

The historical approach in archaeology

Most existing approaches in archaeology are able to explain neither the generation nor the specificity of cultural material. There is a need for an historical dimension to add to the processual and structural approaches. By 'history' is meant Collingwood's 'history from the inside'. Archaeology is particularly able to contribute to the history of the long term. For example, questions of the special character of European developments over the long term were asked by Weber. Although Weber's work has had little impact in archaeology, Childe asked similar questions and it is possible today to describe more fully the distinctive character of Europe in prehistory. Such information is directly relevant to recent anthropological and historical discussion. Long-term history raises problems about the relationship between the past and the present, but it opens up a fundamentally different perspective on issues such as the relationship between the material and the ideal; whether enduring structures are peripheral to, or at the core of, social systems; the relationship between structure, process and meaning content; and the historical role of material culture resulting from its durability. Processes such as diffusion, acculturation, and the production of skeuomorphs need to be reintroduced into archaeology as being explanatory and as playing an important role in any study of social change.

What is meant by an historical approach in archaeology? Responses to this question often refer to the notion that adequate explanation involves identifying the series of events that lead up to the event to be explained. This is certainly part of the definition of history used in this volume. Yet such a viewpoint is already widely found in archaeology. Within systems theory, the system at time n is affected by the system

Chapter 1

The contribution of the long term

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state at time $n-1$. In Marxist approaches in archaeology, the new social system arises out of, and is already present within, the preexisting contradictions. In palaeoeconomic approaches the historical dimensions of Darwinian theory are often retained.

Nevertheless, it has been more common in archaeology to oppose historical and scientific, anthropological, explanations. Whereas the latter form of explanation often emphasises cross-cultural regularities, the former often seems to get involved in detailed descriptions of particular cases. I wish to argue that there are two interrelated debates which separate historical from non-historical accounts.

The first concerns the relationship between description and explanation. I have argued (Hodder 1986) that archaeological explanations can always be shown to be descriptions given in response to questions – questions such as ‘why is this site near this stream?’ or ‘why was this site abandoned?’ These descriptions can be either general (such as, ‘people use nearby resources’) or particular (such as, ‘the river broke its banks and flooded the settlement’). Even the relevance of a particular answer to a particular question is based on general and/or particular descriptions. But when a particular description is used we can understand it, and its relevance, only in terms of some general principles. What historical explanation tries to do is limit the dependence on general statements, because it is believed that the relevance of

a general statement to a particular statement has to be proven, not assumed.

Thus, in answering the question 'why did this event occur?', the archaeological historian – the archaeo-historian – initially answers as best s/he can by describing the sequence of preexisting events in great detail. In identifying the totality of relevant factors, "total history" (Braudel, 1973, p. 1238) is written. Often using an 'aquatic' metaphor, a 'stream' or 'flow' of events is produced, with no easily determinable beginning or end. It is rather like the problem of deciding when life begins – is the important point when the first breath is taken, is it at some stage in the development of the foetus, or immediately the egg is fertilised? But fertilisation depends on sperm, and hence one life depends on another in a continuous stream. Archaeologists often talk of the stream of continual variability and change as one artifact type is transformed into another, and Sayce (1933) has provided some elegant demonstrations of such continua.

With this viewpoint, it becomes difficult to talk of the cause of a life, or the cause of a type. The generalising procedure involves breaking up continua in order to make general statements about cause and effect. But in historical analysis, the attempt at total description (which is itself explanatory and often highly theoretical) leads to an emphasis on process rather than event. Unfortunately, in archaeology, the term 'processual' has come to be associated with an approach which is, in fact, fundamentally non-processual. Processual archaeology has been closely tied to systems theory, to causal functional explanation, and to a 'billiard ball' view of the past based on the interrelationships of events. In historical analysis, on the other hand, the billiard game is not an appropriate metaphor because the definition of the entities (the balls) will vary in different historical contexts, and because there is a fluid set of interrelationships between the balls such that the balls merge and become one. And this one ball has fuzzy edges, and it transforms itself, changes its appearance as it moves through time. A river, with changing banks, or perhaps the currents of wind, are better metaphors.

Historical explanation, then, involves an attempt at particular and total description, and it does not oppose such description to explanation and general theory. Rather, our generalising anthropological concerns can progress only through an adequate description, and hence understanding in our terms, of the particular. The relationship between the general and the particular, between 'our' context and 'their' context, is opened to doubt and scrutiny.

The second debate which distinguishes historical from non-historical accounts concerns the question of whether culture is reducible to things outside itself. The stance taken by non-historical approaches is clear. For example, in many types of structuralism the codes are reducible ultimately to the binary and other mechanisms of the human mind. In ecological and functionalist archaeology, culture is reducible to its effects on, for example, population survival. On the other hand, the historical approach as used in this volume argues that cultures

are produced as organised and organising schemes of action that are meaningful to the individuals involved. These schemes are organised because of the human need to categorise and arrange, in order to perceive and act upon the world. The organisational schemes are arbitrary in the sense that their forms and content are not determined by anything outside themselves. But they are not arbitrary in the sense that, once the continuous stream of human action begins, there are necessary historical links as one scheme is transformed into another. Culture is, then, not reducible. It just is.

