

## SYMBOLIC COGNITIVE ARCHAEOLOGY: A NEW LOSS OF INNOCENCE

Philip L. Kohl

The historical evidence is there, in its primary form, not to disclose its own meaning, but to be interrogated by minds trained in a discipline of attentive disbelief. ... Each age, or each practitioner, may propose new questions to the historical evidence, or may bring new levels of evidence to light. In this sense "history" (when considered as the products of historical enquiry) will change, and ought to change, with the pre-occupations of each generation, or, as it may be, each sex, each nation, each social class. But this by no means implies that the past events themselves change with each questioner, or that the evidence is indeterminate [1].

Anglo-American archaeology in 1984 is engaged in a critical process of self-examination in a manner fundamentally different from the process of introspection which characterized the New Archaeology of the sixties and early seventies. Practitioners of this recent development have cast away the heavy positivist armor which protected the soft theoretical underside of the New Archaeology. They are raising basic questions about the purposes and values of their discipline and are demonstrating how the biases and class outlooks of archaeologists influence their interpretations of the past. In short, Anglo-American archaeology is displaying a sophistication and critical self-awareness that was lacking during the heyday of the New Archaeology.

---

Philip L. Kohl is Professor of Anthropology at Wellesley College, Wellesley, Mass., and Assistant Professor at the New School for Social Research.

Many recent analyses [2] have explicitly adopted an historical materialist perspective, and even those which have turned to structural or symbolic anthropology for inspiration [3] have acknowledged their debt to Marxism. Formerly dominant ecological and/or cultural materialist interpretations of prehistory are being questioned and replaced by more subtle cultural analyses, which, when possible, attempt to reconstruct past ideologies to show how cultural values and beliefs influence cultural development. Ironically and refreshingly, a strength of the neo-Marxist archaeology that is emerging in the West is that it is necessarily dialectical and unlikely to devolve into some form of vulgar materialism since it is precisely the latter approach that pervaded the earlier New Archaeology [4].

This article will attempt to review some of the recent, largely theoretical writings which are indicative of this new and welcome perspective, but it will also focus on certain epistemological and theoretical difficulties which beset some of these studies and which, left uncorrected, may vitiate the undeniably positive features of this current period of critical self-examination.

### THE ORIGINAL LOSS OF INNOCENCE: THE NEW ARCHAEOLOGY REVISITED

In 1973 David Clarke, author of the massive *Analytical Archaeology*, published an article in the venerable journal *Antiquity* [5]

which took the pulse of the New Archaeology and proclaimed a dynamic era for the discipline of increasing consciousness and growth as a science. It is instructive to reread this article a decade later and note how the tone of archaeological discourse has changed. Clarke was optimistic about the future state of archaeology. He presented a picture of a discipline in the process of experiencing a paradigm shift, even sketching an almost mystical disciplinary trajectory from an initial "loss of innocence" through a period of "self-consciousness" to the final, newly arrived at state of "critical self-consciousness." But Clarke's critical self-consciousness does not resemble the relational, questioning perspective currently appearing in the literature. Clarke implored archaeologists to join the new scientific bandwagon and to help develop a specific archaeological epistemology and philosophy. His prose was remarkable even by the standards of the time; in twelve pages the adjective *new* appeared more than one hundred times, vividly describing the breakthrough that had already been achieved (and, of course, literally justifying that unfortunate phrase, the New Archaeology). Let us briefly examine two quintessential passages:

... the development of artistry and imaginative creativity have no place amongst the new materials and new approaches.... A new environment develops new materials and new methods with new consequences, which demand new philosophies, new solutions and new perspectives [6].

The belief in progress was unrestrained, the promise great. In a more significant passage, Clarke admitted only a tenuous relationship between archaeological and social theory, and, in so doing, perpetuated the confusion between method and theory which still adversely affects the discipline [7]:

Certainly part of archaeological theory ... *may be reduced* to social theory and might conversely be derived therefrom; emphasizing the great significance of social as well as environmental studies for the archaeologist. *However,*

*this is but a small part of archaeological theory* and even in this restricted but important area the primitive terms and correlated concepts of social theory will require an appropriately specified transformation to conform with the space, time, and sample characteristics of the equivalent archaeological data [8] (emphasis added).

Where has all the optimism gone? Why does this prose appear almost simple-minded and naive in 1984, or, in other words, how does one evaluate the no longer new, but respectably middle-aged New or Processual Archaeology? These questions are extremely complicated, but, if, for the moment, one ignores the sociology of the phenomenon and some of the early, inflated claims for discovering meaningful "laws" of cultural evolution and the like, a consensus appears to have been reached in which most observers agree that the New Archaeology has been extremely important in forcing archaeologists to formulate explicitly designed research programs and, where possible, to test alternative hypotheses or explanations of their data. In other words, primarily at the level of data collection, the introduction or, better, the wide-scale adoption of the scientific method has had an undeniably salutary effect and made it possible to understand and evaluate better the results of field investigations. At the level of theory or the explanation of past cultural phenomena, the record is considerably more mixed. When L. Binford in the United States and D. Clarke and, to some extent, C. Renfrew in Britain proclaimed their message for a more objective, scientific discipline, they also introduced larger theoretical issues, adopting, in general, a comparative evolutionary perspective based upon an ecological functionalism enlightened by systems theory. Their plea forced archaeologists to raise their heads above their trenches and to interpret their discoveries in a more broadly conceived fashion. Chronological problems were treated as secondary or tertiary concerns, and, for a brief period, methodological issues were

accorded a status inferior to considerations of processes and laws of cultural development.

