PART I

Steps to the present

PROLOGUE

The longest of long revolutions

You don't need a Weatherman
to know which way the wind blows
Bob Dylan *Subterranean homesick blues* 1965

To begin with . . .

> One revolution invariably led to another. Fire drew some of our earliest ancestors into the circle. Stone tools made them hunters and these handy artefacts later became symbols, embellished by language and art. A life on the move was eventually exchanged for a settled existence that promoted agriculture, and the first civilisations followed. Then came the ancient Empires with their bookkeeping, literacy and the institutions of state power. The momentum they established led to industrialisation whose global ramifications define the contemporary world.

There, as I see it in an extreme digested read, lies the familiar contribution of three million years of prehistory to the larger human story. The investigation of the past is based around the origins of great advances such as technology, language, farming and writing; the where, when and why of becoming human. The origin points for these questions are investigated across the globe and are presented by archaeologists as step changes. Origins and revolutions are sought after as both the source of evidence and the causal device that, in the long corridors of prehistoric time, transformed hominids into humans.

I embarked on this book to question this familiar approach and to challenge what archaeologists regard as change. I cannot say exactly when I grew dissatisfied with the search for origin points and the identification of revolutions, but with hindsight I can see two points of departure early in

my career. The first came from archaeologist David Clarke who launched his blistering attack on the cosy foundations of archaeological knowledge more than thirty years ago. He shook his prey like a terrier.

> Even those most complete and finished accomplishments of the old edifice – the explanations of the development of modern man, domestication, metallurgy, urbanisation and civilisation – may in perspective emerge as semantic snares and metaphysical mirages. (Clarke 1973:11)

But Clarke only had archaeologists in his sights although, judging by the rash of new revolutions that have been identified since his tragically early death three years later, not many were listening. What was lacking from his critique was the broader framework, which I discuss in Part I, where revolution is accepted as an apt analogy in many disciplines across the humanities and social sciences, and it is from this broad base that it derives its staying power as a convenient concept.

Archaeology has made one long-lasting contribution to this historical device through Gordon Childe's Neolithic Revolution, formulated in the 1930s, that drew an analogy with the Industrial Revolution. More recently there has been much discussion among archaeologists of a Human Revolution and I spend some time unpacking these concepts in Part I, together with origins research more generally, since they address what many see as fundamental changes that need explaining. The two revolutions, Human and Neolithic, have a cast of characters; among them farmers, hunters, anatomically modern humans and *hominins*. The last is now the widely used term to describe us, *Homo sapiens*, and all our fossil ancestors. The more familiar *hominid*, that it replaces, includes us, our fossil ancestors and the great apes.

That broader context of approval for the idea of revolution, and my second point of departure, is apparent in the writings of another Cambridge figure, Raymond Williams, occasionally glimpsed by undergraduates in the early 1970s on his way back from the radio studio, and whose books *Culture and Society: 1780–1950* (Williams 1958), and *The Long Revolution* (1965) were required reading. Williams spoke of 'genuine revolutions' that transformed people and institutions, and he wove together the democratic, industrial and cultural revolutions to show that they could only be understood in relation to each other. His time-frame was short, 200 years for the most part, but importantly his Long Revolution was an unfinished project of continuous change that made us who we are. He pointed out (1965:13) that we devote a great deal of our cultural and intellectual life to criticising these revolutions in an attempt to

understand ourselves. Williams was therefore quite content with the shallow time depth of history to understand change: the process conveniently structured by the ruptures of revolution. But in 1970 I was an infant archaeologist interested in the long-term contribution of our evolutionary history to what we are. Quite simply, why were the devices of recent history suitable analogies for understanding the much longer sweep of social and economic change that was available to prehistorians? My own seed of change had been planted and now you have the harvest.

Human identity and change

Archaeologists will tell you that they were put on this earth to explain change. What they usually mean by that is their unflagging search for the evidence of origins; the fieldwork quest for the oldest. And once found these origin points, like well driven tent pegs, secure the ropes to explain the changes that led in the first place to the point of origin.