The organisational schemes are universal in the sense that they may have more general beginnings, held in common with others, and in the sense that we can all come to an understanding of them. But they are also particular and unique, created out of circumstances by the human mind. The historical process, the continual stream of being, is directed. And here we see the distinction between action and event made by Collingwood (1946). Rather than looking at events from the outside, it is necessary to attempt an understanding of 'the insides of events', to grasp the intentions, values and organisational schemes within human action. There is certainly a semiotic orientation to this view (see for example Preziosi 1979) but linked to an emphasis on social practice.

An historical approach in archaeology thus involves contributing to anthropological discussion an understanding of the processes of social change by concentrating on the particular context and on meaningful action. Yet in understanding any event as a particular action, how do we define the relevant temporal context? Is what happened 1,000 years ago relevant, or only the last five minutes? And is the event to be understood in terms of what is in the individual actor's head or in terms of some collective assumptions? In so far as they can be distinguished, what is the relative importance of social, economic and ideational structures?

An important attempt at answering such questions in a way that is immediately relevant to archaeologists was made by Braudel (1958, 1973) and the *Annales* school in Paris. Braudel identified three scales in the historical process, although these were simply arbitrary divisions of a continuum. First, over the very long term, there are permanent, slow-moving, or recurrent features. Thus, in his great work on the Mediterranean (1973) he talks of the "constants" and of "the deep bone-structure of the Mediterranean" (*ibid.*, pp. 1239 and 1240). Second, there is structural or social history. This is a history of groups, collective destinies and general trends with still slow but perceptible rhythms. Finally, there is the individual and the event. This is the traditional history of individual men and women and of the ephemera of brief happenings. In what follows I intend to discuss Braudel's scheme and relate it to recent work in archaeology and to the papers in this volume.

Very long-term structures and contents

It is perhaps misleading that Braudel often refers to his first, long-term history as geographical. His concern is not simply to describe the physical environment and to argue that

enduring Mediterranean values are a product of this environment. Rather, the physical, social and ideational are all inextricably linked. For example, instead of describing the mountains of the Mediterranean as those areas above a certain arbitrary altitude, he asks “what exactly is a mountain?” He discusses the distinctive character of Mediterranean mountains as opposed to ranges elsewhere in the world, and describes the Mediterranean mountains in terms of “the freedom of the hills” where people are difficult to conquer and control (*ibid.*, p. 41). He talks of the recurrent character of the Mediterranean mountains as empty or as refuges, with dispersed as opposed to village occupation and having “a separate religious geography” (*ibid.*, p. 35). The Mediterranean islands, on the other hand, led isolated, yet often vital, and precarious lives, as can be seen from the aggregate of events over long periods. Indeed ‘island’ becomes a concept, so that Braudel can talk (*ibid.*, p. 160) of “islands that the sea does not surround”. In explaining why the Reformation never really took hold in the Mediterranean, he suggests (*ibid.*, p. 768) that, “possibly because of an ancient substratum of polytheism”, Mediterranean Christendom remained attached to the cult of the saints and the Virgin Mary.

For Braudel, then, any particular event is part of, influenced by, very long-term continuities which are both the aggregate of previous events, and structures and beliefs which form those events. The physical geography of a region will play an important role here, as was emphasised in archaeology by C. Fox (1932). But also, human relationships and perceptions have enduring qualities, closely tied to the physical constraints and opportunities.

There is an increasing interest in such long-term processes in archaeology and anthropology. For example, Alain Testart (1982) has argued that the sexual division of labour in hunter-gatherer societies cannot be reduced to various ‘external’ functional needs. For example, the hypotheses that women cannot hunt because children make them less mobile, or that two types of knowledge (hunting and gathering) are most efficiently separated, or that men and women have different natural strengths and abilities which suit them to particular tasks, are not supported by the evidence collated by Testart. Instead, Testart identifies a symbolic problem to do with blood. Humans separate two different kinds of flowing blood – that from killing animals, and menstrual blood. Hence the sexual division of labour results from a symbolic concern. Testart supports his case by showing that the taboos of contemporary hunter-gatherers are concerned specifically with separating weapons from women.

Such a model has various expectations about changes through time and place. For example, as hunting increases at the expense of collecting, women are brought more into the animal economy, so that taboos, rituals of separation, domestic cultural elaboration to do with hunting, food preparation and eating increase. This hypothesis may help to explain variation in cultural elaboration in, for example, the European Upper Palaeolithic.

Haudricourt (1962, p. 40) suggests that a further problem

develops when agriculture begins. Plants and animals are brought into the home, domesticated, made part of the interior world of human culture. But at some point there is harvest and slaughter. This involves killing ‘one’s own’, and has to be surrounded in ceremonies and ‘rites de passage’.

Braudel’s concern, however, is with more concrete structures which have some historical specificity. It would be necessary carefully to examine the relevance of the models of Testart and Haudricourt before applying them to the ancient world. Such applications are often facilitated by noting long-term contrasts between regions.

For example, Haudricourt (1962, and see Demoule 1982) draws an analogy between western ideologies and western domestic species, and between eastern ideologies and eastern domesticates. Sheep need direct and immediate control. Without its shepherd the sheep is vulnerable and the image of the pastoral shepherd as leader is important in western religion and political philosophy. Wheat and barley are not fragile but they do receive rough treatment as they are sown, harvested and the grains are separated out with violent motions. The emphasis in the west is on control. In the east, rice involves careful preparation of the ground and the water buffalo remains independent. Philosophy and politics emphasise indirect and bureaucratic control.

