contradictory perspectives may, in theory, be almost limitless. How, then, is meaning controlled by interest groups within society? Strategies might include placing events and their meanings in nature, making them 'natural', or placing them in the past, making them appear inevitable. More generally, material culture has a number of distinctive aspects which suggest that it may play a major role in the control of meaning variation. In particular, it is durable and it is concrete. All the dimensions of material culture elaboration discussed under the heading of 'contextual archaeology' – all the associations, contrasts, spatial and temporal rhythms and so on – can be used in attempts to 'fix' meanings. Much, if not all, material culture production can be described as a process in which different interest groups and individuals try to set up authoritative or established meanings in relation to conflicting interests and in the face of the inherent ability of individuals to create their own, shifting, foot-loose schemes.

The 'fixing' of meanings may be most apparent at centres of control, and in public rituals. The various domains of culture, the opposing strands, may here be brought together, and the dominant structures re-established. A small contemporary example of the relationship between perspective and control may help to clarify the point. Walking in large, formal gardens one is often aware of some larger pattern. Glimpses are obtained of long lines of trees, shrubs, statues, lawn, ponds. In many parts of the garden one is not allowed to walk, and the individual understanding of the overall pattern remains partial and personal, dependent on the particular trajectory taken in the garden. Many of the formal gardens of which we are thinking are arranged around a large house, itself raised up

or at the centre of radiating alignments. It is only from here, the centre of control, that the overall organization becomes apparent. Suddenly, from the centre, the scheme makes sense and the individual understandings can be placed within their context – a context constructed by the centre.

All aspects of cultural production, from the use of space, as in the above example, to the styles of pots and metal items, can be seen to play a part in the negotiation and 'fixing' of meaning by individuals and interest groups within society, whether child, mother, father, chief or commoner. Rather than assuming norms and systems, in the attempt to produce bounded entities, archaeologists can use their material to examine the continual process of interpretation and reinterpretation in relation to interest, itself an interpretation of events.

Many great continental thinkers of the 20th century – Freud, Benjamin, Lacan, Foucault – have appropriated archaeology in some form. However, the 'archaeology' referred to by these writers consists of little more than shallow metaphors – the idea that archaeologists work with silent traces and fragments or the idea that the past is concealed and that we have to dig deep down, one layer at a time, to get to it – for which no archaeologists would take credit. We cannot claim that the actual work of archaeology has made an impact on the conceptual repertoire of any of the theorists listed above. Nevertheless, archaeology's focus on material culture positions it as a potential contributor to any field – anthropology, sociology, cultural studies, history of science and technology – that takes seriously the interaction between people and things.

Early work by Rathje (1979), Miller (1984) and Shanks and Tilley (1987a) showed that archaeology could contribute to an understanding and critique of the present by paying attention to objects that are usually taken for granted. The success of the cross-disciplinary *Journal of Material Culture*, founded in 1996, demonstrates that many fields besides archaeology recognise the importance of objects (Shanks 2001) and underscores the perceived need for a forum on the topic. Archaeology, a field which concerns itself with the production,

consumption, discard, style, context and historicity of objects, has much to contribute to the dialogue on material culture, and it is perhaps no surprise that some of the path-breaking works on the subject have come from writers trained in archaeology (Miller 1987; 1995; 1998; Schiffer 1991; 1995).

There are many reasons to be interested in the material world. As we noted in the previous chapter, the material world is the substance out of which people create their own meaningful, biographical texts. In chapter 6 we stressed that one's memories and sense of self are closely tied to the people, landscapes and things that fill a life. And in chapter 5 we presented the possibility that things are more than just props in the creation of meaningful lives: they acquire lives of their own. Bruno Latour has discussed this point in a number of contexts. In his ethnographic and historical studies of science (1999), he argues that when scientists isolate new substances in labs, such as the fermenting microorganisms studied by Pasteur, they do not simply reveal things that were always there, but give those substances the conditions in which they can act and prove their mettle. Thus, rather than seeing matter as a passive substance waiting to create a fuss, matter is active and can help scientists gain medals.

Even though things have lives, it is not quite correct to say they have lives 'of their own'. Matter is not a sort of bedrock unaffected by the transient biographies of the people that skitter across its surface. Rather, the reality of a thing depends in part on the actions of people. Latour refers to this mutually constitutive interrelationship as circulating reference: a network of associations and collaborations between people and things. In his analysis of a failed attempt to create a Personal Rapid Transit system in Paris, Latour shows that one 'cannot conceive of a technological object without taking into account the mass of human beings with all their passions and politics and pitiful calculations' (1996, p. xiii). Latour's point, then, is that the lives of people are so thoroughly interwoven with the lives of objects that a human science can no longer be the science of humans alone. Machines, like texts and human actions, must also be interpreted.

A case of intertwining of people and things to which archaeology has recently contributed is the house society approach to social organisation. Lévi-Strauss (1987) conceived of the house society to help characterise social structures that elude explanations based on kinship alone. At the core of such ambiguous social groups, ranging from the noble houses of medieval Europe to the Kwakiutl of the Pacific Northwest, he and other ethnographers (see papers in Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995) found 'a spiritual and material heritage, comprising dignity, origins, kinship, names and symbols, wealth and power' (Lévi-Strauss 1987, p. 174). Since material heritage such as heirlooms and landed estates have deep histories and play an active role in constituting these social groups, the archaeological approach has made substantial contributions to the understanding of ancient, historic and contemporary societies (Joyce and Gillespie 2000).