Even in the early seventies, however, more reflective, self-proclaimed processual archaeologists [9] expressed skepticism as to the results achieved, dismissing many of the so-called laws that supposedly had been discovered as trivial or tautological. As time progressed, the discrepancy between the New Archaeology's initial assertions and its actual accomplishments became more apparent and led to two additional developments. First, archaeologists, like K.V. Flannery [10], who were engaged in substantial research programs that necessarily included considerable cultural historical interpretation and reconstruction, became increasingly critical of, even impatient with, armchair theorists who filled newly found journals with conflated and essentially vapid articles on the nature of archaeological materials and laws of cultural process. The sociology of the New Archaeology was recognized, albeit imperfectly, and a reaction set in against the theoretical narcissism and self-aggrandizing actions of the younger New Archaeologists. Concomitant with this, the elder gurus of the initial movement portrayed themselves as reasonable agnostics and appeared much more modest, retreating behind the screen of "middle-range theory" [11]. Thus, Renfrew recently slapped his American counterpart, Binford, on the back and in an obsequious foreword to an "outstandingly important book" by "the outstanding archaeological thinker of our time" observed:

The most important thing to realize about the New Archaeology ... is that it started as, and to a large extent remains, a series of *questions* about the human past [12] (emphasis in the original).

Contrast this to Binford's seminal 1962 entreaty for a more broadly conceived archaeology:

We as archaeologists have available a wide range of variability and a large sample of cultural systems. Ethnographers are restricted to the small and formally limited extant cultural systems.... Archaeologists should be among the best qualified to study and directly test hypotheses concerning the process of evolutionary change.... The lack of theoretical concern and rather naive attempts at explanation which archaeologists currently advance must be modified [13].

Or, more boldly, in a characteristically vicious 1968 polemic against "historical" reconstructions, Binford expressed much more grandiose objectives than Renfrew later was willing to admit:

Most of my own efforts and those of my colleagues in the "new archaeology" have been directed toward the disproof of the old principles of interpretation which gave the ring of plausibility to traditional reconstructions and interpretations. We seek to replace these inadequate propositions by laws that are validated in the context of the epistemology of science, so that we may gain an accurate knowledge of the past [14].

Similarly, in the most excessively positivist treatise of the New Archaeology, Watson, Redman, and LeBlanc presented the archaeologist donned in a white smock coat, testing, as only an archaeologist could, "the laws and details of prehistoric human and cultural evolution." In 1971 there was no reference to middle-range theory or to the bland assertion of raising "a series of questions about the human past"; rather, a scientific threshold had already been crossed: "... we are already on our way to the development of an independent and scientifically respectable theory of evolutionary anthropology" [15].

It is always easy to distort the intellectual history of a discipline, but it can be argued that the disingenuous backpedalling that the gurus of the New Archaeology are now engaged in is directly related to the few substantive accomplishments (other than the methodological) of their movement. The once strident banner of the New Archaeology necessarily must be lowered.

Not only have the results been disappointing, but many of the intellectual attributes of the New Archaeology have successfully been questioned. The hypothetico-deductive method is no longer considered the only appropriate method for manipulating archaeological data [16], and induction has regained its rightful place alongside deduction as a necessary and legitimate exercise. While occasionally enlightening, exclusive reliance on a systems approach is now also viewed as problematic [17], an approach which emphasizes the homeostatic, non-dynamic features of culture and which, at times, provides little more insight than that cultures are complex. The comparative universal perspective, which was one of the most positive features of the New Archaeology (though actually introduced into the archaeological literature through the neo-evolutionary writings of anthropologists, like J. Steward [18]), is today generally accepted but increasingly scrutinized as to what is learned by the rote listing of general similarities among cultures classified together at the same broad evolutionary level. Finally, and this returns us to our initial concern with the current development of symbolic, cognitive (or contextual, structural, and post-processual – to name a few of the adjectives that have appeared) archaeology, the positivist goal of absolute objectivity today seems unattainable, as well as, for some, undesirable. The New Archaeology may have reached a stage of critical self-consciousness in the early seventies but since then has lost its peculiar form of innocence.

#### THE NEW CRITICAL SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS

Despite early critics, the reaction against the excessive positivism and ecological functionalism of the New Archaeology took time to develop and, not accidentally, found its fullest and most sustained expression in the more historically sensitive setting of

British prehistory. Several worthwhile features of this new critical self-consciousness should be mentioned. First, there has been a recognition of the importance of the cultural and historical structure within which archaeological research is conducted. For example, two entire issues of *World Archaeology* [19] were devoted to a presentation of “regional traditions” in archaeology which documented both how the discipline and research are structured and how archaeological data are used within different national contexts. In an important essay, “Some Opinions about Recovering Mind,” M. Leone [20] reviewed historical archaeological studies in the United States which attempted to contextualize their findings and presented his own preliminary evaluation of Williamsburg as a museum of eighteenth century ideology and – in terms of the ways materials have been reconstructed and displayed – as a contemporary artifact, illustrative of twentieth century American values [21].

Similarly, studies have appeared which show how the personality and social outlook of the archaeologist have influenced his/her reconstruction of the past. Thus, Sir Arthur Evans’ romantic vision of a peaceful, prosperous Minoan society has been attributed to his aristocratic and romantic desire to escape “the general political, social and emotional ‘Angst’ in Europe of his time” [22]. Three book-length biographies and, at least, one long review of the works of V. Gordon Childe [23] have appeared which have shown how Childe’s eccentric personality, political views, and masterly knowledge of archaeological data together helped create his still unparalleled prehistoric syntheses.