To support these hypothetical links in evidence from west and east would be an enormous task, involving analyses of a wide range of materials. Prehistory too would have to play its role, supporting or refuting the validity of Haudricourt’s hypothetical links by examining whether the two different ‘styles’ of life did emerge with domestication. Clearly such structures remain abstract, and it is only when linked with action and event in Braudel’s third category of history that their force becomes apparent and they become archaeologically visible.

One area in which archaeology has already been involved in discussion of long-term structures is in the debate about the origin and nature of Indo-Europeans. It is not my concern here to summarise this large area of controversy and uncertainty. Unfortunately much of the archaeological involvement has been at the level of identifying Indo-European traits (such as pastoralism), which is always dangerous given the propensity of traits or groups of traits to change their meanings in different contexts. Perhaps more useful would be to identify the long-term underlying structure of Indo-European society. Such a structure has been identified by Dumézil (1977) and is discussed by, for example, Demoule (1980), Haudry (1981) and Benveniste (1969).

Dumézil identifies a ‘trifunctional’ structure. The first part is a magic-religious sovereignty, a judicial and religious authority. The second is the force of warriors, and the third is production and reproduction. This basic structure has different transformations in all the different Indo-European groups, and it occurs in different forms in all areas of culture – in thought, religion, institutions, in the concept of history, medical doctrine and even in colour symbolism. For Dumézil this is an historical

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structure since although other societies have similar divisions, only among the Indo-Europeans is the 'trifunctional' structure found in all aspects of life. He notes the difference with bipartite divisions in China and the unity of Jewish religion (Demoule 1980, p. 112). The structure as defined is unique and endures over long periods, despite regionalisation and wide separation of the varied Indo-European groups.

Archaeologists have long toyed with the idea of identifying some common cultural core from which the varied European societies developed. Hawkes (1954, pp. 167–8), for example, wanted to follow such a regional, historical approach in order gradually to peel off the later variety and get at the common core. But it was Childe who devoted much of his work to identifying the particular nature of European society (Trigger 1980).

Childe's first edition (1925) of *The Dawn of European Civilization* was intended to understand the particular nature of European culture and to identify a spirit of independence and inventiveness that led to the industrial revolution. He suggested that a distinctively European spirit, involving vitality, inventiveness, a lack of authoritarianism and autocratic power, and a modern naturalism, began in the Bronze Age. Even in the sixth edition of *The Dawn* he argued that "a distinctively European culture had dawned by our Bronze Age" (1957, p. 33).

Childe's descriptions of the fundamental differences between west and east differ somewhat from the account of Haudricourt (see above), perhaps underlining the difficulty of making interpretations at this level of generality. Nevertheless, it remains possible, as Braudel's own work suggests, to collect data to strengthen or weaken alternative hypotheses. Childe was particularly concerned with the greater local diversity in Europe, and the quicker change and progress, especially in the evolution of tools and weapons. He made his contrasts with the Near East, but the same conclusions are reached by Lechtman (1984) in her comparison of the technological characters of New World and Old World metallurgy. The importance and elaboration of metals in Europe are linked to their wider use in warfare, transport and agriculture, whereas in the Andes, for example, metals had a more symbolic role in both secular and religious spheres of life.

There has been much other work on long-term continuities in the New World (e.g. Bricker 1981; Coe 1978; Vogt 1964, 1965; Flannery and Marcus 1983), but I wish to continue with the European scene in order to demonstrate how such archaeological work can contribute to debate within other disciplines. Weber's (1976) analysis of the relationship between the Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism is in answer to his question "why does capitalism emerge in western Europe and not in other parts of the world?" Similar questions seem to lie behind the work of Haudricourt and Childe. But Weber does not have the time perspective to identify the growth of the Puritan emphases on duty and continuous bodily or mental labour. Rather than seeing any one 'cause' of the Protestant ethic, Weber suggests that it 'unfurls' from Roman law, to the

western church, to Protestantism. Clearly Childe saw similar developments even farther back, in the European Bronze Age. These concerns with 'origins' are important. Without the longer perspective one might think that capitalism 'caused' Protestantism, or the other way round. In fact, however, the 'direction' towards Protestantism may have existed for longer periods, growing and changing, unfurling in different conditions, producing capitalism but also produced by it.

The European worlds described by Weber and Childe involve individualism, quick change and an economic and practical rationality. In a discussion of the origins of English individualism, Macfarlane (1978, p. 163) suggests the hypothesis "that the majority of ordinary people in England from at least the thirteenth century were rampant individualists, highly mobile both geographically and socially, economically 'rational', market-oriented and acquisitive, ego-centred in kinship and social life". However, although Macfarlane accepts that the same character might be identifiable in *The Germans* of Tacitus, he cannot identify the origins of this long-term style. "It will need other works before we can trace the elusive English back to their particular roots" (*ibid.*, p. 206). Although Macfarlane is here concerned with England rather than Europe, it is again apparent that adequate considerations of historical events and of the relative importance of the different factors involved in social change lead to a search for the long term. Prehistory can here contribute to history, and hence to anthropology.