Historians and anthropologists have come to recognise in particular that monuments and material heritage play an active role in society, and that archaeologists can contribute to wider debates from the perspective of their theoretical understanding of material monuments (e.g. Bradley 1993). For example, Rowlands (1993) has discussed different ways in which societies develop relationships with monuments and memory. In a highly politicised context, Jerusalem, Nadia Abu El-Haj focuses on the materiality of archaeology as being constitutive of a new reality. She argues that 'in the case of archaeology, it is not only historiographies or narratives of and for past and present that are made. Rather, in excavating the land archaeologists produce material culture – a new material culture that inscribes the landscape with the concrete signs of particular histories and historicities. It is through the making of those objects that archaeology most powerfully "translates" past and present, that it is able not simply to legitimize existing cultural and political worlds, but also to reinvent them' (1998, p. 168). Archaeology not only can contribute to the study of the relationships between materiality and memory, but also plays an active part in forming those memories.

As we have noted throughout the book (see chapters 3 and 9), material culture is often not the focus of conscious reflection or conversation. Our feel for our landscape and our bodily adjustments or reactions to things are not constituted in discourse. This condition creates what Buchli and Lucas (2001) refer to as an absent present. The unconstituted or nondiscursive nature of material culture makes it an especially attractive site for attempts by special-interest groups to control meaning in society.

Process and structure

Archaeologists have in the past been concerned with two main types of process, historical processes (such as diffusion, migration, convergence, divergence) and adaptive processes (population increase, resource utilization, social complexity, trade and so on). Although the work of Grahame Clark and Gordon Childe, for example, shows that both types of process have been studied for a long time in archaeology, it was the processual archaeology of the 1960s and 1970s that introduced a special emphasis on the latter form.

In essence, the two types of process are very similar. If a culture changes, we might say that this is because of the process of diffusion or because of the processes of population increase and environmental deterioration. Of course, as was discussed in the first part of this chapter, we can argue about whether diffusion is an adequate explanation, in the same way that we can argue about whether any processual account is adequate. Yet the manner of argument is always the same – visible event is related causally to visible event. It was on the inter-relationships, correlations and covariations between such events that a positivist New Archaeology was able to build.

The notion that there might be structures, codes of presences and absences, that lie behind historical and adaptive processes, cannot exist comfortably with the empiricism and positivism that have dominated archaeology since its

inception. In this sense, post-processual archaeology, in so far as it incorporates structuralism and Marxism, is a far more radical break than that which has occurred before.

There are dangers in talking of 'structure' as if a unified concept is widely accepted for this term. There are major differences between the types of social structure studied in Marxist archaeology, and the formal and meaning structures studied in structuralist archaeology. Yet despite these fundamental differences, all such uses of the term imply something not visible at the surface – some organizational scheme or principle, not necessarily rigid or determining, that is immanent, visible only in its effects. Thus a new level of reality is proposed in archaeology, often described as 'deeper' than, 'behind' or 'beneath' the measurable evidence.

Yet rather than talking about these deeper structures as underlying the historical and adaptive processes, it is more appropriate to talk of how each of these elements contributes to an integrated view of society that is always in the process of becoming. From the practice theories and dialectics of domination and resistance discussed in chapter 5, from the intersections of historical events and structures in chapter 7, and from the operational meanings in chapter 8, there emerges the familiar idea that society is never a given: its reproduction or transformation is contingent on historical actions that draw upon various unpredictable combinations of structures. The structures and processes mentioned are fluid and constituted in their performance. Because of the passage of time, which allows for the reformulation of context, these structures can be differently reproduced even if the performance is a reiteration of the previous performance.

Historical meaning content: the ideal and the material

The third aspect of post-processual archaeology that can be identified is an increasing acceptance within archaeology of the need for, and possibility of, the rigorous reconstruction of contextual meanings. Within traditional archaeology the

'ladder of inference' (see p. 43) leading to the ideational realm could scarcely be scaled, and the New Archaeology often operated with the same attitude. For example, Binford (1965; 1982, p. 162) has claimed that archaeology is essentially materialist and poorly equipped to carry out 'palaeopsychology'.

We have seen throughout this book, however, an increasing readiness on the part of archaeologists to deal with the ideational sub-system, meaning and operational intentions. All such developments have played an important part in suggesting to archaeologists that systematic links can be identified between the material and the ideal.

We have also seen, in all realms of archaeology, an increasing awareness that the particular historical context needs to be taken into account in applying general theories. The older law-and-order attitude has been faced with its own inability to deliver valid and interesting general laws.

Yet the ideational realm is, in most of archaeology, still studied largely in terms of the functions of symbols and rituals. And the historical context is no more, usually, than the specific conditions in phase *A* that affect phase *B*. In traditional archaeology too, meaning content was rarely examined; material symbols were seen as indicators of contact, cultural affiliation and diffusion. Only in chapter 7 were a few studies noted of an emerging explicit interest in meaning content as the 'cog-wheel' for the inter-relationships between structure and process.