The national and historical context of archaeological research and the personality of the archaeologist cannot be divorced from the interpretation of past reality. One can even argue that this subjective problem in archaeology is more acute than in history since meaning in the former case – no matter

how “objectively” presented — is almost entirely derived from the methods and theories the archaeologist consciously brings to the material record. In this sense, the prehistorian composes history more completely than the scholar working with more explicit documentary data, or, as P. Gathercole expressed it, “without the archaeologist there would be a form of legendary prehistory but no archaeology. Sufficient, therefore, be the need for self-awareness” [24].

Archaeology also clearly has served a variety of purposes, ranging from the blatantly nationalist to the scientifically “objective.” Self-awareness should, at least, imply an evaluation of the purposes to which archaeological data has been and is continuing to be put. B. Trigger [25], for example, has cogently criticized the perjorative image of the American Indian that guided archaeological interpretations and reinforced policy decisions during the nineteenth and early twentieth century. According to Trigger, we have not reached *nirvana* in the late twentieth century, and current use of North American prehistory as a laboratory for cultural evolution has continued this sorry tradition by denying the heritage and personal significance of remains for native Americans:

...it seems not unjust to interpret the emotionally detached and ahistorical attitude that many modern American archaeologists have adopted towards their data as also reflecting Euroamerican archaeology's continuing alienation from the native peoples whose cultural and physical remains are being studied. Viewing the Indians' past as a convenient laboratory for testing general hypotheses about sociocultural development and human behavior may be simply a more intellectualized manifestation of the lack of sympathetic concern for native peoples that in the past has permitted archaeologists to disparage their cultural achievements, excavate their cemeteries, and display Indian skeletons in museums without taking thought for the feelings of living native peoples. If prehistoric archaeology is to become more socially significant, it must learn to regard the past of North America's native peoples as a subject worthy of study in its own right, rather than as a means to an end [26].

Consistent with Trigger's position is an “emphasis on cultural context” which “relocates the objects from the past in the historically specific rather than in the theoretically abstract” [27]. The false divide between history and process should be demolished [28], and past cultures and civilizations studied for themselves, as well as for viewing them as manifestations of more general processes.

Perhaps the most striking emphasis in the new critique is its insistence on the active role ideology and symbols play in shaping the past. That both Marxist and non-Marxist studies share this concern must be related to their common effort to disengage from the ecological materialism of the New Archaeology. In any event, the results are salutary: the emic-etic or vulgar Marxist base-superstructure models have been abandoned and ideology as reflected in material remains and symbols has been presented as more than “false consciousness.” I. Hodder has admirably critiqued systemic and recent Marxist treatments of ideology which have appeared in the archaeological literature [29]. The latter, while preferable to the former, are criticized for the following reasons: (a) the tacit assumption that ideologies are shared by all members of a society; (b) the opposition between ideology and social reality assumes both that the latter exists and that it is the same for everyone; (c) the adoption of cross-cultural perspectives that often are insensitive to the specificity of ideological expressions; and (d) a general lack of concern for how ideologies originate and how they generate themselves and social order over time. Although Hodder must be criticized for the archaeological appropriateness and theoretical adequacy of attempting to explain cultural variability on the basis of universal binary oppositions in the structuralist fashion, his imaginative use of ethnographic materials, his focus on material symbols as active agents

in social and economic relations, and his general insistence that cultures are meaningfully constituted and cannot be reduced to behavioral or maximizing functions deserve high praise. Megalithic monuments may "symbolize the creation of agricultural land" and be best explained as "a ritualized extension of the organization of production" [30], but it is not idle to observe that such tombs closely resemble earlier Central European longhouses and that the function of such structures was transmitted and transformed over time within a specifically changing historical and social context [31].

Moreover, Hodder argues for a special status for archaeological treatments of ideology that is related to the inherent long-term nature of archaeological materials. His view is a much more sophisticated vision of the potential of the discipline than that earlier proclaimed by processual archaeologists on the grounds of archaeology's essential diachronic perspective (cf., Binford above) for he rightly insists that archaeologists can contribute to an understanding of the nature of *culture*:

To explain ideology adequately, we have to consider the construction and reconstruction of cultural meanings over the long term, as well as examining power, interests and practical activity. Considerations of the long term encourages examination of the question 'where do ideologies come from?', and archaeology will in the future play an independent role in contributing to this debate [32].

Predictably, older processual archaeologists have reacted either by criticizing the lack of testable scientific rigor and objectivity of this new approach [33] or have attempted to preempt the movement by issuing their own calls for a cognitive archaeology [34]. Archaeologists who never were converted to the earlier New Archaeology are even less taken with the current emphasis on symbols and ideologies, since in their view such a focus hopelessly inverts the traditional rungs or

stages of decreasingly reliable archaeological inferences from technologies through economies and social structures to ideologies. In reviewing *Symbolic and Structural Archaeology*, R.J.C. Atkinson asks "whether structuralism, conceived as an approach to speech and language alone, has any relevance for archaeology, where the evidence is above all dumb," and he nastily concedes only that the book has "a meretricious attraction for those who treat jargon as a substitute for thought" [35]. Positivists' objections to more open-ended, non-reductionist treatments of archaeological data need not be countered, nor is it really informative to question the personal motives and struggles of British archaeology's most eminent practitioners. But it is useful to consider the extent to which the traditionalists' critique of the new symbolic cognitive archaeology is justified.

