HISTORY AND THE POST-PROCESSUAL ARCHAEOLOGIES

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The appearance of diverse strands of post-processual archaeology resonates with the transformation of university structures, beginning in the 1970s, and gives voice to concerns that have been variously labelled post-structuralist, deconstructionist or critical theory. This article examines the resonance of the post-processual archaeologies with wider social and intellectual currents in the context of the ongoing confrontation with processual archaeology, attempts at a critical engagement with structuralism and symbolic anthropology, and rapprochement with history. It considers the implications of these perspectives.

> Modernity invests its trust in the power of the present moment as an origin but discovers that, in severing itself from the past, it has at the same time severed itself from the present... The more radical the rejection of anything that came before, the greater the dependence on the past (de Man 1983: 149-61).
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> A host of recent 'post-Marxisms' document the truth of the assertion that attempts to 'go beyond' Marxism typically end by re-inventing older pre-Marxist positions (from the recurrent neo-Kantian revivals, to the most recent 'Nietzschean' returns through Hume and Hobbes all the way back to the Pre-Socratics) (Jameson 1977: 196).
>
> Post-modernism is a newly emergent anti-aesthetic characterized by the lack of any fixed moral, aesthetic, or intellectual frame of reference (Blackwell 1988).

My credentials for writing about history and the post-processual archaeologies are that I am neither a historian nor a post-processual archaeologist. This should not automatically disqualify me from commenting on them, since it provides an advantageous 'perspective distance'. I have devoted a good deal of energy and time in recent years to examining the historical development of what archaeologists say they are thinking about and doing and how their statements relate to wider social and intellectual currents (Patterson 1986*a*; 1986*b*; 1987; 1989*a*; 1989*b*). I am an archaeologist trained before the advent of the new, processual archaeology in the late 1960s. I also advocate a serious, thoughtful, long-term engagement, rather than a casual or opportunistic one-night stand, with Marxist social theory. This article, then, is an attempt to examine the philosophical underpinnings of the various post-processual archaeologies, what they must mean, and what their implications are in the current conjuncture with its emphasis on rapprochement with history.

There is not one post-processual archaeology but several. They are conceptually distinct but related, with significant areas of overlap and divergence. The reason for

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this is that they represent theoretical positions produced and refined in an ongoing dialogue, or discourse, over a contested terrain.[1] The silent participants in this dialogue advocate various neo-Hegelian and/or phenomenological worldviews. For my purposes here, it is possible to distinguish the following post-processual archaeologies:

1. A strand which claims Robin Collingwood as an ancestor; cites with approval the works of Roland Barthes, Pierre Bourdieu, Clifford Geertz, Anthony Giddens and Paul Ricoeur; and views the archaeological record as a text to be decoded. This position potentially reifies the individual, privileging the cryptographic skills and eloquence of the archaeologist as interpreter (Hodder 1985; 1986; 1987*a*; 1987*b*).

2. A current, grounded in the writings of Michel Foucault, that engages those of Marx. It focuses on the relations of power and domination, both in the contexts and practices involved in the production of knowledge. It emphasises the specificity of archaeological practices in the era of late capitalism (Handsman 1980; 1981; 1982; 1987; Miller & Tilley 1984; Shanks & Tilley 1987*a*; 1987*b*; 1987*c*).

3. A line, concerned with communication and ideology, that derives inspiration from Louis Althusser and critical theorists, such as Jurgen Habermas. Its advocates argue that archaeology as ideology is part of the present and reveals the historical specificity of both knowledge claims and rationality. They argue for self-consciousness and critical assessment of knowledge claims (Leone 1982; Leone *et al.* 1987; Wylie 1985; 1987).

The appearance of post-processual archaeologies in the early 1980s represents an appropriation of post-structuralist thought and critical theory by archaeologists. The first two currents, which engage or resonate with post-structuralist positions, manifest anarchist concerns with power. They challenge claims of both authority and complete objectivity in a world characterised by the existence of multiple, often contradictory, theoretical perspectives. They are most developed in England, where many academics, especially younger ones, simultaneously express feelings of privilege, marginality, insecurity and powerlessness in the face of the university reforms and social transformations that are currently taking place. The third strand is most developed in the United States and ultimately implicates the Frankfurt School, through the influence of Herbert Marcuse on the student and anti-war movements in the late 1960s (Birnbaum 1986).