Insofar as post-processual archaeologists recognize that all archaeologists necessarily impose meaning content, and that such meanings form the core of archaeological analyses which must be made explicit and rigorous, the concern with meaning content is a third marked break with most recent and traditional archaeology.

Initially, the linking of meaning contents with historical particularism appears to have pernicious results for archaeology. A dangerous and negative pessimism lurks. How can archaeologists understand these particular other worlds, coherent only to themselves? In the discussion of contextual archaeology in chapter 8 we have attempted to demonstrate

that increasingly plausible approximations to this 'otherness', in all its particularity, can be achieved. This is ultimately because historical meanings, however 'other' and coherent to themselves, are nevertheless real, producing real effects in the material world, and they are coherent, and thereby structured and systematic. In relation to the real, structured system of data, archaeologists critically evaluate their theories. The data are real but are both objective and subjective; and the theories are always open to further questions and new perspectives. Better and better accommodations and new insights can be achieved in a continuing process of interpretation.

Such discussions open up a debate about the relationship between subject and object. And if every society and time can be expected to produce their own prehistory, what are the responsibilities of archaeologists to the worlds in which they live?

Archaeology and society

Object and subject

Processual archaeology was not characterized by a detailed examination of the social contexts of archaeologists, since the main emphasis was to be placed on independent testing of theories against ethnographic and archaeological data. In the 1980s, however, archaeologists began to show a greater interest in the subjectivity of the pasts we reconstruct in relation to contemporary power strategies (Patterson 1986; Gibbon 1989; Meltzer 1983; Kristiansen 1981; Rowlands 1984; Wilk 1985; Leone *et al.* 1987; Trigger 1980). Archaeologists engaging in critical theory have been the most vocal in exploring this issue.

Although the archaeologist can be rigorous and scientific in the accommodation of theory and data, much of our definition of those data depends on ourselves. It is writers such as Childe and Collingwood who, from their Marxist and historical idealist positions respectively, discussed most fully the contemporary social basis of archaeological knowledge. The

discussion of power and ideology in chapter 4 raises the issue of whether archaeological interpretations are ideological in relation to sectional interests.

Critical Theory

'Critical Theory' is the umbrella term given to a diversity of European authors, particularly those of the 'Frankfurt school', centred around the Institute of Social Research established in Frankfurt in 1923 (Held 1980). The main figures are Horkheimer, Adorno and Marcuse. More recently Habermas and his associates have reformulated the notion of Critical Theory. The approaches followed in Critical Theory derive from the tradition of German idealist thought, and incorporate a Marxist perspective. Critical Theorists claim on the one hand that all knowledge is historically conditioned, but at the same time suggest that truth can be evaluated and criticism can be conducted independently of social interests – in short, that Critical Theory has a privileged position in relation to theory.

Among the various aspects of the work of Critical Theory that might be of most interest to archaeology, the analysis of aesthetics and contemporary culture is immediately relevant to the presentation of the archaeological past in museums, on television and so on. In their *Dialectic of the Englightenment* Horkheimer and Adorno (1973) use the term 'culture industry'. Contrasting, for example, 'serious' and 'popular' music, they show that modern culture is standardized according to the rationalization of production and distribution techniques. Individuals do not 'live' art and culture any more – they consume its performance. The culture industry impedes the development of thinking, independent individuals; it conveys a message of adjustment, obedience. People are diverted, distracted and made passive. While there are many exceptions, archaeology in television documentaries and in museum displays is often presented as ordered, to be passively viewed. It is consumed as the cultural component of the leisure industry, rarely challenging and participatory. Archaeological scientists can place this sense of order and control and the supremacy

of science (their own science and that of all dominant social groups) in a long-term historical perspective involving escape from the disordered primeval past through technological innovation. The result is a powerful ideological message.

Another relevant aspect of the work of Critical Theorists is their discussion of the philosophy of history. Habermas argues that it is inadequate to rest with the idealist interpretative understanding of contextual meanings, and the analyst must move towards the explanation of systematically distorted communication. In other words, one must see how the ideas of an age relate to domination and power. Similar points are made by Marcuse, Horkheimer and Adorno. In the *Dialectic of the Enlightenment*, the aim is to 'break the grip of all closed systems of thought; it is conceived as a contribution to the undermining of all beliefs that claim completeness and encourage an unreflected affirmation of society' (Held 1980, p. 150).

Following Hegel, the Enlightenment is seen as the rise of universal science in which the control of nature and human beings is the main aim. Within positivism, the world was seen as made up of material things which could be commanded and ordered according to universal laws, and the laws of history were equated with the laws of nature. It can certainly be argued (Hodder 1984b) that archaeological use of the natural science model, positivism and systems theory supports an 'ideology of control' whereby the 'apolitical' scientist is presented as essential for the control of society in past and future time and space.

In contrast, Critical Theory seeks a new enlightenment, an emancipation in which critical reason leads to liberation from all forces of domination and destruction. With writers such as Lukacs, the insight which leads to this liberation is that the structure of the social process constrains, dominates and determines the social totality, including thought and consciousness.