#### CULTURAL MYSTIFICATION AND HISTORICAL REASON

The same book that prompted such a visceral reaction from Atkinson was very favorably evaluated by others. In an important concluding commentary, Leone [36] argues that the symbolic and structural school that is emerging in Britain does not represent a turn towards "that tired [structuralist] method long superseded even among its own practitioners" but a move "to Marx and his direct descendants." The new structural, symbolic, cognitive (or whatever) British prehistorians are not Levi-Strauss' or Leach's offspring but Childe's. The current focus on ideology and cultural values is perfectly consistent with Childe's final injunction to *prehistorians* to treat archaeological materials "always and exclusively as concrete expressions and embodiments of human thoughts and ideas" [37]. Leone has many valuable insights on the nature of archaeology, the inevitability of observer bias, and the genius of Childe:

Archaeology creates an image of the past which is not so much a matter of inaccuracy as it is a tie to the present because it is often, maybe always, informed by modern uses.... Archaeology and history are so thoroughly modern and thoroughly political that we have an obligation, in knowing that, to come to terms with the ideological process that is inevitably going to operate in our work.... Since it is not possible to have objective or neutral knowledge of the past apart from theory, drop the effort.... Childe is important because he knew what he was doing and no one else seems to have. He did what Macaulay did; he wrote a history to be used, not to be emulated. He wrote a political document, not an archaeological one. He did juggle Engels, not to test him but to improve him. He wrote a statement from a political stand, which was of course an ideological and theoretical one as well. That is what provides the consistency in most of the books Childe wrote [38].

Clearly, perceptive archaeologists, like Hodder and Leone, have fled the sterile scientific captivity of Binfordian naturalism (i.e., prehistoric cultural materialism) but, at the same time, have not arrived at what they would consider the illusory Promised Land of Marx, Childe, and historical materialism. They remain in "pursuit of the past" not because they have conflated method with theory and retreated into the ambiguities of the middle-range, but because they have entered a world of historical and cultural relativism where nothing is certain and, thus, any interpretation or reconstruction is possible. They do not follow the footsteps of Marx and Childe but traverse the same terrain of cultural mystification that first Boas' disciples and, today, M. Sahlins have so thoroughly explored. Positivism has rightly been rejected, but a relativism is being adopted which threatens to introduce chaos into that painstakingly assembled record of "cultural evolution as a rational and intelligible process," which, for Childe, made the entire archaeological enterprise worthwhile [39].

One of the exasperating features of the New Archaeology was that it promoted newness seemingly for its own sake, often at the expense of substance; old approaches were given new names and bandwagons were raised simply to produce something novel and differ-

ent. At its worst, symbolic, cognitive, post-processual (Q.E.D.) archaeology suffers from this same narcissistic tendency to play academic parlor games; Atkinson's reactionary criticism of a "meretricious attraction" has merit, but, by itself, this tendency, however irritating, is not damning. Since the New Archaeology led a whole generation of archaeologists into the theoretically impoverished world of ecological functionalism, symbolic cognitive archaeology deserves praise for breaking this bond by whatever means. The important question is where the discipline now is being taken, and here, unfortunately, the rhetorical flourishes and overstatements of the current literature point to the murky, never-never land of Culture, not Practical Reason. The discipline has wandered from the desert of positivist truth only to reach the swamp of arbitrary Culture where all historical and social knowledge is uncertain.

"Ultimately," Hodder [40] asserts, "statements about the past are about the unobservable and they are unverifiable." He goes on to question whether prehistoric exchange ever occurred (since materials can be distributed by a variety of means, none of which can be proven) and whether the presence of domesticated animal bones necessarily means that the site's inhabitants were engaged in some form of livestock raising or food production. Equally, one could question whether the hundreds of hominid fossils found over the last century really *prove* that we evolved from the apes. Creationist journals love to cite skeptical comments by eminent anthropologists which claim that the fossil record is only "data in search of interpretation" [41]. Maybe, just maybe there is a perverse God who planted these irrelevant fossils and archaeological artifacts, all this misinformation, just to dupe the enemy, the logical positivists of this world, who vainly keep insisting that there is an objective reality which can be ascertained scientifically. The

proof of the paleontologist dealing with fossil remains or that of the archaeologist interpreting the admittedly more refractory *cultural* products of the past is not the same as that of the logician analyzing a syllogism, a mathematician solving a problem, or a physicist confirming a theory by experimentation. However distasteful, one must here agree with Binford [42] and accept the epistemologically necessary uniformitarian assumptions that form the basis of all natural scientific and prehistoric research. Hodder's agnosticism unrestrained logically leads to an anarchic disciplinary solipsism where any interpretation of the past is as valid as any other.

Even explicitly Marxist-inspired studies seem to flirt with descending into this same hyper-relativist morass. M. Spriggs' comprehensive and refreshingly non-dogmatic overview to *Marxist Perspectives in Archaeology* [43] is somewhat defensively entitled "Another (not A Better) Way of Telling," and Sahlins is cited approvingly for his willingness to entertain the possibility that historical events might help transform Culture, as well as being ordered by it. S. Kus' sensitive and persuasive plea to consider a society's "practical consciousness," as well as its ecological balance, information processing techniques, and the like, seems to open the door to the old relativist argument that cultures differ simply because they differ [44]. She argues:

...a society which defines itself as an element of an ahistorical and immutable cosmological order, and which legitimates its socio-political order through reference to such a cosmological order, places restrictions on the form and direction social change can take.... The question of society and nature is... also a question of society's understanding of its capacity to interact with and intervene in an order of physical nature as it is conceived within a given historical context [45].

