

Introduction: the sources of archaeological theory

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Abstract

Archaeological theory is not independent of the problems that need to be solved: it arises out of particular problems and articulates them with others. This volume explores how widely discussed bodies of theory relate to the major problem-domains studied by archaeologists.

There has never been a unified school of archaeology: just as today, the subject has always been characterized by competing theoretical stances that often arise from different bodies of data and attendant problems of interpretation.

If “archaeology” is more than a word that completely changes its meaning according to context, however, there should be some common ground among its practitioners in various branches of the discipline. One expects some community of ideas and approaches, especially an explicit understanding of how “appropriate theory” is matched to the various problems with which archaeologists have to deal.

Typically, however, “theoretical schools” have arisen and claimed to have a privileged status in determining what constitutes valid explanation in archaeological research, and the recent literature shows that this is still the case. In historical perspective, such schools are clearly seen not only as grounded in partial bodies of empirical material but also as reactions to preceding theoretical positions and are themselves likely to be superseded.

Despite the evident dangers of advancing universal prescriptions, however, a significant part of the explicitly theoretical literature in archaeology today consists of polemical claims to novel and exclusive sources of truth. Thus, “post-processual” archaeology stigmatizes all earlier modes of explanation as inadequate – not because they are limited by particular types of evidence, but because they

are fundamentally misconceived. These earlier approaches are characterized as “behaviorist,” “functionalist,” “positivist,” or “evolutionist” and are seen as fatally flawed because they fail to consider “cognition,” “structuration,” “the individual,” and “the arbitrary nature of the sign.” Moreover, adherents of this school assert that their agenda represents the only way forward to a theoretically sound modern archaeology.

Rather than launch a “post-post-processual archaeology,” this volume examines the claims of various archaeological theories against a wider historical and geographical perspective of archaeological work. We intend, thus, to consider both a representative sample of traditional archaeological problem-domains as well as to examine a variety of newer issues that confront archaeologists.

This volume is particularly timely in view of the fundamental changes affecting the role of archaeology in society today. The status of archaeology in the universities is uncertain and, in many cases, under threat. The relation of archaeology to its sister disciplines (sociocultural anthropology, history, classics), to its “parent organizations” (e.g., the American Anthropological Association), and to funding agencies necessitates practical consideration of archaeology as an autonomous academic subject. Archaeologists also face the repatriation of collections as yet unanalyzed, are denied excavation permits, and must battle looters for control of archaeological sites (Kintigh and Goldstein 1990).

Then, all over the industrialized world, the “heritage phenomenon” has placed archaeology in a central role in providing local sources of identity. Ancient sites are visited by vast numbers of people and hence are increasingly protected, and interpreted to the public. Much of the presentation of archaeological material is geared to the instant appreciation and visual stimulation demanded by the video generation; like fast-food, there is a “fast-past.” While books for the mass market may naturally choose to emphasize visual images rather than verbal arguments and concepts, archaeologists cannot cede rights of interpretation to the Rupert Murdochs of the communication world.

Under these circumstances, archaeologists must especially avoid a retreat into obfuscatory and introverted arguments that have decreasing reference to problems of interest about the past. Furthermore, while views of the past are inevitably “theory-laden” and relative to the concerns of the present, this does not mean that archaeologists should choose to manipulate the past for their own purposes. Archaeologists must and do strive to see what happened in the past as objectively as they can while attempting to recognize what motivates certain kinds of investigations but not others.

Archaeologists now deploy increasingly sophisticated

means towards the acquisition of hitherto unobtainable data needed to understand life in the past. We do not seek to reduce the past to the mechanical application of a naive positivism dressed up as scientific procedure (in which methodology is confused with theory); equally we do not believe that criteria of testability and falsification should be abandoned in favor of speculations about unrecorded intentions of knowledgeable actors in the past in which anyone's opinion is as good as anyone else's.

The goals of this volume, therefore, are not to set a new agenda for archaeological theory, if by that is meant a rejection of traditional and important problems and existing archaeological activities: archaeologists have reason to celebrate successful research into important segments of the human past and the development of many persuasive and interesting accounts of social organization and social change. We shall consider what sorts of theoretical contexts are appropriate for the explanation of archaeological problems – as well as which theoretical claims are specious. We propose to identify those areas (within the scope of this volume) in which archaeological theory remains to be built, and what are the means by which we can get on with the job.