The ideals of objectivity and value-freedom are described by critical theorists as being themselves value-laden. Critical Theory seeks to judge between competing accounts of reality

and to expose realms of ideology, and thus to emancipate people from class domination. By emphasizing the material and social conditions, ideological distortions can be revealed, leading to self-awareness and emancipation.

A materialist approach to history as ideology has been taken most clearly in archaeology by Leone (1982; Leone *et al.* 1987; see also Handsman 1980 and 1981). Leone notes that when the past is interpreted and made history it tends to become ideology, and he suggests that the consciousness or revelation of that process may help those who write or are told about the past to become aware of the ideological notions that generate modern everyday life. Through, for example, locating the origins of individualism or modern notions of time in the growth of capitalism in eighteenth-century America, visitors to museums could be made aware of their own ideology as historically-based, and their taken-for-granteds could be revealed as sources of domination.

While the notions of self-critique, and awareness of the social and political value of what we write, are of prime importance in the further development of archaeology, the position held by Critical Theory – as exemplified by Leone and Handsman's publications in the 1980s – seems to us to be difficult, although undoubtedly attractive and important, for two main reasons.

First, such work embodies an unsatisfactory notion of domination both in the past and in the present. Leone has acknowledged that the early stages of his collaborative work on the archaeology of Annapolis focused too heavily on dominant ideologies and did not account for the possibility of resistance (see chapter 5). Additional oral history and archaeology of residences of both free and enslaved African Americans in Annapolis strove to give voice to alternative experiences of the past (Leone *et al.* 1995). Whether or not the new phase of work succeeds in granting agency to these voices is a matter of debate (Wilkie and Bartoy 2000).

As for the present, society is represented as being ridden with all embracing, unified systems of representation. 'Society appears in their writings as steered from above rather

than as the outcome, as I believe it to be, of a continuous process of struggle over rules and resources' (Held 1980, p. 365). However, there is evidence that different people in the contemporary public view the past in very different ways, and it is not at all clear that archaeology contributes to the maintenance of a universal Western ideology that prevents people from understanding their social conditions of existence. Indeed it seems that the past as constructed and experienced in contemporary life may reveal as much about the present as it masks.

Surveys of the general public in England conducted by Merriman (1991) suggested that individuals and subordinate groups in contemporary Britain are not easily duped by dominant interpretations of the past: although dominated groups including the working class appeared to have least scientific knowledge about the past, they scored highest in responses to questions about the need for the past. Individuals in such categories do think that the past and archaeology are necessary and worthwhile in giving meaning to the present. Yet individuals frequently showed a scepticism about the manipulation of the past by the media or by national governments; many people felt that little of what was said about the past by archaeologists and scientists could be proved in any way.

The second problem with current critical approaches in archaeology concerns the critique of those approaches themselves as historically generated. How can Critical Theory on the one hand claim that all knowledge is historical, distorted communication, and on the other hand be a critical means of enlightenment and emancipation? By what right or procedures does it accord itself a special theoretical status? The dilemma of critical theory in archaeology is: why should anyone accept a Marxist or critical analysis of our reconstructions of the past including the origins of capitalism? If the past is ideology, how can we presume to argue that only certain intellectuals can see through ideology to identify the social reality?

More recently, Leone has avoided the premise of the existence of a single social reality. Instead, since understanding

history requires multiple views, the goal is to produce a variety of perspectives on the past, particularly those that have gone unrecorded historically. In this approach there is a willingness to give interviews and oral history equal weight to the material data (Leone *et al.* 1995, p. 122).

The special theoretical status which Leone claims in order to avoid the above dilemma is an avowedly 'materialist archaeology'. But if, for example, we do not accept the basic tenets of materialism, for reasons outlined in this book, we can claim that materialism is itself a false ideology – that it is just another universal theory developed by the academic community in order to maintain privileged control of the 'correct' interpretation of the past.

An alternative response to the second criticism made above is to argue that the past is not knowable with any integrity. The task of the archaeologist is, then, to choose any political stance he or she likes as a member of society, and to write the past so as to further that political viewpoint. This is certainly an honest reply which many may find attractive, but the potential results are disturbing. If the past has no integrity, and anyone's interpretation is as good as anyone else's, then archaeology is completely open to political manipulation by governments, elite interest groups, and fascist dictatorships. With the data described as totally subjective, the archaeologist would have no recourse to the data in objecting to 'misuses' of the past. The past which was disseminated would depend entirely on power, and the ability to control theory, method and communication. In this volume, however, we have argued that the data from the past do have a contextual reality in relation to theory (see p. 200).