If the historical context is not made explicit; that is, if the reasons why an ideology or belief system takes hold and

maintains itself are not specified, then one returns to the useless distinction between hot and cold societies or the archaeological equivalent [46] that some societies are innovating, others conserving.

One must be careful not to exaggerate this slippage towards uncertainty. Geertz [47] is correct in reminding us that the dangers of ethnocentrism or, in this case, logical positivism *in our society* are far greater than the frequently distorted and exaggerated problems associated with acceptance of multiple ways of viewing reality. Acceptance of diversity and cultural relativism do not necessarily or even usually mean that "the sky is falling," that solipsism is upon us, or that the good, the beautiful, and the truth cannot be determined. Hodder himself claims that the result of making archaeological interpretations context-dependent will not be anarchy but an awareness and acceptance of the fact that different pasts will be constructed for different and limited sets of social interests [48]. M.J. Rowlands sensibly has addressed the problem of objectivity and subjectivity in archaeological interpretations, arguing against their opposition as exclusive choices [49]; truth will be reached gradually through a critical, socially aware evaluation of different reconstructions of the past.

The more appropriate comparison for archaeology is not with paleontology but with history since both deal with the structure and development of past, meaningfully constituted societies. But the historian's archives are every bit as problematic as the archaeologist's artifacts, and some histories, like some prehistories, simply may be incorrect, may deliberately deceive, or may so select and weigh the documentary evidence as to be unbelievable. G. Kossina's presentation of German prehistory was not just another way of telling; it was wrong, dangerously so. More positively, having considered which depositional factors postulated by a behavioral archaeology are operative in a given



archaeological context, certain conclusions may seem reasonably inescapable. Prehistoric exchange cannot be proven in the logician's or mathematician's sense but can be demonstrated, in a given instance, to be the most reasonable and plausible interpretation of archaeological remains and so be accepted by the vast majority of reasonable scholars considering the same evidence. Reconstructions of past social structures are not totally arbitrary; as I have written in a different context:

Certain features, such as landowning and landworking patterns (which, obviously, are critical for agrarian societies) may prove incapable of reconstructing solely on the basis of archaeological evidence. On the other hand, one does not need Early Dynastic texts to demonstrate that the third millennium tombs from Ur were not left by a society in which all individuals were ranked equally [50].

One must demur from Hodder's assertion that "there is no external objective basis for saying that any one theory, well argued and coherent internally and 'fitting' to the data, is any better than any other theory, equally well argued but based on different assumptions" [51]. Such an overstatement is doubly unfortunate for there is much to be applauded in the call for a multiplicity of pasts serving different limited social interests and even more in the current deconstruction of an uncomplicated objective reality awaiting archaeological discovery. In short, if unchecked, archaeology's new loss of innocence may be leading the discipline directly into a quagmire of total cultural relativism, the only positive result of which might be that it will switch discourse from broad, but increasingly hackneyed, comparative generalizations to a concern for details, thus stimulating primary research. Theoretically, however, a very heavy price may be paid to escape the bondage of the New Archaeology.

Most opportunely, E. Wolf has reminded archaeologists that the identification of

cultures and the documentation of cultural differences represent the starting point of an inquiry, not the solution or panacea for understanding one's materials. Cultures crystallize or assume a particular form for historically ascertainable reasons; they are not fixed, bounded essences but constantly evolve and change due both to internal structural problems and to the outside world and external forces with which they necessarily come into contact. To use the archaic sounding Soviet formulation, the problem of ethnogenesis or the formation of a culture is real and, in many cases, can only be approached through the analysis of archaeological materials:

...I share Harris's sense that there is a real world out there that is not a figment of our imagination; that the degree of correspondence between the ideas in our heads and reality matters — to paraphrase Bertrand Russell: "it had better"; and that human life depends on how humans engage the reality of nature. I do not think, however, that it is all a matter of protein capture and the whelping of human litters. We do not attack reality only with tools and teeth, we also grasp it with the forceps of the mind, and we do so socially, in social interaction and cultural communication with our fellows and enemies.... Cultural construction, reconstruction, and destruction are ongoing processes, but they always take place within larger historical fields or arenas. These arenas are shaped, in their turn, by the operation of modes of mobilizing social labor and by the conflicts these generate internally and externally, within and between social constellations. In these operations and in the conflicts to which they give rise, ideology-making and ideology-unmaking play a vital part. Cultural forms and sets of forms are put to play in this process; but to understand their significance we must go beyond the level of their ostensible meanings. We must come to understand them as human constructions built up to embody the forces generated by the underlying mode of mobilizing social labor. They are not static and given for all times; embodying the tensions of the regnant mode, they are subject to a continuous process of social ordering and dismemberment [52].

Ethnologists [53] have cogently criticized Sahlins' vision of the primacy of Culture over Practical Reason for its insistence upon rigidly opposed cultural and material realms and for its assumption of a general cultural code in all societies (reminiscent of Hodder's criticism

of neo-Marxist treatments of ideology, cf. above) and a directing cultural logic which defines functionality and, consequently, permits change to be explained in functional terms. As prehistorians, archaeologists necessarily must be concerned with the thoughts and intentions of the peoples who produced the artifacts they study, with culture, in other words, as a meaningfully constituted process, but their subject matter necessitates a second imperative no less important than the first; viz., to explain their materials and, by extension, the cultures they have studied *historically* as phenomena that came into being at certain periods of time for certain specific reasons, many of which can be detected in the archaeological record. The archaeologist as prehistorian adds to the ethnologist's critique of Culture the dimension of time and, in so doing, makes a unique and generally unrecognized contribution. Where possible, cultural logic and form must be recognized to interpret the past, but they cannot constitute final explanations of a given society's behavior or transformation for the logic, form, values, and beliefs of a society also developed over time, and such development can be documented.