Our contributors deal with a wide range of archaeological theories that are adumbrated further in this introduction. The first section considers the attractions of theory-building in the context of the archaeological community. The second section focuses upon the appropriateness of theories that have been used to explain respectively the biogeographic spread of human populations in the Paleolithic, the “cultural logic” of societies that neither are based on hunting–gathering nor are states, and the rise of ancient states and civilizations. The third section presents case studies on the use and abuse of empirical methods in ethnoarchaeology, in the interpretation of visual symbols, and that sort out the various claimants to ownership of the past. An epilogue on the relativity of archaeological theory and the nature of archaeological imagination concludes the volume.

The origin of this volume

Most of the papers in this volume were written for a symposium (bearing the same title as this volume's) held at the 10th annual meeting of the Theoretical Archaeology Group (TAG) on 14 December 1988 at Sheffield University, UK. Thanks to a British Academy grant secured by Andrew Flemming, we were able to fund the travel of overseas participants to the symposium. Prior to the TAG meeting, most of the symposiasts met at Wolfson College, Oxford, to discuss our papers and the agenda for the symposium and projected volume. We acknowledge here the grant from the British Academy and express our appreciation to Andrew

Flemming and to the President and staff of Wolfson College for supporting the symposium and so making this volume possible.

The idea for the symposium germinated in Oxford over lunches at which the editors (and itinerant friends) regularly discussed the state of archaeological theory and especially the latest post-processual writings. We were concerned not only with what was being said by post-processual archaeologists but also, and perhaps more interestingly, with why it was being said. In particular, as archaeology students of the 1960s in the USA and the UK, respectively, that is, the *floruit* of the “processual” archaeology, we were surprised that “processual” archaeology was of any immediate relevance to archaeologists in the late 1980s, much less had such a pejorative connotation. To us, “processual” archaeology was an episode in the history of archaeology that had had a demonstrable effect on archaeological theory and practice but whose wretched excesses were as clear as its accomplishments. We also found it significant that adherents of the post-processual school based much of their criticism of processual archaeology on new domains of social theory outside archaeology itself and in this there were obvious parallels to processual (or “new archaeology”) practices.

We thus decided to convene a symposium around the question of where did archaeologists find theory. In this we saw ourselves not opposed to the post-processual camp, since we wanted to place the most recent generations of archaeological schools of theory in intellectual and sociological perspective. Post-processualism served as a point of entry, therefore, in a wider-ranging investigation of the sources of archaeological theory and the practice of theory-building in archaeology.

For our symposium we wanted to gather archaeologists who were engaged in different kinds of archaeology. This included not only archaeology of different levels of socio-cultural complexity (and in this volume there are papers by Gamble on the Paleolithic, Yoffee on chiefdoms and early states, and Shennan on societies betwixt and between those two categories) but also archaeology as practiced in various parts of the world and by archaeologists of different social backgrounds and educational experiences (in this volume Tim Murray presents an Australianist perspective; Kelley Hays and Miriam Stark are graduate students working in the American Southwest and the Philippines, respectively). We also wanted a philosopher's analysis of changing trends in archaeology and were pleased that Alison Wylie accepted our invitation. Wylie's paper, furthermore, is grounded in a feminist perspective on archaeological theory, which we regarded as an important component in modern archaeological discourse.

Philip Kohl and Christopher Chippindale write about the sociological context of archaeological schools of theory. Kohl notes the similarities of processual and post-processual movements, while Chippindale considers the questions of social status and political correctness that attend claims of theoretical purity. Both writers note that such claims, which usually are directed against the defects of a foregoing school and especially its lack of critical perspective on why and how it is historically situated, are notoriously un-self-critical in their own pretensions.

Miriam Stark and Kelley Hays take up two of the most important topics in modern archaeological practice, the relationship between studies of modern material culture in ethnographic field situations and the ancient distribution of artifacts, and the interpretation of prehistoric visual arts. Both consider the problem of elucidating cross-cultural regularities while insisting on context-specific cultural particularities, and both offer practical avenues of analysis in ethnoarchaeological and symbolic studies. Tim Murray considers, by means of examples from Australian prehistory and modern political affairs in Australia, how diverse interest groups compete both for ownership of the physical past and for control of the means by which the past might be investigated. In the presented case studies Murray shows that by fostering communication and by re-examining how and for whom the past is investigated and disseminated, the possibility of avoiding a footnote for the high moral ground can be facilitated. Finally, Richard Bradley offers an epilogue in which the process of archaeological discovery is connected to theory-building in such a way that theory is not only not distant from the archaeological record, but is rather the vehicle for open-mindedness and the exercise of critical imagination.