There are, of course, many dangers here, and the methods of history and long-term history will be discussed below. One of the major difficulties has been outlined by Merriman (1987). It is certainly attractive today to imagine prehistoric Europe filled with individualistic, creative, free, rational entrepreneurs. Yet Merriman shows how our views of Europe north of the Alps are derived from Classical Mediterranean authors projecting their sense of 'barbarian' onto this other world. In the nineteenth century a Romantic interest in the Celts and their independent spirit revived. Yet through critical assessment of the historical origin of such ideas, coupled with detailed consideration of European prehistoric data, particularly when contrasted with those of other parts of the world, I would argue that scientific analysis of long-term continuities in social, economic and symbolic structures can be conducted.

All continuities exist through change since no two actions can ever be identical. What types of rhythm of change occur over the long term? Archaeologists have been little concerned with such questions. It would be interesting, for example, to compare the numerous cases in which periods have been divided up into Early, Middle and Late phases. Are there any common characteristics of, for example, Early phases? And what causes variation between them? And once a certain type of Middle phase has been reached, what sort of leeway exists for the Late phase? Answers to such questions would lead to an understanding of whether long-term rhythms do occur.

Few European prehistoric archaeologists would accept a

distinction between a 'hot' rhythm of fast change in societies which emphasise the continuous process of history and a 'cold' rhythm of slow change in societies which emphasise categorical distinctions (Lévi-Strauss 1962). Yet if continual change is everywhere to be found, how does it proceed? One view is that, once a new structure or scheme has been found, there is the possibility of endless permutation and expansion. Thus, "all classification proceeds by pairs of contrasts: classification only ceases when it is no longer possible to establish oppositions. Strictly speaking, therefore, the system knows no checks" (Lévi-Strauss 1962, p. 217). This practically unlimited capacity for extension can be seen in many archaeological sequences. Sayce (1933) noted that by the process of elaboration from a simple idea one could move from a grass stem, to a clarinet, to all wind instruments, to the church organ. He also suggested that the pace of elaboration increased through time, and he provided an explanation. The mind is always busy producing patterns, and innovation comes about from playing with what is already there. As what is already there increases so also the pace of innovation increases.

In Chapter 2, Whitley provides an example of such a process, although within the German idealist tradition it has a slightly different meaning. Here there is the notion of an underlying ideal which the producers of material culture are trying to attain. There is a gradual move towards the 'perfect' expression of some abstract quality.

Of course, the phenomenon of 'decline' or 'simplification' is also commonly met. It can be argued that oppositional structures do not lend themselves to endless elaboration. At some point the system gets 'stuck' or 'filled up' as everything is cross-referenced to everything else in a dense, complex network. A new structure is derived out of the old, and the cycle can start again.

Such discussion is premature until the relevant research has been carried out. And also it is abstract. Can one really talk of structures becoming more or less elaborate and complex as if they meant nothing and did nothing in the social realm? To a certain extent it can be argued that there may be constraints deriving from structures which are independent of other, shorter histories. Clearly, however, most structural variation and change are located within shorter-term strategies, to be considered below. It is the shorter-term changes which reproduce and create the longer term. It is important not to reify the long term. Yet, in so far as there is an interaction between the long and short terms, archaeologists, and particularly prehistorians, can play an indispensable role. That role will have to be argued by archaeologists in ways that have been largely ignored recently.

Social structures

If there is some degree of determinacy on human agency identifiable in long-term continuities, there may also be constraints provided by social structures. The individual event takes place within certain bounds set by the social conditions of existence, and it is the analysis of these constraints that Braudel

(1973) called social or structural history. In his work on the Mediterranean in the sixteenth century AD, Braudel gave many examples of this scale of historical analysis. Some of the social structures seem unchanging over the period considered. For example, a quadrilateral of cities (Genoa, Milan, Venice and Florence) formed the economic centre of the Mediterranean in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Distance also remained a constant in this period (*ibid.*, p. 369). Average speeds for covering a set distance remained much the same before and after the sixteenth century so that administration, letters, orders and troop movements were all similarly affected. Any particular action occurring over space is influenced by constraints which take their form within a specific set of social, technological and ideational conditions.

Other social conditions which influence individual actions include temporal change. Braudel (*ibid.*) provided many examples of prices and wage curves for the sixteenth century, of demographic movements and the changing dimensions of states and empires. He also talked of sixteenth-century society tending to polarise through time into a rich nobility and a great and growing mass of the poor and disinherited (*ibid.*, p. 755).

Archaeologists have long been concerned to identify quantitative trends of similar types. Logistic and exponential growth curves for population increase, 'battle-ship' curves for the increase and decrease in the popularity of styles, the increasing separation of hierarchical levels in settlement pattern studies, the increasing dependence on certain resources, have all been charted by archaeologists, and the methods involved have become a regular part of the archaeological armoury.

Such analyses involve little more than the surface description of aggregates of events. It is difficult to argue that the events themselves are constrained by the quantitative trends which they produce. An alternative is to examine the relationship between structure and event which lies behind and produces the quantitative trends. Archaeological concepts of social structure have been greatly developed by Marxist critique and discussion (e.g. Spriggs 1984).

Incorporation of the notion of an underlying structure of social relations is seen in this volume in the work of, for example, Pratap (Chapter 8). Patterns of regional exploitation and domination in India have affected the subsistence strategies of individual groups and imply that generalisation or comparison with the subsistence economies of groups elsewhere may be difficult. Vestergaard (Chapter 7) discusses the way in which the different social structures of neighbouring groups may be linked to different ways in which material culture is given social meaning. Collett too (Chapter 10) shows that the ordering of the material world is dependent on a set of social meanings of some historical specificity.