Childe [54] praised the idealist art historian and archaeologist H. Frankfort for attempting to reenact in his own mind the thoughts and motives of the peoples whose remains he studied, and he praised Frankfort's seminal sketch *The Birth of Civilization in the Near East* as "a noble portrayal of the spiritual achievements" of the ancient Egyptians and Sumerians, while questioning its underlying philosophy of history. In the first chapter of that work, Frankfort quoted approvingly Benedict's famous theory of cultures selecting from "the arc of possible human behavior" and criticized Spengler's and Toynbee's fatalistic visions of historical development. He insisted that an ancient civilization only could be understood by paying attention to its "form" imprecisely

defined as "a certain consistency in orientation, a cultural style"; one worked backwards from the values, artistic accomplishments, literature, and theology of a mature civilization to understand how this form emerged, how it crystallized: "a discussion of the emergence of form entails a knowledge of a civilization in its maturity" [55]. It was Frankfort's contention that distinctive, highly consistent, and integrated forms appeared very early in the development of Mesopotamian and Egyptian civilizations and then continued for millennia with little essential change. Such crystallization followed by cultural stability is well documented throughout the prehistoric record (e.g., Peru, China) and deserves detailed analysis for it ultimately tells us something about the early history of complex societies and the nature of their cultures. Whether such form is best explained in terms of deliberate selection from the "arc of possible human behavior" or in terms of an historically specific process by which groups within a society attempted to change or to reproduce and extend their mode of existence is the question that divides idealists from historical materialists.

Anglo-American archaeology in 1984 finds itself at an interesting crossroads. The logical positivism of the New Archaeology has been dismantled. Attention to symbols and ideologies implicit within materials potentially enriches our understanding of the past beyond the equally legitimate and tremendously informative achievements of archaeology during the past twenty five years: the reconstruction of subsistence systems, settlement patterns, and, in general, the material bases of past societies. Clarke was, of course, correct in insisting that archaeologists examine in detail the nature of their discipline and define methods and theories appropriate to it. Archaeological data consists of materials that were intentionally produced, utilized, and deposited at certain points in time. The perspective is necessarily historical and

materialist. Given recent advances within the discipline and the impressive sophistication of the current studies, it would be reactionary to suggest that archaeology is following an idealist path which it is eminently unsuited to traverse. One's objections should focus on where this path is leading — backwards to Benedict, Frankfort, and Sahlins or beyond Childe to a subtler historical materialism along which ideas and materials actively and continuously interact with one another.

Childe's historical materialism was overly rooted in demonstrating cumulative developments in the forces of production; it was too mechanical in part because Childe was too much the empiricist who soberly concluded that the archaeological record had an extremely limited potential for reconstructing social relations. More unfortunately, his lifetime concern remained the explanation of European peculiarity; the broader anthropological perspective of the interrelated evolution of all human cultures informed only his more popular works [56]. The subsequent development of the discipline has proven that Childe too pessimistically evaluated the nature of the archaeological record, and the nearly universally adopted evolutionary perspective remains today one of the most enduring and positive legacies of the New Archaeology.

The current reaction to the positivist boasts of Binford and his disciples appears to have taken the wrong turn. A real past, although blurred, can be glimpsed through archaeological materials. Prehistory's logic essentially is the same as history's: active engagement in a continual dialogue with oneself and one's sources. Perfect knowledge is never attained, but understanding of the past "as a rational and intelligible process" is indirectly arrived at through a non-ending series of successive approximations.

## NOTES

- 1 E.P. Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays* (London: Merlin Press, 1978), pp. 220–221, 232–233.
- 2 Cf., in particular, M. Spriggs (ed.), *Marxist Perspectives in Archaeology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984) and many of the articles in D. Miller and C. Tilly (eds.), *Ideology, Power and Prehistory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); also part II, "The Dynamics of Change," in C. Renfrew, M.J. Rowlands, and B.A. Segraves (eds.), *Theory and Explanation in Archaeology: The Southampton Conference* (New York: Academic Press, 1982) and the article by C. Tilley, "Conceptual Frameworks for the Explanation of Sociocultural Change," in I. Hodder, G. Isaac, and N. Hammond (eds.), *Pattern of the Past: Studies of Honour of David Clarke* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981, pp. 363–386).
- 3 I. Hodder (ed.), *Symbolic and Structural Archaeology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); I. Hodder, *Symbols in Action: Ethnoarchaeological Studies of Material Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).
- 4 P.L. Kohl, "Materialist Approaches in Prehistory," in *Annual Review of Anthropology* 10 (1981), pp. 89–118; for a spirited defense of a cultural materialist approach to archaeological data, cf., B.J. Price, "Cultural Materialism: A Theoretical Review," *American Antiquity* 47 (1982), pp. 709–741. That American anthropological archaeology is still dominated by ecological approaches is documented by B.G. Trigger in his review of *Advances in Archaeological Method and Theory*; cf., his "Archaeology Advances?," *Reviews in Anthropology*, summer 1983, pp. 10, 13.
- 5 D. Clarke, "Archaeology: The Loss of Innocence," in *Antiquity* XLVII, no. 185 (1973), pp. 6–18.
- 6 *Ibid.*, pp. 8–9.
- 7 The long-lived confusion between method and theory in the archaeological "theoretical" literature is well presented in an article on the application of middle-range theory in archaeology: L.M. Raab and A.C. Goodyear, "Middle Range Theory in Archaeology: A Critical Review of Origins and Applications," *American Antiquity* 49 (1984), pp. 255–268; another discussion of this regrettable confusion and a treatment of the "tyranny of methodology" appears in J.A. Moore and A.S. Keene, "Archaeology and the Law of the Hammer" in J.A. Moore and A.S. Keene (eds.), *Archaeological Hammers and Theories* (New York: Academic Press, 1983), pp. 3–13.
- 8 Clarke, *op. cit.*, 1973, p. 17.
- 9 The classic early questioning of the New Archaeology's pretensions was K.V. Flannery's "Archeology with a Capital S" in C.L. Redman (ed.), *Research and Theory in Current Archaeology* (New York: Wiley, 1973), pp. 47–53; a more sustained critique was developed by B.G. Trigger throughout the seventies; cf., in particular, his first six articles collected in *Time and Traditions: Essays in Archaeological Interpretation* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1978).