The appropriation of post-structuralism and critical theory by archaeologists has four dimensions. First, it marks continued confrontation with and critique of the largely implicit, empiricist, behaviourist, functionalist and logical positivist grounding theories, caricatured by some of the more vocal advocates of the processual archaeology. Second, it means that the post-processual archaeologists—given the relation of their perspectives to phenomenology, anarchism and Marxism—have or should have rejected both structuralism and symbolic anthropology (Harland 1987; Merquior 1986). Third, it opens the question of history itself; does historical narrative or discourse really deliver the 'facts' of the 'real past', or does it merely assert that the story it tells is real (Bennington & Young 1987: 2-3)? This has been called 'the crisis of historicity' (Jameson 1977: 196); they reassert the importance of human intentionality in the constitution of knowledge and acknowledge the role of non-objective sources—such as milieu, audience and power—in those constitutive processes (Dirlik 1987; Topolski 1976: 225-38). Fourth, it marks an engagement with post-modernism, the cultural correlate of what has been called post-industrial or late capitalist society (Lyotard 1984). Thus,

the post-processual archaeologists must acknowledge the problems arising from the separation of science from the rest of the culture and the rationalisation of politics (Callinicos 1985; Foster 1983).

The confrontation with processual archaeology

By calling into question fundamental presuppositions, the post-processual archaeologists appear to threaten the very foundations of the new archaeology; they challenge its scientism, its largely implicit conceptual framework, its separation of theory from practice, its obsession with technique, and its claim to objectivity. This apparent anti-foundationalism questions the hegemonic views—held by both the new archaeologists and their designated foes, the culture historians—that past societies constitute closed totalities and that archaeologists are involved in recording or narrating what happened in the past (Patrik 1985). They suggest instead that archaeologists construct representations of past realities which interpenetrate the present, thereby shaping and constraining possibilities for future action (Eagleton 1986). This shifts attention from techniques and data collection to questions of epistemology, logic and metaphysics by focusing attention on the specificity and historicity of archaeological practice.

Given their implicit and largely unacknowledged metaphysical framework, the processual archaeologists dismiss this anti-foundationalism as a retreat into relativism, scepticism, particularism, or idealism (Binford 1987; Earle & Preucel 1987). However, by rejecting the challenge as 'posturing' instead of confronting it with meaningful debate rather than ambiguous slogans, the processual archaeologists cover up weaknesses in their own position and miss opportunities for constructive engagement that would clarify areas of agreement and disagreement and advance archaeological discourse. Whether the post-processual archaeologists are, in fact, anti-foundationalist is an open question, which I will not explore here (Sim 1986).

The new archaeologists and the cultural evolutionists, in opposing what they viewed as the 'old-fashioned' empiricism of traditional archaeology, shared a theory of science and explanation based on logical positivism without realising that logical positivism is an empiricist theory of knowledge (Wylie 1982). Thus, the criticisms of cultural evolutionism, which appeared in the late 1950s, are also applicable to the new archaeology; however, there have been few systematic, theoretical responses to and explorations of the issues they raised. The critics challenged the associations of given economic forms with particular forms of social organisation and ideas; they demanded greater specification of the relations between the economic and political dimensions of the cultural types described by the cultural evolutionists; and they focused attention on the synchronic-diachronic dichotomy, questioning both the utility and validity of separating the study of history from the study of structure and process (Adams 1956; 1960; Rowe 1962).

The processual archaeologists and the cultural evolutionists of the 1950s conceptualise history in the same way. They view it as a succession of unique events flowing unidirectionally through a container called time. History is a narrative of those events, a controversial perspective that even finds support among some historians at elite institutions.[2] The new archaeologists, however, have much narrower conceptions of culture than the cultural evolutionists: they view it either in utilitarian terms as adaptation, the means by which people adjust to the natural milieu, or conflate it with ideology which is vaguely construed as false consciousness or a belief system. In their

perspective, history and culture are conceptually distinct and unrelated both in theory and practice.