Another important source of critique in archaeology is provided by post-structuralist writers such as Derrida (1975; see Bapty and Yates 1990; Tilley 1990a). The underlying idea here (see chapter 3 and p. 65) is that meaning is dispersed along chains of signifiers. Thus the validity of terms like truth or origin is undermined by the dependence of these terms on other terms in an endless sequence. One useful result of

this critique is that it encourages archaeologists to examine their own writing and show how it is imbued with style and rhetoric (e.g. Hodder 1989b; Tilley 1989). In other words, the objectivity and truth claims can be shown to be constructed using various mechanisms (such as choice of words, appeal to authority, impersonal descriptions, avoidance of the 'I', the experienced and the contingent). Another useful result is that attempts are made to think of ways in which the past and our writing about the past can be opened up to alternative perspectives. However, difficulties similar to those encountered with Critical Theory approaches recur. The fragmentation of the past and the dispersal of meaning, distinctive characteristics of post-modern thought, can be seen as entirely consistent with dominant interests within later or high capitalism (Eagleton 1983). In the post-modern world in which individuals, time and place are fragmented and commodified, the directed interests of subordinate groups are undermined and their 'truth' dispersed. This is why we have resisted a radical decentring of the subject and embraced a theory of agency and why we have retained an account which puts faith in the reality and modified objectivity of the past. Ultimately a fully critical and responsible archaeology must be able to use the objectivity and reality of the experience of its data to shape and transform the experience of the world.

Although critical theory in archaeology emerged partly as a result of initiatives taken by academic archaeologists alone, it can be argued that some movement in the direction of critical perspectives has resulted from recent confrontations between 'established' and 'alternative' archaeologies and from engagements between archaeologists and non-archaeologists. By 'established' we mean the archaeology written by Western, upper middle class and largely Anglo-Saxon males. We wish to identify three examples of the kind of confrontations and engagements that have had an emergent impact on the practice of archaeology. In all these cases, two points can be made: first, the past is subjectively constructed in the present, and second, the subjective past is involved in power strategies today.

African burial grounds

The African Burial Ground project in New York City can be read as part of a critical tradition in archaeology as well as a paradigm case of how the goals and motivations of scientific archaeology can be successfully coordinated with the goals and motivations of other communities who have a stake in the past (La Roche and Blakey 1997; cf. Langford 1983).

In the summer of 1991, a CRM firm contracted by the US government began excavating the construction site of a proposed office building near City Hall in Manhattan. Eighteenth-century maps referred to an African cemetery in the vicinity, and within less than a year more than 400 burials were disinterred. Upset by the disturbance of the burials and osteological analyses that focused mainly on racial classification, a broad coalition of concerned citizens, artists, clergy members, activists, anthropologists, and city, state and federal politicians succeeded in stopping the excavation and transferring the artifacts and human remains to a team of African-American anthropologists whose research design was supported by the descendent community. Thereafter, the African Burial Ground project consisted of not only osteology and forensics (stable isotope analysis, molecular genetics, morphology, morphometrics, etc.), but also African and African-American history, art history and ethnology, a public education and interpretation programme, plans to rebury the human remains and determine the future fate of the site, and more.

The research conducted by the African Burial Ground project has addressed a number of Eurocentric distortions and omissions in the historical record that, if left uncorrected, would deny northern racism and locate enslavement primarily in the southern United States (Pittman 1998). During the 18th century, the vast majority of Africans in New York were enslaved. Evidence of malnutrition and excessive physical strain demonstrate the abhorrent quality of life for many New York slaves (Blakey 1998). Disrespect for the humanity of New York city's Africans continued after death. Not

allowed to bury their dead in church cemeteries, Africans had to use a plot of land in a ravine outside of the palisades that marked the edge of the city. The burial ground was desecrated by dumping of refuse from nearby tanning and pottery industries, grave robbing by medical students, executions in retribution for alleged revolts, and, once the burial grounds were closed, the digging of privies and cisterns as part of Dutch American occupation of the site in the 19th century. Ironically, now that we know much more about the African Burial Ground, distortion continues today in artistic portraits that picture the burial grounds as a lush, flat pastoral landscape rather than a hilly ravine on the margin of noxious industries. Such inaccuracies negate the actual hardships faced by New York's early African community and defuse the raw power of the Burial Ground (La Roche and Blakey 1997, p. 98).

Beyond providing evidence that confronts a whitewashed past, the African Burial Ground is 'an avenue leading to spiritual rebirth and renewal', a possibility that 'slavery's wounds might finally be tended' (La Roche and Blakey 1997, p. 100; Blakey 1998, p. 58). In other words, the African Burial Ground project, along with other examples of African-American historical archaeology (Franklin 1997; Leone *et al.* 1995; McDavid and Babson 1997), empowers contemporary descendants by giving them tangible, material evidence of their heritage and of the contributions and suffering of their once ignored, silenced and disenfranchised ancestors.

As an example of an archaeology engaged in contemporary politics, the African Burial Ground project also serves as a model for the potential benefits of collaboration between archaeologists and non-archaeologists. Despite the fact that archaeology, physical anthropology and history have traditionally abused or demeaned African-Americans, systematic consultation between the descendent community and the team that replaced the original CRM firm led the descendent community to endorse wholeheartedly a scientific research design. Because of a shared affinity for African-American culture, past and present, it helped that the archaeologists and descendent communities were both African-American (La Roche

and Blakey 1997, p. 93). However, the recent history of engagements between archaeologists and native Americans, to which we now turn, shows that a successful collaboration does not require ethnic homogeneity of the participants.

Indigenous archaeologies

Western archaeologists working in non-industrialized societies, particularly in the post-colonial era, became increasingly confronted both with the idea that the pasts they were reconstructing were 'Western' and with an articulate rejection of those pasts as being politically and ideologically motivated (Layton 1989a and b). The secure rocks of objective data began to seem more like shifting sands of subjective impressions. In many parts of the Middle East and of Africa, for example, Western archaeological interpretations have been rejected or reassessed and the Western archaeologists themselves excluded.