The post-processual critique

Since many new publications have evaluated the sources, trends, and diversity of post-processual theory (Binford 1987, Earle and Preucel 1987, Gibbon 1989, Hodder, 1991, Patterson 1989, 1990, Preucel 1991, Redman 1991, Shanks and Tilley 1989, Stutt and Shennan 1990, Trigger 1989, 1991, P. J. Watson, 1991, Watson and Fotiadis 1990, R. Watson 1990), we present here a critique – not all of which is unfriendly – of post-processual claims simply as an introduction to our theme of agendas in archaeological theory.

On the surface, little unanimity of what should be the sources of archaeological theory characterized the 1980s, as can be seen from the following statements about the nature of archaeological theory that have been drawn from major essays from that time:

(1) What archaeologists need is an evolutionary theory, a “theory that can be borrowed in unadulterated form,” namely modern biological theory, because “biology is . . . struggling with similar problems in a similar context” as archaeology (Dunnell 1982: 20, 19).

(2) “I don’t believe there’s any such thing as ‘archaeological theory.’ For me there’s only anthropological theory. Archaeologists have their own methodology and ethnologists have theirs; but when it comes to theory, we all ought to sound like anthropologists” (The Old Timer, cited in Flannery 1982: 269–70; this position is refuted by Flannery in Flannery and Marcus 1983: 361–2).

(3) “If archaeologists can gain a healthy skepticism regarding received conceptualizations of nature and seek to place themselves in positions relative to nature and experience where the adequacy and/or ambiguity of the received comments may be evaluated, then they can hope to gain some objectivity relative to the utility of their concepts.” Such objectivity will proceed, the authors continue from an unusual vantage point: “Once archaeologists learn to look at systems from the realistic perspective of an observer in a well, they will see many new things which can aid in the organizational diagnoses of past systems” (Binford and Sabloff 1982: 150, 151).

(4) Archaeology is a mediated relation between what happened and its representation . . . Material culture [is] a constructed network of significations . . . irreducibly polysemous . . . a contextualized matrix of associative and syntagmatic relations involving parallelism, opposition, linearity, equivalence, and inversion between its elements (Shanks and Tilley 1987b: 134, 114, 115, 103).

Although there may seem to be little in common among the biological, anthropological, objectivist–positivist, and generative linguistic goals for archaeological theory-building, there is one unifying thread running through the disparate views cited above (save perhaps the Binford–Sabloff damp allegiance to objectivism): archaeological theory is a mining-and-bridging exercise. The archaeologist’s task is to find theory in some other discipline – since *real* theory exists in biology, geography, sociology, sociocultural anthropology, and/or linguistics – and then to “operationalize” that theory, that is, modify it for archaeological purposes.

In the most atavistically positivist accounts of Binford and Schiffer, the mines need only be shallow while the bridges are mighty. Binford’s call for “good instruments for measuring specified properties of past cultural systems” (Binford 1982: 129) and Schiffer’s focus on site-formation processes that emphasize taphonomy, ethnoarchaeology,

and experimental archaeology (Schiffer 1987), are built on assumptions that once it is known how the archaeological record is formed, there will be a more-or-less clear path to the behavior of the people who ultimately produced it. Unfortunately, the “good instruments” are still being forged and the site-formation processes still seem to be in formative stages of development. Grand organizational theory is usually eschewed until our observational powers are sufficiently sharpened (see Schiffer 1988).

For most archaeologists, however, the mining part of the exercise is straightforward and depends on the background of the “theoretician.” Thus, catastrophe theory, central place theory, structuralist theory, and others have been borrowed and adapted by “archaeological” theorists. The result of these mining-and-bridging operations has been to force otherwise practically engaged archaeologists to consider the ideas of Thom, Christaller, Lévi-Strauss, and others before determining that mathematical topology, the economics of retailing, and mythological analysis, however worthy on their own terms, are of limited or at best indirect relevance to the study of past societies. By this time, of course, the miners have moved on and new bridges have been erected.

Processual archaeology in the post-processual critique

It is in this context of theoretical engineering that the claims of post-processual archaeology may be briefly evaluated. Since this discussion is not intended to duplicate or comment upon the above-cited articles that review the contributions of post-processual archaeology, we shall pass over whatever schisms may be apparent among the hardly unified congregation of post-processual archaeologists. We apologize to offended Albigensians and Monophysites for unfairly lumping them into what we delineate as the central post-processual creed.