- 10 K.V. Flannery, "The Golden Marshalltown: A Parable for the Archeology of the 1980s," *American Anthropologist* 84 (1982), pp. 265–278.
- 11 The term was introduced by L.R. Binford in his "Introduction" to *For Theory Building in Archaeology* (New York: Academic Press, 1977), pp. 1–10; cf., the excellent critique of Binford's usage by Raab and Goodyear, *op. cit.*, pp. 259 ff.
- 12 C. Renfrew, "Foreword," in L.R. Binford *In Pursuit of the Past: Decoding the Archaeological Record* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1983), p. 8.
- 13 L.R. Binford, "Archaeology as Anthropology," reprinted in L.R. Binford, *An Archaeological Perspective* (New York and London: Seminar Press, 1972), p. 31.
- 14 L.R. Binford, "Historical vs Processual Archaeology," reprinted in L.R. Binford, *An Archaeological ...*, *ibid.*, pp. 120–121.
- 15 P.J. Watson, S.A. LeBlanc, and C.L. Redman, *Explanation in Archeology: An Explicitly Scientific Approach* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1971), p. 165.
- 16 Cf., for example, M.H. Salmon, *Philosophy and Archaeology* (New York: Academic Press, 1982).
- 17 Cf., P.L. Kohl, "Materialist Approaches ...," *op. cit.*, pp. 94–95; J.N. Hill, "Systems Theory and the Explanation of Change," in J.N. Hill (ed.), *Explanation of Prehistoric Exchange* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1977), pp. 59–104.
- 18 J. Steward, "Cultural Causality and Law: A Trial Formulation of the Development of Early Civilizations," *American Anthropologist* 51 (1949), pp. 1–27; also his *Theory of Culture Change* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1955).
- 19 *World Archaeology*, vol. 13, no. 2 (1981) and vol. 13, no. 3 (1982); cf., the "Editorial" in the first volume by B.G. Trigger and I.C. Glover, pp. 133–137.
- 20 M. Leone, "Some Opinions about Recovering Mind," in *American Antiquity* 47 (1982), pp. 742–760.
- 21 A more detailed discussion of Williamsburg as a contemporary artifact appears in M. Leone's "Archaeology's Relationship to the Present and the Past" in R.A. Gould and M.B. Schiffer (eds.), *Modern Material Culture: The Archaeology of US* (New York: Academic Press, 1981), pp. 2–14; Leone also presents a fascinating study of how Georgian architecture and formal gardens bolstered or insulated the shaky social hierarchy of eighteenth century Virginia and Maryland society in "Interpreting Ideology in Historical Archaeology: Using the Rules of Perspective in the William Paca Garden in Annapolis, Maryland" in *Ideology, Power and Prehistory*, *op. cit.* 1984, pp. 25–35.
- 22 J.L. Bintliff, "Structuralism and Myth in Minoan Studies," *Antiquity*, vol. LVIII (1984), p. 35.
- 23 S. Green, *Prehistorian: A Biography of V. Gordon Childe* (Bradford: Moonraker Press, 1981), B. McNairn, *The Method and Theory of V. Gordon Childe* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1980); B.G. Trigger, *Gordon Childe: Revolutions in Archaeology* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1980); R. Tringham, "V. Gordon Childe 25 Years After: His Relevance for the Archaeology of the Eighties," *Journal of Field Archaeology* 10 (1983), pp. 85–100; cf. also the two excellent articles by B.G. Trigger, "If Childe Were Alive Today," *Bulletin of the Institute of Archaeology, University of London* 19 (1982), pp. 1–20 and "Childe and Soviet Archaeology," *Australian Archaeology* 18 (June 1984), pp. 1–16.
- 24 P. Gathercole, "A Consideration of Ideology," in *Marxist Perspectives in Archaeology*, *op. cit.* 1984, p. 150.
- 25 B.G. Trigger, "Archaeology and the Image of the American Indian," *American Antiquity* 45 (1980), pp. 662–676.
- 26 *Ibid.*, p. 671.
- 27 I. Hodder, "Archaeology in 1984," *Antiquity* LVIII (1984), p. 30.
- 28 *Ibid.* and also P.L. Kohl, "Force, History and the Evolutionist Paradigm," in *Marxist Perspectives in Archaeology*, *op. cit.*, 1984, pp. 127–134.
- 29 I. Hodder, "Ideology and Power: The Archaeological Debate," *Space and Society* (forthcoming).
- 30 K. Kristiansen, "Ideology and Material Culture: An Archaeological Perspective" in *Marxist Perspectives in Archaeology*, *op. cit.*, 1984, pp. 79–80.
- 31 I. Hodder, "Burials, Houses, Women and Men in the European Neolithic" in *Ideology, Power and Prehistory*, *op. cit.*, 1984, pp. 51–68.
- 32 I. Hodder, "Ideology and Power..." *op. cit.*, 1984, pp. 9–10.
- 33 Cf., R. Whallon, "Comments on Explanation" in C. Renfrew and S. Shennan (eds.), *Ranking, Resource and Exchange* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 155–158; and L.R. Binford, "Meaning, Inference and the Material Record," *ibid.*, pp. 160–163.
- 34 A.C. Renfrew, "Divided We Stand: Aspects of Archaeology and Information," *American Antiquity* 48 (1983), pp. 3–16.
- 35 R.J.C. Atkinson, Review of I. Hodder (ed.), *Symbolic and Structural Archaeology*, *Antiquity* LVIII (1984), pp. 67–68; the appropriateness of a linguistic model for the study of society must be questioned on much more general theoretical grounds, not limited solely by the nature of mute archaeological remains; cf., the brilliant critique of the linguistic structuralist model as a general paradigm in the human sciences in P. Anderson, *In the Tracks of Historical Materialism* (London: Verso Editions, The Thetford Press, 1983), pp. 42–51.
- 36 M. Leone, "Childe's Offspring," in *Symbolic and Structural Archaeology*, *op. cit.*, 1982, pp. 179–184.
- 37 V.G. Childe, *Society and Knowledge* (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1956), p. 1; cf., S. Kus's comments on this passage in "Matters Material and Ideal," in *Symbolic and Structural Archaeology*, *op. cit.*, 1982, p. 49 and in "The Spirit and Its Burden: Archaeological and Symbolic Activity" in *Marxist Perspectives in Archaeology*, *op. cit.*, 1984, pp. 101–113.
- 38 Leone, "Childe's Offspring..." *op. cit.*, 1982, p. 182.
- 39 V.G. Childe, *Social Evolution* (Cleveland: World Publishing Company, 1963), p. 175.
- 40 Hodder, "Archaeology in 1984," *op. cit.*, 1984, p. 27.
- 41 Cf., for example, the *Origins Research* lead article on the *Ancestors* exhibit at the American Museum of Natural History, New York, vol. 7, no. 1 (1984), pp. 1, 4.