It can be suggested that the Australian government publicized anthropological and archaeological interpretations of Aborigines as 'natural', primitive and isolated. By processes such as these, the Australian Aborigines were denied another identity and their access to Western knowledge about disease, health, the law and power was restricted. On the other hand, Aborigines make use of archaeological interpretations in land claims, and similar strategies are used elsewhere, for example by the Canadian Inuit. In Europe, too, archaeology makes legitimate claims about long-term residence in certain areas. For example, in Norway, debate about archaeologists' abilities to identify ethnic groups in prehistory is heightened by political issues concerned with Sami (Lapp) rights.

The United States of America, a country which has grown up through the relatively recent mass genocide of indigenous American peoples and which has even developed high positive values in relation to 'the frontier', has complex attitudes to the archaeology of the peoples it displaced (Watkins 2000). These attitudes have changed through time, but they have always portrayed America's native people as unprogressive (Trigger 1980). Thus in the nineteenth century native peoples

were seen as unprogressive savages, a view resulting in the 'Mound Builder' myth according to which spectacular earthworks in North America were described as produced by non-native Americans. In the early twentieth century, the same disrespect for native Americans led to a lack of interest in explaining their cultural developments; a descriptive and static picture was painted. In processual archaeology, native Americans were treated as laboratories for the testing of general statements of interest to non-native American archaeologists but of little relevance to the history or concerns of the native Americans themselves (Trigger 1980). In all these ways, the native Americans' place in America, and the Euro-American destruction of that place, are minimized, and archaeology contributes to an 'historical amnesia'. Recently, however, liberal tendencies and environmental resource concerns in Western society, coupled with native American land claims, have led to Western archaeologists working on behalf of groups in the United States and Canada. Indeed recent legislation in the United States (including NAGPRA) attempts to safeguard the interests of native Americans in regard to their heritage. This has led to closer cooperation between archaeologists and native Americans (Swidler *et al.* 1997; Watkins 2000), and even to changes in archaeological method which involve native American oral traditions and ritual observances within the scientific process (e.g. Dowdall and Parrish 2003).

The differences between Western and indigenous perceptions of non-Western pasts are often difficult to handle in practice. There is often considerable mistrust, misunderstanding and resentment. But it is difficulties such as these which have begun to push Western archaeologists to consider their own biases and to confront the issue of whether differences in interpretation can be resolved by testing theories against objective data. In many cases the doctrines of verification are themselves perceived as political (Langford 1983). The temptation is to withdraw from the confrontation and the debate, rather than to expose the apolitical nature of Western empiricism and positivism to erosion.

Feminist archaeologies

It is this ability of Western archaeologists to note but ignore the confrontation with indigenous archaeologies which emphasizes the importance of a feminist perspective in archaeology. By 'feminist' we mean here a critical perspective from the point of view of women in contemporary society, which goes beyond 'gender archaeology' – the study of the relations between men and women in the past. Since this perspective in archaeology derives from a contemporary current within the West it is potentially less easy to ignore than the archaeology of distant countries. This potential (Conkey and Spector 1984) is rapidly being realized (Barstow 1978; Claassen 1994; Conkey and Gero 1997; Engelstad 1991; Gero 1985; Gero and Conkey 1991; Gilchrist 1993; Meskell 2002; Sørensen 1988; 2000; Wright 1996).

We do not intend to discuss the imbalance in the representation of women in the archaeological profession or the use of sexist language in archaeological publications, although both matters are linked to the main aspect of feminist archaeology to be discussed here as relevant to the theme of this chapter. Rather, we shall concentrate on two important points made by feminist archaeologists (Conkey and Spector 1984). The first is that archaeologists have tended to view the past sexual division of labour as similar to that of the present. For example, hunting and trade are often seen as male pursuits, while gathering and weaving are female. Projectile points and well-made tools are linked to men, while non-wheel-made pots are linked to women. This sex-linking of past activities makes present sexual relations seem inevitable and legitimate.

Second, greater interest is shown in the 'dominant' male activities. Males are generally portrayed as stronger, more aggressive, more dominant, more active and more important than women, who often appear as weak, passive and dependent. The past is written in terms of leadership, power, warfare, the exchange of women, man the hunter, rights of inheritance, control over resources, and so on.

These two androcentric strands of archaeological analysis have been critically examined, in particular, in relation to the debate about the 'origins of man' and 'man the hunter' (Conkey and Spector *ibid.*), and reinterpretations of the 'origins of man' have been made in which women play a more positive role (e.g. Tanner 1981). The impact of the debate is equally relevant for the adoption of agriculture (Draper 1975; Gero and Conkey 1990) and for the rise of the state (Gailey 1987; Hastorf 1990).