By contrast, the post-processual archaeologists employ broader conceptualisations of both history and culture, which permit them to ask questions about their interrelationship. They do not view culture as reducible to something outside itself; they relate it instead to the everyday realities of historically specific, concrete societies in ways that remind one of Karel Kosík (1976: 42-6). For Kosík, the everyday represents the organising of people's lives into regular and replicable rhythms of work, action and life. History is created in the everyday but clashes with it; the two are intertwined; they interpenetrate. However, the everyday is occasionally overpowered in this collision with history, so that the rhythms associated with one everyday are disrupted, but another is not mechanically established in its place. This collision reveals the character of both the everyday and history as well as their relationship.

The rejection of structuralism and symbolic anthropology

The post-structuralists in France built on a phenomenological tradition opposed to structuralism (Diamond 1974; Rosen 1974; Schmidt 1985; Silverman 1987). The acceptance of both structuralism and post-structuralism in the United States was mediated largely through academic literary critics who were mostly unconcerned with the political implications of either perspective. Critical theory developed as part of a political movement in Germany after the first world war, that reacted to phenomenology and the nihilism of Friedrich Nietzsche; it was revived by the politicised student movement of the 1960s, retaining its distrust of the ahistorical, apolitical formalism of both the structuralist and phenomenological traditions (Nagele 1986: 92-3). This implies that the theoretical underpinnings of the various post-processual archaeologists are opposed to those of structuralism and should be antagonistic to the claims of symbolic anthropologists—e.g. Clifford Geertz (1973; 1984).

On the one hand, Claude Lévi-Strauss (1969: 39), a founder of structuralist anthropology, argued that all societies have history. '[B]ut whereas so-called primitive societies are surrounded by the substance of history and try to remain impervious to it, modern societies interiorize history, as it were, and turn it into the motive power of their development'. Rosen (1974: 407-8) has summarised Lévi-Strauss's view of history:

> ...Particular histories are only utilitarian interpretations by later writers... History is not a continuous flow of events but a discontinuous choice by men of those incidents and processes which are fitted into a logical order by the human mind... Chronology is, therefore, important not as a statement of actual continuity or development, but as an indication of how the mind groups, codes, and imposes meaning upon a set of constituent units drawn from the uninterrupted sequence of events.

More recently, structuralists such as Marshall Sahlins (1981; 1985) are attempting to respond to criticisms that structuralism cannot adequately come to grips with history (Friedman 1987; Haldon 1981; Hobsbawm 1972). Sahlins (1985: vii) sees history as culturally ordered and determined, differently in different societies; at the same time, culture is also historically ordered, since meanings are reinterpreted as they are put into practice. Sahlins focuses on what happens when primitive and modern societies, in Lévi-Strauss's sense, come into contact—Captain Cook's arrival in Hawaii in 1789. He embeds the social relations that emerged in symbolic forms; the elements of European society and history are recast in terms of the mythopraxis of the Hawaiian elite.

Thus, each society not only has its own culture but also its own version of history. Structuralism, then, embodies the kind of extreme relativism that strikes fear into the hearts of processual archaeologists, especially those who profess comparative interests.[3] The post-processual archaeologists must also reject structuralism, but for quite different reasons. Structuralism denies intentionality and reflexivity to human beings who become the passive bearers of cultural codes rather than actors. It also implies that one human being is identical to every other human being in that society and that the culture of a society is homogeneous, uniform from top to bottom, rather than manifesting differences which resonate with relations of authority, domination, or power.

On the other hand, symbolic anthropologists such as Geertz build on a narrow Parsonian concept of culture that is rooted in underlying but changing biosocial evolutionary processes and in symbols (Geertz 1973: 55-83; Rabinow 1983). In this perspective, culture is a totalising order,

> ... an historically transmitted pattern of meanings, embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop knowledge about and attitudes toward life... [A symbol is] any object, act, event, quality, or relation which serves as a vehicle for a conception (Geertz 1973: 89-91).