However, as with longer-term structures, there is a danger that the social structure becomes reified such that the relationship between structure and action is obscured. Many Marxist studies of social structure have long been concerned to identify general evolutionary trends. More recently Parker Pearson (1984) and Bonte (1977) have been influenced by

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Leach (1954) in their identification of cyclical social trends occurring within broad material constraints. Yet even within such studies of the rhythms of social-structural change, the individual often appears caught within trends beyond his or her comprehension.

While the importance of the social structure in delimiting human action can readily be admitted, and while the social structure as the unintended consequence of action can be accepted (Giddens 1979), what exactly is the relationship between structure and intentional action? What role can individual events play? What is the individual potsherd in the overall scheme of things? These questions will be considered further below, but first the individual event itself can be discussed as Braudel's third scale of historical analysis.

Individuals and events

For Braudel (1973, p. 901), every event, however brief, has some effect on larger-scale structures. But the writing of such history is more selective in that the historian has to pick out events that are considered 'important'. The definition of importance partly relates to the questions being asked. More specifically, Braudel (*ibid.*, p. 902) defines an important event as one that has consequences. He talks of chains of events, and picks out certain wars, the coming to power of particular kings and leaders, as significant in the phase by phase historical description.

Archaeologists dig up individual artifacts which are the results of individual events. They have to reconstruct the social structures, the groups, the societies, the regions, from the individual traces on potsherds, individual discard and constructional events. While considerable energy has recently been invested in the identification and explanation of archaeological variability, the relationship between variability and norm or structure has been largely ignored. The role of the individual has been denied, and archaeological variability has, wherever possible, been reduced to predictable, rule-governed behaviour.

Braudel remained unsure about the relationship between event and structure. His view that "the long run always wins in the end" (1973, p. 1244) has an internal logic, a tautologous character from which it is difficult to escape. Yet it does seem possible to argue that since societies are made up of individuals, and since individuals can form groups to further their ends, directed, intentional behaviour of individual actors or ideologies can lead to structural change. Indeed, societies might best be seen as non-static negotiations between a variety of changing and uncertain perspectives.

Nowakowski (Chapter 5), for example, shows the way in which different individuals and groups of individuals within 'one society' have different senses of 'place', and make different uses and interpretations of material culture items. A similar point has been made by Kent (1983) in relation to ethnographic and archaeological work. Nowakowski, Vestergaard (Chapter 7) and Helskog (Chapter 3), all demonstrate processes whereby individuals make different

selections from within a cultural tradition, giving the same things different meanings and transforming them within new contexts.

It is not argued here that archaeologists should try to identify individual or named persons in the past. Rather the concern is to break down the notion that clear-cut aggregates and common structures exist within the entities that we construct as archaeologists. It is not enough simply to note variability and to explain it 'from the outside', by reference to general laws about social structures and behavioural trends. Each event can be seen, not as the passive by-product of 'the environment', but as an active force in changing that environment. Both the particularity and the meaning content of the actions need to be addressed if that force is to be reconstructed.

Of the myriad of individual events excavated by archaeologists, which are significant in shaping long-term and medium-term structures? The answer to such a question lies in our ability as archaeologists to recognise Braudel's chains of events. It is from analyses of such chains that archaeologists can begin to make contributions to understanding of the relationships between structure and event. Moore (Chapter 9) provides an example of a 'knock-on effect' which illustrates the need, even at this third scale of historical analysis, to consider the 'inside' of events.

She shows how an initial event – colonial pressure about hygiene in Kenyan Marakwet settlements – coupled with an indigenous desire to use the house for entertaining and display, had the consequence that males and females no longer had their own huts, but that kitchen and entertaining/living huts were separated. An indigenous, pre-existing principle connected burial places to houses. But, because of the reorganisation of hut use, men and women could no longer be buried separately in relation to houses. Another local principle linked the separation and discard of rubbish to burial. Now, no longer were different kinds of refuse kept distinct. The initial event has had a knock-on effect on settlement, burial and refuse disposal. But these systemic relationships make sense only in terms of the local principles of meaning and, as Moore shows, in terms of the directed strategies of individuals and sub-sections within society.

The replacement of stone axes by steel axes had many knock-on effects in Aborigine groups (e.g. Sharp 1952), the effects varying according to the social structures and systems of meaning within different groups (Melody Pope, pers. comm.). The ethnographer, like the historian or archaeologist, cannot be sure that a statistical correlation in time and place implies a relevant relationship. The notion that an event is relevant and important for another depends partly on inductive analyses of interrelationships, coincidences and differences, but also on the ability of the analyst to provide some theory to account for the interrelationships. We have seen that, to be plausible, the theory must include internal perceptions, motivations and cultural patterns.

Where do the individual events occur that ultimately lead

to major social and cultural change? Archaeologists have the ability to watch the way in which variability in one realm becomes adopted to take a dominant position. Do new social forms tend to have their origin in peripheral, subordinate areas of life or are they produced from within the centre? Does material culture behaviour in 'harmless' areas of activity provide an objectification of alternative models of society that ultimately challenge the dominant mode? In what ways can the event change the structure?