- 42 L.R. Binford, "Meaning, Inference, ..." op. cit., 1982, p. 161; also his *Bones: Ancient Men and Modern Myths* (New York: Academic Press, 1981).
- 43 M. Spriggs, "Another Way of Telling: Marxist Perspectives in Archaeology," in *Marxist Perspectives in Archaeology*, op. cit., 1984, pp. 1-9.
- 44 M. Harris' devastating critique of R. Benedict's *Patterns of Culture* and its failure to explain cultural differences is relevant in this context; cf., *The Rise of Anthropological Theory* (New York: Crowell, 1968), pp. 402-403.
- 45 S. Kus, "The Spirit and Its Burden...", op. cit., 1984, p. 106.
- 46 S. Piggott, *Ancient Europe: From the Beginnings of Agriculture to Classical Antiquity*, pp. 17-18; it is interesting that Piggott in this discussion also cites Benedict's famous "arc" of possibilities from which cultures select specific segments; cf., text below. Idealists are amazingly consistent in the authorities whom they cite approvingly.
- 47 C. Geertz, "Distinguished Lecture: Anti Anti-Relativism," *American Anthropologist* 86 (1984), pp. 263-278.
- 48 Hodder, "Archaeology in 1984," op. cit., 1984, p. 30.
- 49 M.J. Rowlands, "Objectivity and Subjectivity in Archaeology" in *Marxist Perspectives in Archaeology*, op. cit., 1984, pp. 108-113.
- 50 P.L. Kohl, *Central Asia: Palaeolithic Beginnings to the Iron Age* (Paris: Editions Recherche sur les Civilisations, Synthese no. 14, 1984), p. 268.
- 51 Hodder, "Archaeology in 1984," op. cit., 1984, p. 30.
- 52 E.R. Wolf, "Culture: Panacea or Problem," *American Antiquity*, vol. 49 (1984), pp. 397, 399.
- 53 Cf., B. O'Laughlin, "Imperialist Culture and its Practical Reason," *Dialectical Anthropology*, vol. 3, no. 1 (1978), pp. 97-104.
- 54 V.G. Childe, "Henri Frankfort: 1897-1954," *Proceedings of the British Academy*, vol. XLI, pp. 366-371.
- 55 H. Frankfort, *The Birth of Civilization in the Near East* (New York: Doubleday, 1956), p. 25.
- 56 See, however, Trigger's informed speculations as to how Childe would have favorably responded to the new chronological evidence for early European indigenous developments and to the comparative value of archaeological materials found throughout the world and the need for a universal evolutionary perspective. Trigger further persuasively argues that the concept of diffusion had strong ethical implications for Childe; it expressed the mutual interdependence of humankind and combatted the myths of racial superiority which pervaded archaeological discourse during the twenties and thirties. Cf., B.G. Trigger, "If Childe Were Alive Today," op. cit., 1982, p. 3.