In this book I will not be looking for the origin of anything. Neither will I be examining existing nor proposing new revolutions as devices for understanding why change happened. Instead I will present a study of human identity in earliest prehistory. My basic point is that the study of change, and I do not deny that it has taken place, has to acknowledge the material basis of human identity. The construction of the self and personhood, what I understand as human identity, was always local rather than universal. Identifying what needs to be explained in the change between such apparently universal categories as hunter to farmer or archaic to modern human mis-represents the ways in which material culture is woven into our identities. Hence my emphasis on how artefacts, the archaeologist's bread and butter evidence, act as material metaphors for that hidden, inner identity. Metaphors in earliest prehistory need to be especially well anchored and I will argue in Part II that this was achieved through the hominin body since it provided at all times and places the reference for sensory and emotional experiences about the world. Major turning points such as language and art must have affected these hominin experiences. Notwithstanding, I will argue that such developments, however significant we regard them, were not origin points for a radically new hominin identity from which we can trace the beginnings of our own humanity. Artefacts are much older than words. Tools and techniques have always had a metaphorical relationship with the hominin body and identities have been formed from this interaction.

These relationships between artefacts and bodies are examined in Part II. In particular I set out a scheme for the study of material culture through the categories of instruments and containers that are proxies for parts of the body, and from which they derive their symbolic force. Material metaphors of this kind are comparable to the more familiar linguistic rhetorical devices by which something is understood in terms of something else. I set these material proxies in a framework where identity is created through social practices that enchain and accumulate and actions that consume and fragment.

Finally, in Part III I apply my concept of change to the prehistory of a social technology that spans almost three million years. I will show that change in this vast time period can be understood without recourse to either revolutions or the identification of specific, singular points of origin. There were no step-changes, only gradients in the respective authority of commonplace material metaphors that organised the world of experience. The dominant archaeological approach that seeks to establish rational associations in order to explain the variety of artefacts is supplemented in my account by a relational perspective that brings the body as well as the mind into consideration. What we regard as change depends on how we view artefacts as material proxies for identities derived from the active body and the inner self. The former is hidden to the archaeologist, the latter to ourselves.

I also tackle in Part III the question of whether agriculture did in fact change the world. Here is a historical tipping point not only for archaeologists but for all those seeking an origin for the modern world. My answer to the question is a negative in terms of the material basis of human identity. To make my point I concentrate on a neglected category in archaeology enquiry, children. I use the concept of the childscape, which I define as the environment of development, to provide a context for understanding how such an apparently fundamental change as growing crops and raising animals occurred. To assist this undertaking I examine two primary metaphors, the giving-environment and growing-the-body, that impacted on the childscape and the material project we call agriculture. I question the view of a number of archaeologists that humanity is no older than the earliest evidence for cultivation.

Rational and relational approaches

The difference that exists between my approach to change and the more familiar framework of the Human and Neolithic Revolutions is captured

in the opposition of mind and body. The tension provides another tussle between rational and relational accounts of the ways in which people engage with their material worlds.

Two examples will help to set the scene. Phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962:147) contended some time ago that 'bodily experience forces us to acknowledge an imposition of meaning which is not the work of a universal constituting consciousness'. Yet evolutionary psychologist Robin Dunbar (2003:163) has recently declared that 'what makes us human is not our bodies but our minds'. A theme of my book is to bring these positions together using material culture as the focus.

The start of Williams' Long Revolution furnishes two famous Latin sound bites in support of these opposite views about the authority of mind and body, rational and relational, for understanding the on-going global project of Modernity. Both come from the seventeenth century; '*Cogito ergo sum*' (I think therefore I am) and '*Habeas corpus*' (You should have the body).