Asad (1983: 239) points out there is no concept about the relationship of culture to life itself or to the material conditions and activities for maintaining and changing it, and a symbol can be either an aspect of reality or a representation of it. He proceeds to show how Geertz uses these conceptualisations of culture and symbol to formulate a universal, ahistorical definition of religion. Since his earliest writings, Geertz has employed a number of other equally universal, ahistorical categories—such as economy (Patterson 1987).

By employing ahistorical, universal categories to describe a concrete society, Geertz can simultaneously preserve its distinctive features and deny them, as he reduces them, in the process of interpretation or translation, to those categories which are found in all cultures and are grounded in the human condition (Rabinow 1983: 63-5). Any interpretation of a culture is evaluated in terms of its eloquence and aesthetic appreciation of pattern (Nonini, personal communication). This accounts for the appeal of his work to historians, who write about the *mentalités* of past cultures; it permits them to assume that all layers of a historically specific society have the same culture and to translate easily the complex events, acts or attitudes of those cultures into categories that have meaning for us but may not have been meaningful for the participants, actors or bearers of those views. However, by adopting this approach they deny the distinctiveness of the past peoples they claim were distinctive.

Binford's (1987: 398) attack that Geertz's culturalism is subjective and relativist—that it seeks '... understanding in others' terms'—is misplaced, since Geertz simultaneously argues for and denies the particularity of the cultures he interprets. Binford is right in rejecting symbolic anthropology, not for the relativism and subjectivism he imputes to it but rather for its universality, for its denial of the historic specificity of past societies and cultures. This is one reason why both the post-structuralist and critical theory strands of the post processual archaeology must also reject symbolic anthropology.

Rapprochement with history during a crisis of historicity

A rapprochement between history and the social sciences began in the 1970s (Cohn 1980; 1981; Hobsbawm 1971; Jones 1976; Medick 1987). Both anthropology and

archaeology are implicated. It entails the forging of new alliances and the dissolution of old ones. The new archaeologists and the cultural historians now tell each other they have much in common—e.g. empiricism and positivism—and that they should be suspicious of too much emphasis on theory (Flannery 1982).

This rapprochement explores the interrelations of different ways of constructing and understanding other societies and cultures. It points to the obvious. Historians have sought their understanding by examining the evidence of past actions and thoughts, mostly of Europeans; however, from 1500 onwards, the history Europeans have constructed for themselves has increasingly involved peoples living in other parts of the world.[4] Anthropologists were left to study the Other who were spatially separated from Europe and viewed as possessing static histories or no histories at all (Asad 1987; Wolf 1982).

One issue is the form rapprochement will take. So far, history has largely remained the study of past events and societies, while theory is perceived to be the property of the social sciences. What is problematic about this widespread view is its uncritical, atheoretical character. Jones (1976: 295) posed two questions. Is history really theoretically empty? Are the theoretical conceptions of historical and social causality we possess adequate to meet the demands of historical practice? He argued that they are linked and that their non-resolution has led historians to seek a 'quick fix' in the social sciences. From this perspective, the problem is to escape the empirically ungrounded developmental schemes of the evolutionists, on the one hand, and the mindless empiricism of those who believe that history is a narrative of unique happenings, on the other.

The project of rapprochement is complicated, because it is occurring at a time when the objectivity of historical theory and practice itself has been challenged. Does history provide a true description or narrative about the real past? Does it merely assert that the description or story are real? Or, does it provide nothing more than a representation of a past actuality created in the present to explain the present, as Cuyler Young (1988: 8) recently claimed and James Deetz (1988*a*: 15; 1988*b*) implied? These questions constitute the crisis of historicity. The present crisis is not unique but merely one of a number of similar episodes that have occurred intermittently since the Enlightenment (Bock 1956: 100 sqq.). What is distinctive about the current one is that its particular configuration demands that historians and archaeologists confront the historicity of their subjects and deal with questions about the nature of historical facts, the distinctiveness of historical knowledge, objectivity, relativism and presentism.