The post-processual critique of the processual school can be divided into three parts: the processual models of culture, material culture, and explanation. Processual archaeologists, according to the post-processualists, argue that *culture* is a means of adaptation to the natural environment. Human behavior, being the instrument of such adaptation, is determined by material circumstances, while ideas and values are epiphenomenal and predictable by the material conditions of existence. The systemic nature of human organization is due to the functional relationship between material culture and the environment such that an equilibrium is established and maintained until upset by an external stress. Individual behavior is determined by these systemic forces. Since the relationship between artifact characteristics and distributions is functional and universal, the remains of past behavior can be measured without reference to specific contexts.

Processualists (again, according to post-processualists)

consider that *material culture* is the passive product of human adaptation to the external environment. Culture may therefore be inferred from material culture after formation processes are taken into account. Once functional relationships within the system, and between the system and the external environment, are established, change can be explained as perturbations that lead to greater adaptive efficiency. Although material culture may serve ideological or social purposes, beliefs, ideas, and values are not reconstructable by archaeologists and, in any case, are of secondary importance in the function of material culture.

Explanation for processual archaeologists (in the post-processual view) consists in constructing universal laws through the hypothetico-deductive method. Objective procedures of analysis allow formulation and testing of hypotheses that can be statistically confirmed or at least falsified. Detailed methodological work and cross-cultural comparisons will result in law-like correlations between artifact distributions and social organizations. The constructed typologies will stand in evolutionary sequence based on their levels of adaptive efficiency.

This picture of what the post-processual archaeologists claim to be “processual archaeology” is, of course, a jarring collage. While it may be intellectually amusing to fit Schiffer and Binford into the same frame, it is only unlettered arrogance that forces Flannery into the same family unit. What post-processual archaeologists have conjoined as “processual archaeology” are certain programmatic statements made about a quarter of a century ago (while ignoring the historical context of those positions). Not only have post-processualists denied the diversity of views of archaeologists studying non-complex societies, but they have overlooked the fact that most archaeologists investigating ancient states and civilizations (since most post-processualists are not themselves interested in complex societies) were never processual archaeologists. Furthermore, there is nothing new in the attack on functionalism and the quest for cultural laws. Boasians of more than a half-century ago considered themselves to have refuted evolutionists and structural-functionalists on precisely these terms.

The post-processual attack on scientism in processual archaeology has, at least, made explicit that which most archaeologists have been content to accept without much comment. Those few archaeologists who insist on discovering “laws” have thus far failed to produce more than the most trivial of observations (as Flannery noted in 1973). Despite the most earnest claim that the development of more scientific methods of coping with the archaeological record is only a first step, many studies of the physical properties of archaeological materials seem to be conducted in

the absence of any archaeological problem requiring investigation.

In the failure to discover “laws of behavior,” there is of course little agreement on what constitutes adequate archaeological explanation – as the diversity of views on archaeological theory cited above illustrates. However, in their attack on scientism in archaeology, post-processualists have unfairly de-emphasized the necessary role for scientific analysis of archaeological materials in the investigation of the past; they have merely constructed a processual school in order to differentiate it from their own view of culture, material culture, and explanation.

Culture, material culture, and explanation in post-processual archaeology

According to post-processualists, human behavior is “culturally constituted”; that is, behavior is informed by meaning and through the agency of individuals. The ever-changing structure of meaning is context-dependent and negotiated through the actions of individuals to produce culture. *Culture*, therefore, can only be understood as an ideational code and must include function and meaning, process and structure, norms and variability, and subject and object.

Material culture cannot be reduced as a direct reflection of behavior because it is a transformation of behavior. In fact, material culture has transformative power; it is “recursive,” and “acts back” on behavior as part of the strategies of social negotiation. Material culture thereby symbolizes the relationship between people and things: as Hodder puts it in an oft-cited passage, material culture and culture “are not caused by anything outside themselves . . . they just are” (1986: 4). Material culture, since it is used for purposes of communication and to effect changes in the social environment, constitutes a universal meta-language and hence must be read as a text. By contextualizing artifacts in the totality of the entire environment of cultural meanings and strategies, the symbolic messages of material culture can be deciphered.