Improvement of the mind

Cogito ergo sum, in the hands of the mathematician and philosopher René Descartes (1596–1650), privileged the mind over the body by dividing the world into oppositions that included subject and object, nature and culture, individual and society, structure and process. In Descartes' paradigm, the internal mind understood and interpreted the external world in a rational manner. The rewards of this way of thinking have been immense and included scientific and medical advances. Applied to the past, the rational paradigm sees our improving minds as driving history forward while below the neck our bodies stayed the same, merely executing orders from above. The benefits of progress can be measured by material items such as ploughs, steam engines, longevity, digital watches and the release from toothache. It is therefore un-surprising that the systematic study of the past followed, rather than preceded Descartes, and that the step-changes which archaeologists have used to structure their accounts of prehistory since the early nineteenth century embraced a progressive view of our history. For instance, when trained by a rational education the mind could be improved to the benefit of the individual and wider society. By analogy, the story of the past became one of improvement as our species changed from a natural into a cultural being. The perception of such a transition in part explains the interest in the skulls of our earliest ancestors and the importance attached to their size, shape and by inference their contents.

The archaeological contribution to this story has been to provide tangible proof of the pace of change in the classrooms of human evolution. For the most part the record card of material evidence is filled with phrases such as 'slow progress', 'could do better' and 'nothing to report'. This state of affairs changes with the first of my two revolutions, the Human Revolution. The period starts 300,000 years ago with several hominin species found in the same geographical localities. It ends with a single global species, *Homo sapiens*, ready to move on alone and turn its back on hunting and gathering. During this time the curriculum has been expanded from an early emphasis on survival and natural history to include advanced crafts, religious studies, music, languages, global geography, multi-culturalism and art classes. The Neolithic Revolution, beginning some 15,000 years ago, quickens this pace further, suggesting to some that this was the time when we truly appeared, as if woken from a very long daydream at the back of a stuffy classroom.

Archaeologists see two of their goals as deciding on the temporal and geographical origins of the expanded curriculum, outlined above, and commonly called modern behaviour. It was certainly a revolution as judged by the almost three million years of stone tool use that preceded it. But compared to say the American or French revolutions of the eighteenth century the terminology sits awkwardly. It is the significance *for us* of the origins of these modern humans, rather than the time it took for them to appear, that is truly revolutionary.

A whole body

The Cartesian system has of course had side effects. Scientific and medical advances have not all been beneficial. But rather like the NRA slogan 'People, not guns, kill people' this is seen neither as the fault of the technology nor the system that produced it (Robb 2004:131). Instead, it is people who are the weakest link. The rational mind both identifies and provides material solutions to problems. For example, our bodies wear out and are susceptible to disease. With this problem in mind solutions can be sought. The result is the treatment of the body as another piece of technology, 'machines of meat' as the novelist Kurt Vonnegut once described them. 'My body let me down' just as 'My memory is going' beg for an applied solution that will make them better instruments for serving the mind. Both depend on the mind making a judgement about ourselves that curiously distances one set of faculties from another as in the opposition between subject and object, internal and external states.

This is why *Habeas corpus* extends the argument in important ways. The move from a philosophy of the mind to the legal imperative of the body reminds us that to be a person we not only need to think but also to be seen and heard. *Habeas corpus* enshrined, in an Act of Parliament of 1679, a much older common law principle that there could be no imprisonment without legal hearing. Physical presence before witnesses recognised the materiality of being a subject of flesh and bone rather than just an object animated by thought. Or at least that is how I see these oppositions in the seventeenth century as philosophers and lawyers now defined what it was to be an individual in a rapidly changing European world (Williams 1965:Chapter 3).

The Long Revolution therefore gives the on-going project of hominin evolution a choice of starting point, mind and body, rational as well as relational. My intention is to re-unite the mind and the body in our understanding of the past by showing, through the study of two so-called revolutions, that they bring different perspectives to the central archaeological issue of change. This standpoint involves both the description and explanation of change from material evidence. This body-whole perspective is not new and draws on critiques in many disciplines, including archaeology, of the Cartesian system of how we understand the world. The unification is necessary to achieve what I hope will be a fresh understanding of why things changed in the past, based on a different appreciation of the material evidence. The point I do carry forward from the Cartesian system is that our bodies are a social technology. But they are also, as the anthropologist Marcel Mauss insisted, techniques. Bodies are material projects comparable to those of building a house or planting a field of barley. They are always cultural as well as biological artefacts, just as artefacts are similarly social and natural things. I will argue that to understand change we need to dig beneath the surface and view our evidence through other prisms than origins research and by analogies other than that of revolution.