The concept of a historical fact is problematic. For some, historical facts are fragments of a past that exists independently of historians who reconstruct them in their consciousness; for others, they do not have an independent existence but rather are what historians reconstruct. Empiricists, like the processual archaeologists and culture historians, tend to conflate the two conceptualisations of historical fact. Non-positivists, like the post-processual archaeologists, who stress the active role of the subject in constructing the past, distinguish between them; they accept the existence of an objective historical reality, which is complex and varied, as well as the construction of historical facts by means of simplifying assumptions as a means of acquiring simplified knowledge of that actuality. In this perspective, '... there is a constant confrontation between those historical realities, the knowledge of which steadily improves, with historical facts as they are constructed by the researcher' (Topolski 1976: 221-2).

The empiricism and scientism of some processual archaeologists—e.g. Binford (1987)—lead them to treat the knowing subject as a passive receiver of sensory perceptions that are faithful reflections of the object of cognition, to privilege direct observation as the only source of objective knowledge, and to argue that we can only indirectly observe the past so that historical cognition is different from direct cognition. In contrast, the post-processual archaeologists argue that the knowing subject is active, combining direct cognition with *a priori* knowledge derived indirectly from the direct observations of others. They imply that the indirectness ascribed to the cognition of past events and relations, is not unique or specific to history but, in fact, also occurs in physics and biology. This means that the indirectness attributed to historical cognition is characteristic of cognition in general. Thus, historical knowledge is created in the same way as other kinds of knowledge (Topolski 1976: 305-49).

Empiricists believe that active, knowing subjects introduce distortions into their accounts of past events or societies, because they are neither impartial passive observers nor immune from the influences of their milieu. It is their accounts of the past, not the past realities themselves, that are subjective; their statements are conditioned by present-day concerns and the values they hold. This idea, coupled with the claim that historical cognition is distinct from cognition in the general and cognition in the exact sciences specifically, gives rise to relativism and scepticism—to concerns about the truth of statements.

For logical empiricists, verification or falsification are the only criteria for establishing the truth of these statements; however, these procedures make it difficult to investigate the relationships between statements about the past and the past itself, especially those of moderate relativists who assert that archaeologists, during their research, arrive at a succession of partial truths, which represent steps on a path towards absolute objectivity—i.e. complete agreement between statements about past realities and those realities themselves (Topolski 1976: 331-45). The post-processual archaeologists, along with many Marxists, believe that (1) cognition is a continuous process involving a variety of factors; (2) there is a complex relationship between those factors and the results of research; and (3) active knowing subjects have a considerable impact on the results of cognition.

This focuses attention on procedures for determining the truth of statements about the past. The procedures advocated by empiricists focus on the statements themselves or on the relations between the statements and those who make them. At least one strand of post-processual archaeology focuses on practice which establishes direct contact between statements and facts. It involves the substantiation of statements by mutual confrontation; newly formulated statements are confronted with the knowledge already available.

Modernism v. postmodernism: implications for archaeology

The post-processual archaeologists have drawn attention to the fact that the archaeological record, construed as a series of texts, socially constructed, does not exist independently of the circumstances in which the practices of its interpretations are organised. Closely paraphrasing an argument by Tony Bennett (1987: 70-1), these circumstances and practices connect the archaeological record as texts and archaeologists as readers in specific relations. They prescribe that archaeologists read in certain ways and that archaeological records as objects be read in certain ways. The archaeologist

and the archaeological record are gridded onto one another; the connexions are variable and historically specific. Archaeologists are both interpreters who give meaning to those texts and critics who intervene in the interpretive process to move interpretation in different directions, to view the texts through different lenses, so that they take on a multiplicity of meanings, which can be assessed in light of current circumstances. The interpretive and critical activities of archaeologists take place in '... accordance with [the] shifting and variable calculations of political objectives rather than with the fixed calculations of such objectives which scientistic formulations produce' (Bennett 1987: 71).