Continuity and change

In some ways Braudel's scheme as outlined above is best replaced by an examination of the relationships between structure (of various types and scales) and event (of various types and scales). This is a more flexible approach which directly faces the main problem raised by Braudel. To what extent do structures, aggregates and wholes have any real independent existence? Do objective historical processes exist independent of human agency?

It can be argued that ideational structures are the most lasting and determinant. The argument here might be that humans cannot live, eat or act without perception based on cultural-historical frameworks. In this case it is symbolic archaeology that will unearth the longest-term structures. Or else it can be argued that ideational structures endure only because they are peripheral and unimportant, the dominant structures being social and economic.

Throughout this volume, the view is taken that there is a two-way relationship between structure and action, and that this relationship is often more dialectic and antagonistic than smooth and systemic.

It is relevant here to consider the relationships between continuity and change and between tradition and novelty. A major contribution in this field was made by Redfield (1953, 1956). Moore (Chapter 9) follows Gluckman (1958) in making a distinction between continuity through change and change through continuity. In the first case practices persist in changing circumstances, and in the second case practices change in order to retain things as they are. These two strategies may be negotiated by different groups in relation to each other, and Moore provides some examples. Further illustration is provided by Vestergaard (Chapter 7).

Willis (1977) has shown the way in which strategies taken by individuals against the system in which they live may have the unintended consequence of maintaining the structure of that system. Lane (Chapter 6) also argues that the social structure as represented in settlement space is continually given new meaning, reordered but reestablished as individuals follow through their varying life strategies.

Material culture, especially in the form of buildings, as discussed by Lane, Nowakowski, Moore and Collett, has a particular importance in the relationship between change and continuity, event and structure. By their very durability (Donley 1982), material constructions provide a potential for the 'fixing' of dominant meanings, for making those meanings

seem lasting and unchanging. There is always the possibility for reinterpretation. Yet the material construction itself provides a limit to reevaluation. Or at least the construction provides a peg on which social strategies can be hung.

At the same time, notions such as 'continuity' and 'change' are very much matters of perception, involving the evaluation of similarity and difference. Temporal perspectives and structures are built in the present as much as they determine the present. It is necessary, then, to move from a consideration of space and distance as socially meaningful and historically particular, a realm already well covered in archaeology, to an equivalent consideration of time.

It can be argued that time has two natural characteristics. On the one hand it is continuous. In the chain of being life has no beginning and no end – there is only transformation and continuous change. On the other hand it has natural breaks – birth, death, day, night – a bird flies away, a rock falls. In the social and cultural realm it is the same. On the one hand history is a continual stream of becoming and doing. Yet this continuity can be broken, punctuated by changes that can be sensed.

In human society natural and cultural events are used to emphasise sameness, difference, becoming, death, and so on. Individuals may try to make two pots the same in order to build a continuity. Such strategies may have the effect of denying time, of timelessness. Hence ideologies involving naturalisation are invoked. The two pots can also be made substantially different, ushering in a new order, and an identification of past opposed to present. Nowakowski (Chapter 5) and Lane (Chapter 6) provide contrasting examples of how knocking down a house or wall, punctuating time, can have effects on the continuity of the social structure.

Diffusion and migration provide settings in which the often complex and subtle interrelationships between continuity and change can be played out. These processes are discussed in particular in the final section in this volume by Collett (Chapter 10) and Greene (Chapter 11), where the point is made that the impact of the new forms depends on their previous social meanings and on the new context in which they are placed. The identification of diffusion is itself explanatory in that it explains why a particular form is found in a particular area. But it can also be seen as a social and symbolic process requiring further historical probing.

Similarly, the term 'acculturation' often appears overly abstract and descriptive. As Moore (Chapter 9) argues, the word is often used in such a way as to imply culture contact between groups, emulation, borrowing and the possible absorption of one group by another. But the widespread use of such a term may hide important differences in the processes of social change in different historical circumstances. An alternative approach is to examine the forces of change and continuity as structural components of groups in contact with one another, and then to examine the event of that contact in relation to structure.

In the hands of traditional archaeologists the skeuomorph helps to explain the shape and decoration of artifacts. Thus,

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Sayce (1933, p. 87) explained the decoration of a pottery vessel by saying that it derived from or copied a leather original. Von Gernet and Timmins (Chapter 4) define a skeuomorph as the reappearance of a shape or decoration that had previously occurred in a different medium or material. Such a process is again one in which continuity and change, structure and event, interplay. But the social effect of such ploys cannot be understood outside their particular historical contexts. Particular, 'inside' archaeo-history is required.

It might be suggested, then, that the old tired debates about whether cultural change is internal or external, autonomous or introduced (see Odner 1983b for a summary in relation to European prehistory), were necessarily of limited value since all change incorporates continuity and the archaeologist can emphasise one or the other at will. The problem here has been the failure to identify continuity and change as social-symbolic processes. They have been studied from the outside, as givens. An alternative approach is to examine the ways in which similarity and difference, continuity and change, are constructed through material culture, and to interpret the way in which these constructions play a role in the dialectical relationship between structure and event. Thus, each material act has the potential for reordering the past, for causing temporal breaks and for bringing about new perceptions of the past. How and whether it does so or not depend on the social-symbolic strategies of individuals and groups within particular historical contexts.