In relation to the two points made above, feminist archaeologists argue that, first, we cannot assume universally equivalent divisions of labour and sex-linking of activities. Rather than assuming that the term 'woman' has universal cultural characteristics, there is a need to examine the way in which gender constructions can vary. Archaeological data are rife with evidence of the cultural constructions of gender relations. Objects can be linked to women in graves, the nutritional aspect of gender relations can be examined in comparing female and male skeletons (Hastorf 1990), the representation and non-representation of women in art and symbolism can be studied. Indeed, it is often the absence of women from certain domains of representation that will support insight into gender constructions.

In relation to the second point made above, it is argued by feminist archaeologists that women can play an active role in society (see Tanner 1981). For example, pottery decoration has been seen by archaeologists largely as a cultural indicator – it is a passive indexing device. Even when viewed in terms of information flow, exchange and interaction, the decoration remains passive and unrelated to women. Feminist perspectives, however, suggest that in certain situations pottery decoration may be involved in the covert discourse of women who are 'muted' in the dominant modes of discourse (Braithwaite 1982). Indeed, decoration and elaboration in the domestic context may often have much more to do with the negotiation of power between men and women than they have with symbolizing contact and interaction between local

groups (see Hodder 1984a for an application of this notion to European prehistory).

One of the most important aspects of the feminist critique relates to the discussion of power in chapter 4, where it was argued that there are different types of power which overlap and conflict and are continually being negotiated between different interest groups. Power is not simply a 'reality' of force or the control of resources but is also closely linked to meanings, values and prestige. Control of a prestigious resource can only be used as the basis of power when the resource has been given cultural and social values. Moore (1988, p. 35) argues that 'most feminist scholars would now agree, I think, that the cultural valuations given to women and men in society arise from something more than just their respective positions in the relations of production'. The representation of gender relations in material culture (in burials, dress, art, use of space, etc.) may tell us more about the attempts made to value or devalue men and women than it tells us about the 'real' power of men and women in the control of resources. We cannot simply read off gender dominance from the material representation of gender relations (Hodder 1990c). Rather, we are forced, in discussing the representation of gender dominance, to interpret symbolic meanings. For this reason, we would argue that the overall theoretical shift being outlined in this volume is needed in the discipline before many of the most exciting aspects of feminism can take hold in archaeology. As Michelle Rosaldo said of this shift in anthropology, we must pursue not universal, general causality but meaningful explanation. 'It now appears to me that woman's place in human social life is not in any direct sense a product of the things she *does*, but of the *meaning* her activities acquire through concrete social interaction' (Rosaldo 1980, p. 400).

If we want to show how gender relations are experienced and given meaning, how they are used to define personhood and how they are involved in subtle ways in multidimensional relations of power, a critical hermeneutic or contextual approach may be necessary. In so far as issues

of meaning are part of feminist archaeology, positivism is not an appropriate framework. Feminism has had a very late impact in archaeology in comparison with related disciplines. Stacey and Thorne (1985) claim that feminist approaches have succeeded least in disciplines (like sociology, psychology, economics) more deeply anchored in positivism. It is in fields with a strong interpretive approach (history, literature, sociocultural anthropology) that feminism has advanced furthest. It may be archaeology's recent positivist history coupled with its increasing resource base in the sciences that impeded the development of feminist archaeology for so long.

In recent years there has been internal debate within feminist archaeology about the overall emphasis on women rather than on gender relations, and on various forms of sexuality that counter dominant modes of discourse (Voss and Schmidt 2000). Indeed, one of the main issues at the heart of a 'third wave' of feminism and feminist archaeology is that not enough attention has been paid to different categories of men and women. Rather than talking of women as a whole in a particular society, the focus is on differences in class, age, occupation and so on which may be just as important in defining identity as sex or gender (Joyce 2000; Meskell 1999). This emphasis on difference radically undermines claims for an essential character for men and women. Even the biological basis of sexual difference is now seen as embedded in discourse (Foucault 1981b). Cultural 'gender' cannot be set against biological 'sex' because the latter too is discursive and historically changing. This type of 'third wave' approach leads to attempts to describe individual and private lives (Meskell 2002). It leads to a focus on difference and social agency, but also to a situating of sex and gender as components in wider social fields which vary historically and spatially.

Other alternative Western archaeologies

From Creationists and readers of Von Daniken to metal detector users (Gregory 1983) and ley-line hunters (Williamson and Bellamy 1983), alternative and often extremely popular

pasts are derived which establishment archaeologists may try to ignore, or dismiss as 'fringe'. Increasingly, however, direct confrontation occurs, particularly in Western societies in which the past as a resource has now to be used more effectively for the general public, as a commodity, well-packaged and responsive to demand.

In many Western countries archaeology has long been linked to the upper and middle classes. To what extent is this true today, how is the past used to legitimate established interests, and what are the effects on interpretations of the past? A survey of the British public's knowledge of and attitudes to archaeology was carried out by Merriman (1989a, b; 1991).

From the surveys, it is clear that certain groups of people in contemporary Britain know more about the past than others. They have a broader and more accurate knowledge of what archaeologists write. They watch more archaeological documentaries on television, go more to museums and visit sites and churches, and read more about the past. Not surprisingly, these people have often had more education (stayed at school longer, or had some form of further education) than those with less archaeological knowledge. They also often have higher-valued jobs with more control over people and resources.