The post-processual archaeologists acknowledge what was clear to scientists at the end of the second world war. As James B. Conant wrote in 'The role of science in our unique society', his presidential address to the American Association for the Advancement of Science, '... our solidarity as a nation depends on our acceptance of [certain] ideals and a concerted effort to move continuously toward the social goals implied' (quoted by Turner & Factor 1984: 181). While controversial at the time, Conant's claim that science was not and should not be value-free is a far cry from the value-neutrality advocated by some processual archaeologists today. By embedding the interpretive and critical practices of archaeology as history in discourses about the shifting objectives of the wider society, the post-processual archaeologists demand clarification of those values and ideals. This links their concerns with those of others who are struggling with the same issues. Such serious engagement almost always affords opportunities for greater understanding and enrichment.

One question implicit in their agenda must be: how is archaeology, which proclaims itself divorced from wider social currents, being employed or deployed in the United States to promote images of stability or gradual change at time when the social fabric of the country has suddenly been transformed and when its influence, internationally, has declined significantly during the last twenty years? Part of the answer must be the story of how archaeology came to separate itself from its own history and from the rest of culture and how this process was linked with ideas of science, rationality and modernity. However, the question is not a new one, for it was posed in different terms in the closing years of the last century, when the issues of modernity and alienation—the fragmentation of life—which accompanied the emergence of the world we are now losing, were central concerns of social theorists—such as Marx, Nietzsche and Weber—who advocated studying the Other in order to understand our own place in the world.

Conclusions

The three strands of post-processual archaeology address the empiricist and positivist assertions of the new or processual archaeologists concerning structure, history and change. All of them reject the notion that the past is directly accessible—an object to be read by the trained professional from the archaeological record. They argue instead that history is constructed by people rather than something that is handed down by nature. They acknowledge the importance of non-objective influences on the construction of history—e.g. the shaping effects political practices have had on the historical structures and processes being investigated and the effects they have on the creation of knowledge about those in the reproduction and transformation of past societies. At the same time, some strands of post-processual archaeology have sought to bolster their phenomenological underpinnings with uncritical appropriations of Marxist, structu-

ralist or symbolic anthropological perspectives that are theoretically incompatible with their own views or whose relation with them is problematic and in need of further exploration and clarification.

NOTES

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[1] Among those identified with the new archaeology, Kent Flannery (1976: 3-4) long ago recognised the discursive nature of the production of knowledge—the dialectical interplay between the present and the past, between distinctive worldviews—in the discussions he recorded between the 'Real Mesoamerican Archaeologist', the 'Grand Synthesizer' and the 'Skeptical Graduate Student'. Jerzy Topolski (1976: 225-238) and Garland Allen (1983) provide accessible accounts of dialectical thought in history and evolutionary biology.

[2] Lawrence Stone (1979: 3) indicates that narrative involves arranging historical facts in a descriptive, chronological order and focuses them into a single story. He argues that narrative history is currently on the rise. Eric Hobsbawm (1980) questions this assertion.

[3] Karl Popper, whose influence on processual archaeology goes largely unacknowledged, uses the term 'historicism' to refer to '... all forms of interpretation or prediction by "historical necessity" or the discovery of "general laws of historical development"' (Williams 1983: 147). That Popper (1957) rejects all forms of historicism must necessarily also create a dilemma for those processual archaeologists who concur or adopt his views with approval; it suggests that their theoretical frameworks contain contradictory and mutually exclusive elements, that are neither unrecognised or unexplored.

[4] This is effectively Immanuel Wallerstein's (1974) description of the modern world system; my use of it in no way implies I agree with its theoretical underpinnings which are critically examined and discussed by Robert Brenner (1977).

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L'histoire et les archéologies 'post-processuelles'

Résumé

L'apparence de plusieurs types d'archéologie 'post-processuelle' a un rapport avec la transformation des structures universitaires, débutant dans les années 70, et permet l'apparence de matières qui ont été diversement cataloguées comme 'post-structuralistes', 'dé-constructionnistes' ou théorie critique. Cet article examine le rapport des archéologies 'post-processuelles' avec des courants intellectuels et sociaux plus amples dans le contexte de la confrontation continue avec l'archéologie 'processuelle', les tentatives d'un engagement critique avec le structuralisme et l'anthropologie symbolique, et le rapprochement avec l'histoire. Il considère les implications de ces perspectives.