CHAPTER 1

The Neolithic Revolution

The Neolithic took place in the grey night of remote prehistory
Gordon Childe *What happened in history* 1942

Changing trains

In 1934 the archaeologist Gordon Childe made a short trip to the Soviet Union. For twelve days he visited colleagues in museums and archaeological institutes in Leningrad and Moscow. He saw the country from the train and he returned laden with books and information about the origins of the Indo-Europeans. He also learned first-hand about theoretical upheaval. The Soviet archaeology he encountered was a fully fledged state instrument charged with the investigation of pre-capitalist societies and the history of material culture. Indeed, the word archaeology was prohibited and the names of the major institutes had been changed accordingly (Trigger 1980:93). By coincidence the leading archaeologist prior to the Russian revolution of 1917, N. Y. Marr, died in the year of Childe's visit. Marr's brand of Marxism as applied to prehistory stressed that social development was a staged process that took place independently, and therefore in parallel, in different geographical areas. There was little room for diffusion and migration as explanations for change until Marr was denounced by Stalin in 1950 (McNairn 1980:154, 165).

The movement of peoples was Childe's preferred mechanism for the archaeological variety he had already seen first-hand in museums across Europe. In this device at least he shared common ground with another of his contemporaries that he outlived, the ultra-German nationalist Gustav Kossinna who had died in 1931. Kossinna's views of Aryan racial superiority led him to propose a homeland for their origin among northern

Nordic peoples. From there, he argued, sprang all that was progressive and valuable about a European past (Barkan 1992; Härke 1992; Malafouris 2004; Veit 1989). Kossinna's agenda was to find archaeological evidence that would demonstrate this. Childe was opposed to Kossinna's programme on political, moral and scientific grounds. While he shared the view that as peoples moved so prehistoric cultures ebbed and flowed, he neither subscribed to racial superiority as a motive force nor to a northern homeland as a significant origin point, arguing rather for the importance of the east. Europe, he claimed, fell under the light from the east, *ex oriente lux*. He was to later write of his early syntheses that 'the sole unifying theme was the irradiation of European barbarism by Oriental civilisation (Childe 1958b:70)', and he directed his considerable powers of archaeological synthesis and philological analysis to showing this was indeed the case.

Kossinna's legacy is well known and infamous (Klejn 1999). Two years after his death the Third Reich was founded, and his agenda was enthusiastically taken up by the *Deutches Ahnenerbe*, or German ancestral heritage, an organisation whose purpose was to use history and science to justify German superiority. The *Ahnenerbe* was a major National Socialist project, established by Heinrich Himmler in 1935 and generously endowed at Wewelsburg Castle, the ritual headquarters of the SS. Archaeology figured prominently in the justification of invasion and suppression of the free nations of Europe.

Childe would have been familiar with such overt nationalism as he criss-crossed Europe during the 1920s and 1930s. His travels linked archaeological provinces together in great chains of historical connections based on the similarity of their prehistoric artefacts, although instead of railways it was the great route-ways of the Danube, the Rhine and the shores of the Mediterranean that tied the prehistory of the continent together. He strengthened these chains by binding them ultimately to chronologies derived from the text-aided archaeology of the Near East and Egypt. He was not the first archaeologist to do this but he was the most successful.

So it is interesting to think about what else Childe might have glimpsed through the train window during his visit to the Soviet Union in 1934. Almost certainly he would have seen the effects of Stalin's programme of agricultural collectivisation. Beginning in 1929 the working practices of generations of farmers had been bulldozed aside according to the dictates of centralised state planning. Collectivisation, exacerbated by drought, is largely held responsible for the famines of 1932–3 when five million