Explanation in post-processual archaeology is the process of deciphering the meaning-laden constitution of material culture. As ethnoarchaeological researches have shown, adequate explanation of the parts of a cultural system depends on the richness of contextualization within specific, long-term historical trajectories. In order to reach the meaning of past social action, it is necessary, following Collingwood, to live the past experience through the mind. As Hodder puts it, in another of his elegant locutions, “it is only when we make assumptions about the subjective meanings in the minds of people long dead that we can begin to do archaeology” (1986: 7). Furthermore, since the real

world is not independent of the observer, archaeologists must understand how particular reconstructions of the past are used in the context of modern society and the observer’s place in it. The achievement of self-knowledge is important because “the need for cultural order is universal and the methods of producing and reading the cultural order are the same in the present and the past” (Hodder 1986: 8).

From post-processual critique to archaeological theory

Much of the post-processualist view of culture is obviously borrowed from post-modernist trends in literature and the resonance of such trends in sociocultural anthropology. For example, since, according to Clifford, “culture [is] composed of seriously contested codes and representations” (1986: 2), ethnographies are hardly empirical accounts but rather a species of fiction. In similar spirit, Hodder’s “writing archaeology” (1989a, 1989b) and Tilley’s call for site-reports to be like stage plays (1989) are like “thick description,” self-reflexivity, “dialogic” rhetoric and the “writer’s voice” in post-modernist anthropology. Although post-processualists are kindly dedicated to bringing various post-modernist writers into the purview of their less up-to-date archaeological brethren and sistren (see most recently Tilley, ed. 1990, and Bapty and Yates, eds. 1990, who are carrying on this mission), post-processual archaeologists are much like other archaeologists who borrow concepts of culture, material culture, and explanation from a variety of non-archaeological sources and with little recourse to the understanding of archaeological problems. In this activity they have functioned as theory-miners on a grander scale than other archaeologists. Perhaps it is the very scale of their mining exercise that has prevented even the most rudimentary of bridge-building operations. While Tilley’s assertion that “digging is a pathology of archaeology” (1989: 275) has awakened the suspicion that some post-processualists aren’t interested in the practice of archaeology at all (as a practical science that studies the past; see Bradley, this volume), Hodder has clearly sought to distance himself from this position (1991).

As many commentators have observed (see Kohl, this volume), most of the theoretical pronouncements of post-processual archaeologists began as structural oppositions to their constructed category of “processualists.” But, as we argue here, although functionalist, adaptationist, positivist, and reductionist ideas of culture and material culture can be dredged up from some fossilized “new archaeologists,” these views have never been held seriously by many (including leading) archaeologists. (Is or was Gordon Willey or Robert McC. Adams a “new archaeologist”?)

Yet the dichotomy of views between, for example,

Binford and Hodder, the academic patrons of new and post-processual archaeology, respectively, is of continuing interest to historians and philosophers of archaeology. First, Binford seems not to have grasped that if a model of culture is preferred to his own adaptationist one, then a different interpretation of material culture and explanation is warranted (Binford 1987, Binford and Stone 1988). Post-processual archaeologists, on the other hand, have resisted claims that there is anything important that is adaptive or functional in culture and material culture or that there are sound and successful empirical methods for dealing with residues of the past.

Preucel has recently sought to reconcile these opposing views (1991). He proposes that archaeologists must include scientific, empirical methods in explaining human behavior while also seeking to understand (*sensu* Dilthey's *verstehen*) the past so that "an empathetic linkage between the past and the present is established" and we may identify "the meaning of cultural systems for those participants within it" (Preucel 1991: Ch. 1). The practice of analysis must finally consider a self-understanding of why archaeologists ask certain questions and what is the "intellectual investment in a particular answer" (Preucel 1991: Ch. 1). Although Preucel accepts the terms of the debate as set by those working at its extremes, he still regards the various approaches in processual and post-processual archaeology as complementary and mutually reinforcing.

While Preucel's attempt at resolving these theoretical oppositions is admirable, one may question his synthesis on two grounds. First, not all working archaeologists are card-carrying members of one of the two schools that are delineated; also, the two diametrically opposed views of culture, material culture, and explanation cannot easily be compartmentalized into different aspects of, or as subsequent steps in, archaeological practice. Second, it seems disingenuous to claim that archaeological theory can be abstracted from the kinds of problems that archaeologists seek to investigate and that archaeological theory is a kind of abstract logic. These two points deserve some elaboration.