Methods and conclusions

The methods employed in all the applied examples in this volume suggest a certain coherence of approach. First, all the authors take Lane's (Chapter 6) point of view that we do not have to observe the act of novel writing to be able to understand a novel. Hypotheses about what was in the author's head may be part of that understanding, and an interview with the author might throw some further light. Yet all texts, written or material culture, have multiple meanings at different levels. The author's thoughts are part of the picture but they may be irrelevant to many types of enquiry about meaning and event. In this volume it is assumed that past words and cultural acts can be 'read' by placing them more fully into patterned, structured relationships – that is, within the wider 'text' of which they form a part. Such con-textual analysis is both particular and general, concrete and theoretical. Rather than translating the text into something other than itself, the aim is, as far as possible, to understand it in its own terms.

It is, then, incumbent on the archaeo-historian to demonstrate that arguments about long-term structures and about the significance of individual events do make coherent sense of the data as perceived. This is partly a pattern-playing, inductive exercise. The data are searched for recurring patterns

of association and contrast, similarity and difference. Data may seem to be relevant to each other because of statistically significant patterning. But at the same time theory is imposed, both general and particular.

While the need to contribute to and use general theory is accepted within this volume, the authors remain wary of the uncritical application of general terms. This point is made specifically by Pratap (Chapter 8) in relation to 'shifting cultivation' and by Moore (Chapter 9) in relation to 'acculturation' and 'westernisation'. All such terms and general concepts have to be scrutinised in relation to the particular historical data being considered.

The transference of information from one society to another on the basis of some perceived likeness between them is often called indirect or cross-cultural analogy. Von Gernet and Timmins (Chapter 4) make the important point that many apparently indirect analogies may in fact be direct in the sense that the two societies being compared may have a common historical ancestry. Here again the need for archaeologists to examine the origin and divergence of long-term cultural traditions is apparent. Superficially two societies may appear very different. But at the structural level there may be similarities deriving from a common cultural core. This commonality is not only an essential part of any understanding of analogical comparison. It is also part of an understanding of the adaptive processes at work in the two societies.

Since historical method as described here is accommodative and, in an absolute sense, uncertain, and since the meanings of texts are seen as multiple and open-ended, the authority of the archaeological interpretation cannot reside solely in appeals to the data. It is equally important for archaeologists to be self-critical, not only in relation to the questions they ask of the data, but also in relation to answers given. This point is expressed by Pratap (Chapter 8) and is particularly important in relation to the search for long-term structures where the past and present are brought closer together. Where the past is in this way made relevant to the present it can all too easily become the mirror of the present. David Clarke's (1973) description of a new critical awareness, a loss of innocence in archaeology, in fact contributed to a continued blindness to the social construction of the archaeological past. It is only more recently that self-critical analysis has been encouraged in archaeology (e.g. Conkey and Spector 1984; Handsman 1980, 1983; Leone 1982). Such analysis of our own texts, our archaeological writings, is part of historical analysis and integrates the study of the present with that of the past. The idea and identification of long-term structures may derive from the present. But, equally, long-term structures, identifiable in the archaeological domain, may contribute to and form the present world and the archaeologist within it.

Chapter 2

Art history, archaeology and idealism: the German tradition

James Whitley

Some aspects of the German archaeological scene often appear to Anglo-American archaeologists as overly concerned with description rather than with scientific explanation. German archaeology is decried as old-fashioned, out-of-touch. Whitley demonstrates, however, that an idealist tradition in German archaeology and art history leads to a distinctive view of material objects and their interpretation which needs to be understood in its own terms. In examining nineteenth-century art history and some examples of German archaeological interpretation, Whitley demonstrates close links to Kant and Hegel and to a concern less with explanation of material culture by reference to function and context, and more with identifying abstract issues which formalise and contribute to the generation of art and material culture. Anglo-American archaeology would benefit from an incorporation of these more humane yet scientifically idealist aims and methods within a broader contextual approach.

To many British and American archaeologists, particularly to those influenced by the so-called 'new' archaeology of the past two decades, German archaeology often appears strange and unlovely. It seems narrow in its almost exclusive concentration upon artifacts and unnecessarily exhaustive in their description. It appears to lack the geographical, economic and anthropological dimensions of Anglo-American archaeology. But this judgement is superficial. German archaeology is a separate tradition, almost a separate discipline, whose concerns are often quite different from our own. This difference in part stems from a much closer relationship with art history, with aesthetics, and ultimately

with philosophy; in particular with that philosophical perspective often referred to as 'idealism'. These are the relationships I wish to examine. I shall therefore be concerned with three related themes: the notion of 'Idealism' as a part of philosophical thought; its appropriation by German art historians and its application to the study of stylistic change; and the use of 'idealist' theories derived from art history in the study of prehistoric material.

In contrast to these overtly philosophical concerns, Anglo-American archaeologists have recently dealt with the phenomenon of 'style' in one of two ways: either they have approached material culture from a sociological standpoint (where cultural items become the currency for the endless renegotiation of power relations); or they have treated artifacts as the products of universal behavioural norms (where artifacts are judged by purely utilitarian standards). Aesthetics as such has not been regarded as a proper subject of archaeological interest. Yet at a time when there is a much greater theoretical interest in material culture among British and American archaeologists, the German tradition should not be ignored. It is in the hope that this perspective still has something to contribute, if only by way of balance, that this article is written.