How exactly do these different groups in society interpret the past? The survey results suggested that less educated, lower income groups tended to be relatively more interested in their local past, in archaeology as history. Most individuals in the general public find it extremely difficult to develop their ideas about an alternative past in relation to the data from the past. They are excited by Von Daniken and films such as *One Million Years B.C.* and *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, and they develop their personal views about what the past must have been like, but they are kept at a distance from archaeological artifacts by glass cases, systems analyses and the jargon of social theory. Where they *do* manage to gain some access to an immediately experienced past, they are often directly confronted by

the archaeological establishment, or else their views are studiously ignored. For example, metal detector users and the archaeological establishment in Britain have entered into a heated and acrimonious debate which serves only to widen social divisions (Hodder 1984b). Those archaeologists who do try to work with, rather than against, metal detector enthusiasts have found ways of encouraging cooperation and understanding (Gregory 1983).

The same can be said for the various forms of New Age archaeology that are burgeoning world-wide. In particular, the interactions between archaeology and the various goddess communities have been explored by a number of archaeologists (e.g. Meskell 1995; 1998b; Tringham and Conkey 1998). Locations such as the Neolithic temples in Malta, the Bronze Age sites on Crete, or Çatalhöyük in Turkey have become pilgrimage sites for such groups (Rountree 1999; 2001; 2002). The individuals involved in these tours are often well educated. Their aim is often to engage in sites more deeply than most tourists, and this can lead to conflict with local communities (Rountree 2001). There is often a desire to perform circle dances and other rituals on sites. Some goddess groups are very sensitive to local interests and to the preservation of sites, but other groups may be antagonistic towards archaeologists whom they see as male-biased and secular, unresponsive to the presence of the goddess. But attempts can be made to enter into a dialogue with these groups (see www.catalhoyuk.com), and successful collaborative programmes at sites can be developed in which the new religions, archaeological science and local communities are accommodated to each other.

There is, then, great potential for archaeologists to encourage and help to create different views of and ways of participating in the past (Willey 1980). Attempts could be made to explain how the past is excavated (Leone 1983) and how it is reconstructed. Many museums, such as the Jorvik Viking Centre in York, are now more concerned with providing living versions of the past that can be experienced by the public. This is equally true of some well-established museums.

Conclusion

In the latter part of this chapter we have discussed the actual and potential archaeological viewpoints of a number of groups which can be described as subordinate on a global or intra-societal scale. These alternative, but by no means 'minority', viewpoints confront establishment perspectives and imply that the pasts we reconstruct are both partly subjective and involved in the negotiation of power.

It does not seem possible to react to this discussion of the contextuality of archaeological knowledge by claiming that 'method' will allow differentiation between the alternative interpretations of the past. Positivism, independent Middle Range Theories, materialist analysis, all can be seen to be tied to particular contemporary social assumptions; method too is ideological.

An open relativism appears at first to be the only solution, whereby 'anything goes'. Certainly there are some attractive aspects of this solution, if it allows greater debate between different viewpoints and a fuller involvement of archaeology in contemporary social and political issues. Yet most archaeologists feel that this solution is too extreme. Most feel that some interpretations of the past are not as good as others, that not everything can be said with equal integrity.

The contemporary social basis of our reconstructions of the past does not necessitate a lack of validity for those reconstructions. Our interpretations may be biased, but they may still be 'right'. Clearly, however, it is important to understand where our ideas come from, and why we want to reconstruct the past in a particular way.

There is a dialectical relationship between past and present: the past is interpreted in terms of the present, but the past can also be used to criticize and challenge the present. In this view it is possible critically to evaluate past and present contexts in relation to each other, so as to achieve a better understanding of both. There is a human mental ability to conceive of more than one subjective context and critically to examine the relationship between varied perspectives. This discussion returns

us to earlier statements in this volume about the relationship between the larger whole (structure, system) and the individual part (action, practice, the individual). Structures and taken-for-granteds may well be the media for thought and action, yet they can themselves be changed by critical thought and action.

Thus the data are not objective or subjective but real. And there are no universal instruments of measurement, but it is possible to understand 'otherness'. Even the notions of the universality of meaning construction must be subject to critical evaluation, especially in periods prior to *Homo sapiens sapiens*. We always translate 'their' meanings into 'our' language, but our language is flexible and rich enough to identify and perceive differences in the way the same 'words' are used in different contexts. The subjectivity of other objects can be comprehended without imposing our own 'objective' subjectivities; the subject/object division that has dominated archaeology can be broken down.

Post-processual archaeology, then, involves the breaking down of established, taken-for-granted dichotomies, and opens up study of the relationships between norm and individual, process and structure, material and ideal, object and subject. Post-processual archaeology does not espouse one approach or argue that archaeology should develop an agreed methodology. It is about opening up, not shutting down, and therefore welcomes the proliferation of archaeologies. Though we endorse the hermeneutic method, our endorsement should not be taken as a rejection of other methods or approaches. In fact, we argue that the hermeneutic approach is extremely broad, subsuming modes of inquiry that prioritise both the laboratory sciences and the humanities. Finally post-processual archaeology is about engagements with social theory and social groups. Though in the next chapter we maintain that archaeology is archaeology is archaeology, it is strongest when most broadly networked with other disciplines and most relevant when interwoven with social issues.