It is a relief to many archaeologists that they can do without either a nomothetic view of culture or one that holds that material culture is a text and site reports are a kind of story. Indeed, for most archaeologists it is obvious that the degree to which culture/material culture can be considered as a response to the environment is greater in the Paleolithic than in classical Athens. Similarly, in ancient states one must study a variety of social and economic orientations, especially the nature of political systems and resistance to them; in non-stratified societies one studies, among other things, wealth-levelling mechanisms, the moral economy of

kinship relations, and how these institutions are socially learned and reproduced. Since the nature of culture is very different along the spectrum of human societies, it follows that archaeological theory must vary commensurately with the societies and problems being investigated.

We must also point out in this otherwise high-minded discussion of the nature of archaeological theory that chronological resolution in archaeology is often coarse, that site-formation processes are critically important in assessing artifactual patterning, that population size is often a guessing game and, even if we could identify individuals in prehistory, one would then need to relate individual behavior to that of the group (or groups) in which the individual was embedded (see Shennan, this volume). Furthermore, as Kohl and Wylie discuss in this volume, if archaeologists are to think themselves into the past and regard the process of inference as a species of story-telling, we shall not only lose academic credibility as scientists, but also we shall bore the public who can always find more entertaining versions of the past than archaeologists are likely to produce. Although archaeologists can have no objective way of reconstructing a final and uniquely true human past, they do have the capability of eliminating some alternative versions, and reasonably prefer others (as Wylie shows in her paper in this volume).

While the methodological objections alone may be sufficient to put most archaeologists off post-processualism, it is still important to evaluate post-processual claims of what culture is, and hence how material culture is to be studied and explanation structured. Having rejected the adaptationist and functionalist views of the "new archaeologists," is the post-processual position the only viable alternative?

David Clarke wrote (in the R. Chapman translation) of his own concern about the relationship of culture to material culture in a way that still commands our attention:

The anthropologists [may] look at aspects of the social system of cultures [whilst] the archaeologists . . . look at the material system of the same cultures – the systems are not the same yet neither are they unconnected. Serious dangers await those who transfer observations about the one class of system to the other and yet it is important that the coupling between the different systems and their attributes should be . . . made explicit . . . The archaeological entities reflect realities [that are] as important as those recognized by . . . other disciplines . . . [and] are equally real . . . and simply different (1978: 61, 369).

We may infer from Clarke that even if the post-processual view of culture as a network of individuals negotiating their status is not fallacious, it is a partial view of the range, origins, and changing nature of culture and need not deter-

mine the archaeological investigation of material culture. Archaeologists deal with certain kinds of problems, some of which are not studied or cannot be studied by sociocultural anthropologists. Archaeological theory, it follows, cannot simply be a subset of anthropological theory (see Flannery 1983, and Wobst 1978).

Understanding the transition to sedentary, food-producing societies or explaining how certain groups control access to scarce resources, including the field of symbolic resources (see Hays, this volume) in the evolution of ancient states and civilizations, or how and why movements of peoples resulted in culture change, cannot be reduced to theories about the negotiation of meaning.

In sum, no matter how salient in post-modern ethnographic theory the role of the individual might be, there is little theory on the individual's ability to affect more than the short-term ethnographic moment. Thus the issue at stake in theory-building in archaeology concerns what is the proper subject of archaeological research and what is the relationship between culture history and cultural generalization (see Stark, this volume).

Archaeological self-criticism and the future of archaeological theory

The most powerful rhetoric of post-processual archaeologists has focused on the relationship of the archaeological investigator to the number of important political issues that do and must obtain in every stage in the reconstruction of the past. The post-processualist position has been (especially in the writings of Shanks and Tilley, e.g., 1987a, 1987b, Tilley 1989) that processual (and all other non-post-processual) archaeologists, under the guise of being neutral and scientific reporters of the past, have been in fact willing conspirators in exercising a control over the past in the interests of the conservative, ruling apparatus of modern Western societies.

Post-processualists have argued, by way of example, that principles of systemic order and economic rationality are simply Western concepts that apply to capitalist societies and have been writ (wrongly) by processualists as universal principles of analysis. Similarly, the goal of constructing universal "laws" of behavior has tended to rob indigenous, subject peoples of their own pasts: their histories and their views of their histories are insignificant compared to the scientific enterprises carried out by objective archaeologists. While great museums have nobly argued that they safeguard the remnants of past human achievement, post-processualists charge that the museums are really claiming that they are the spiritual heirs of the past; the objections to foreign ownership by institutions in lands whence the artifacts originated are petty and wearisome. Furthermore,

the presence of these foreign artifacts happily reminds the Western museums' clients of the former or current power of their own lands and of the generosity of benevolent philanthropists who were able to secure the prized residues of the past.