The word 'idealism' can have many meanings, but the attempt to bring them all into play simultaneously can result only in confusion. The political and moral connotations of the word should first be dispensed with. Equally there have been

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many definitions of the term recently adopted which are, to say the least, inappropriate. Idealism did not originally mean the possession of ideas by the writer or author. Similarly the use of the term 'idealism' to denote the attempt by some historians to attribute ideas to people in the past (ideas conceived of as thoughts or concepts) and then to seek an explanation of historical change in terms of those ideas is of recent coinage. In the twentieth century it is true that some German art historians have seen works of art as the physical manifestation, the embodiment as it were, of ideas and/or ideals held by the artists themselves, and sometimes these art historians have been called 'idealist'. There is thus in many ways a similarity between the German art historian Panofsky and the English historian Collingwood. Just as Panofsky (1957) thought it necessary to reconstruct the ideas of the Abbé Suger before one could begin to understand the abbey church of St Denis, so Collingwood (1946, p. 199), quoting Croce, felt that, in order to write the history of a Neolithic Ligurian one had to reenact in one's own mind the thoughts and feelings which led a Neolithic Ligurian to act in the way that he did. But, Panofsky's idealism is not Kant's, and to use the term 'idealism' in this way is to mistake its original meaning. With respect to nineteenth-century art history the term has a more restricted, a more precise, sense, one that bears a closer relationship to its usage in western philosophy. To understand this sense we have to return to one of the originators of the western philosophical tradition, Plato.¹

Plato did not have a notion of idealism, but he did have a theory of ideas or forms. Briefly stated, he noticed that while individual horses, humans, tables and the like have a transient material existence, the forms of humans, horses, etc. not only reappear but persist apparently eternally. What makes humans human and horses horses therefore cannot be the material from which they are composed, but an eternal essence in which they partake, Humanity or Horseness. (Sometimes he expressed this relationship differently: particular horses were imitations of the eternal form, Horseness.) These essences must be eternal otherwise the examples of such forms could not repeat themselves with such fidelity to type. The Forms were therefore, in a sense, more real, and certainly to be more highly regarded than any individual man or horse, and the notion that it is an abstract principle which animates the phenomenal world is a thread which links many features of western, particularly German, thought. Strangely, if logically, this led Plato to devalue art. Art is an imitation of the phenomenal world which in turn is an imitation of the world of Forms or Ideas. Art is therefore the least real of all things, and of least value. Yet western thought has frequently used Platonic metaphysics and Platonic arguments to turn Plato's own evaluation of art on its head. Later Christian writers, particularly those Byzantine theologians who stood opposed to the image-breaking Iconoclasts, wished to show that the religious art of their own age was of real spiritual value, indeed that it served a spiritual purpose. They therefore argued that images, icons, were a medium through which the divine spirit could enter the phenomenal world to be apprehended by human eyes. For

them art played a transcendental role in human experience (see Runciman 1975, pp. 81–9; Ware 1964, pp. 38–42). In a similar vein, Panofsky has traced the influence of the neo-platonic notion of Idea, as providing both an ideological justification for the making of works of art and an intellectual tool for understanding its purpose, in western Europe from Antiquity through the medieval period to the seventeenth century (Panofsky 1968). German art historians, standing at the end of this tradition, admiring art as much as they admired Plato, seemed to have thought along lines not dissimilar from earlier Christian apologists. Even E. H. Gombrich, the least mystical of German art historians and the one most influenced by British empirical modes of thought, could say (1979, p. 84): "I would still defend the position that Mozart has found means of giving real pleasure to human beings which are as objectively suited to this purpose as are aeroplanes to flying, that Fra Angelico has discovered ways of expressing devotion or Rembrandt of hinting at mysteries anybody can learn to see because they are 'there'."

It is important to note that Gombrich is not simply claiming that Fra Angelico had an 'ideal' of devotion or Rembrandt of mystery that they wished to express. He is also saying that, in a timeless sense, Rembrandt's paintings are about mystery and Fra Angelico's about devotion. It is possible for someone from an age or culture quite different from that of either painter to come to an understanding of these works, to an appreciation of their timeless qualities. This attitude has affected most German art historians, though it is a notion which we, in our relativist age, encouraged to believe that whatever claims to be art is art, find difficult to credit. The critical art historians, however, sought to justify the timeless claims of art, and moreover sought to understand how it is that something in a Platonic sense, transient and material, can possess 'timeless' qualities. How did this come about?

Art history began as a discipline separate from the related enquiries of aesthetics and archaeology in the early nineteenth century. With aesthetics it continues to share a philosophical interest in the questions of perception, judgement and knowledge. With archaeology it shares a concern with the material and cultural forms of the world and with historical change. The word archaeology in art historical parlance has however now come to mean a restricted interest in the particular historical conditions surrounding a work or style; in detailed problems of technique and craftsmanship; and in patronage and explicit intention. It is not that the idealist or critical school of art historians disdains to consider such questions. They are considered important, but secondary, and as regards stylistic change there has been very much a tendency to seek non-functional explanations. I will try to trace some of the reasons for this below.

What must also be remembered about the early art historians, apart from the fact that their education was strongly absorbed by philosophical issues, is their knowledge of and affinity to the art of the antique world. Throughout the nineteenth century the art of the Greeks was thought to be