While these powerful and often cogent arguments are not and have not been the sole property of post-processualist archaeologists, the force of post-processual arguments has focused the attention of the archaeological community and is especially not lost on modern students of archaeology. Archaeologists of all theoretical persuasions, however, are working to reorganize governmental policies concerning reburial, repatriation, sacred sites, and excavation procedures. Jim Allen (1987) has shown that archaeology cannot be and never was an ivory-tower discipline; Tim Murray, in this volume, has presented an example of how archaeological theory is implicated in the practice of archaeology in Australia.

As Murray's, Wylie's, and Kohl's essays in this volume emphasize, moreover, the branch of post-processualism that argues that there are multiple versions of the past and that all or many of them might be equally valid (especially as is espoused by Shanks and Tilley) contradicts the important call to political action by archaeologists. Just as they have refuted claims of the Third Reich and some South African and Israeli governments, for example, archaeologists today cannot afford multiple versions of the past to proliferate. Rather, it is critical that archaeologists assert that there is at least a partially knowable antiquity and that archaeologists are the guardians of its integrity.

Conclusion

In this introduction we have argued that post-processual archaeologists, like their equally theory-borrowing adversaries, have looked to other fields' theories to understand the archaeological record. However, while most theory-borrowers have ingeniously attempted to show that their theory explains observed patterns of data, post-processual archaeologists have advanced a theory that is unlinked and apparently unlinked to archaeological practice (O'Shea's 1992 review of Hodder 1990; compare Hodder [1991], who insists that outdoors is where he wants to be). Post-processual theory in archaeology has been taken substantially from post-modernist trends in social theory which, however weakly transmuted into archaeological terms, are less concerned with specific cases and concrete problems than with a self-denigrating polyvocality. Practical and substantive arguments are not held to carry conviction – this despite a century of progress in archaeological knowledge that ought to have made archaeology an

ornament of modern academic life as it is a subject of endless public fascination.

Of all the social sciences (in which category we include the historical sciences), archaeology stands alone in its failure to insist on and build a contextually appropriate range of social theory. Such theories must afford linkage between matters of data collection and primary analysis of data, and the process of inference in which patterns of data are held to reflect social phenomena. Thus far the process of inference has relied on assumptions and analogies – theories or parts of theories – that have been drawn from other disciplines. These theories have been used to model extant archaeological data by specifying the logically entailed, but non-existent, data required by the overarching assumptions and analogies. Having borrowed these “prior probabilities” (Salmon 1982) from other fields, archaeologists have condemned the past to resemble some aspect of the present.

It is only when archaeologists are able to build social theory on an intra-archaeological data base and using an intra-archaeological comparative method – one that demands the possibility of discovering and explaining contrasts as well as similarities – that archaeological theory can be said to flourish. Using this foundation of archaeological theory, then, we will be able to select critically and to evaluate theories that might be taken over from other fields and that are claimed to fit past organizational structures and trajectories of change. This volume is dedicated to the ideal of constructing a range of archaeological theory that is appropriate to the problems archaeologists face.

Post-processual archaeologists have effectively emphasized that archaeology is an interpretive science, that symbols, ideologies and structures of meaning are not merely reflections of how humans cope with the vagaries of external environments. Furthermore, as post-processualists have stressed, archaeologists have special responsibilities, not only in recovering the past, but also in ensuring that the past is not maliciously used in the present. Post-processual archaeologists, however, have no monopoly on these matters. Indeed, the post-processual school is no school at all (nor have its proponents ever declared that it was) in that it does not attempt to formulate a constructive archaeological agenda, launches no coherent body of theory and method for interpreting the past, and sets out deliberately to obfuscate the genuine gains made in over a century of systematic archaeological research.

The ideological danger posed by the grimmest processual scientism pales in comparison to the threat of those who seek to undermine the framework of traditional archaeological practice and who, at their most systematically critical, are indeed nihilists. In this time when the existence of archae-

ology in the academy is being debated and the integrity of archaeologists is being questioned in public forums, archaeologists cannot be excused the responsibility for setting our own theoretical and contextually appropriate agenda.

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PART I

The social context of
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