

Agency, Class, and Archaeological Interpretation

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Anthropology has drawn heavily on the Marxist theoretical tradition for help in understanding agency and conflict in human societies. This paper considers agency theories in contemporary archaeology. It argues that current theories marginalize a key aspect of human social life of importance to Marx: the process of extracting and distributing surplus labor. The interpretive consequences of this situation are explored, and an alternative class-analytical framework is outlined. The implications of this class-analytical approach for archaeological interpretation are discussed, and the approach is illustrated using case material from the Mississippian archaeological record of the midcontinental United States. © 1994 Academic Press, Inc.

In *Europe and The People Without History*, Eric Wolf argues that the social sciences "constitute one long dialogue with the ghost of Marx (Wolf 1982:20)." Archaeology, like anthropology in general, has been an active participant in this dialogue, especially over the last two decades. In the 1970s archaeologists began to focus on the tensions and conflicts internal to society that can produce social change, and the role played by individuals in these dynamics (Marquardt 1992). Conflict and agency are important elements of Marxist theory, and in recent years a variety of Marxist concepts (e.g., mode of production, dialectic, contradiction) have been incorporated into everyday archaeological discourse. Several recent publications explore this intellectual terrain (Gilman 1989; McGuire 1992, 1993; Trigger 1993).

Something has been left out of the dialogue between Marxism and anthropology, however, which compromises the potential of archaeology to illuminate conflict and agency in prehistory. What is missing is theoretical attention to a key aspect of social life of importance to Marx: the specifically economic process of appropriating and distributing social surplus labor.^{1*} For Marx, the surplus labor process went to

the heart of social integration and varied widely in form depending on historical circumstances. In contemporary archaeology, however, the surplus labor process is at best a marginal analytical concern. Social differences created by the process are overlooked, and the form of surplus extraction is often unproblematically correlated with and/or deduced from other relationships in society, such as power relationships. This can obscure important organizational details and variation in political-economic relationships.

In this paper I argue for greater attention to the surplus labor process and its structural position in society (i.e., its precise relationships to processes of power, property, and consciousness) as a way to broaden and enrich our perspective on the dynamics of prehistoric social life. This means renewing our discipline's engagement with Marxist thought and, especially, rethinking some key concepts within the Marxist storehouse of ideas.

I present my argument in three parts. The first part of the paper elaborates a Marxist critique of what I term "agency theories" of human social life. This critique substantiates the neglect of the surplus labor process in archaeological theory and explores the interpretive consequences. In so doing, it justifies the alternative analytical approach to social life which follows.

* See Notes section at end of paper for all footnotes.

The second part more closely specifies this alternative Marxist approach. For exposition's sake, I identify this alternative as a "class-analytical" approach. In this approach, class refers to the process of appropriating and distributing social surplus labor. This is an unconventional understanding of class, and my use of the term risks being construed as a vulgar imposition of a bourgeois category on "primitive" society. Nonetheless, this definition of class is as justifiable as any other and I think uniquely productive in capturing key social differences between economic agents at all ranges of societal scale. The second section outlines such differences as they are created by the class process, the relationship between class and nonclass processes in society, and the tensions and struggles produced by their reciprocal interaction. Understanding these differences, relationships, and tensions is crucial for exploring variability in past societies and expanding inference into the forces creating social change.²

The third part discusses the implications of a class-analytical perspective for archaeological interpretation. A Marxist approach complicates the study of archaeological materials, but also offers a useful way to deal with "ambiguities" (Binford 1986; Leone and Potter 1989) in the meaning of particular archaeological patterns. Case material from the Mississippian archaeological record of the midcontinental United States is used to illustrate this point.

THEORIES OF AGENCY AND A MARXIST CRITIQUE

Agency theories in archaeology, as defined here, take several forms. They include various "postprocessual" approaches [including Hodder's (1991) contextual archaeology; the symbolic and critical archaeologies (Leon 1986); the structural-marxist approach defined by

Friedman and Rowlands (1978); and Shanks and Tilley's (1987a, 1987b) "post-structuralist" archaeology], the "behavioral archaeology" of Earle and Preucel (1987; see also Earle 1991); gender archaeologies (Gero and Conkey 1991), and some of the evolutionary approaches (e.g., Mithen 1989; Braun 1990; Shennan 1991). Lumping all of these approaches together under the rubric of agency obscures important epistemological and theoretical differences between them. Nonetheless, these approaches converge at some key points which distinguish them as a group from a Marxist approach. The purpose of this paper is best served by limiting discussion to the broad commonalities which tie agency approaches together.

Agency approaches developed out of the many critiques of the ecosystemic theory that anchored the "New Archaeology" in the 1960s and 1970s. In the New Archaeology, societies were viewed as tightly integrated wholes that changed in response to external, biophysical stimuli, i.e., to changes in the natural environment and population-resource imbalances (e.g., contributors to Hill 1977). This approach, for agency theorists, denies the active role of individuals in shaping social life and change. Individuals are treated as equivalent units and assumed to share a fundamental sameness in their material conditions of existence (Hodder 1982b; Tilley 1982; Paynter 1989a; Marquardt 1992). That is, they accept and play by the same set of rules and for the same kinds of adaptive goals (Braun 1991). Individuals are "shuffled around from one adaptive state to the next (Tilley 1989:109)."

Agency approaches work with different ontologies. They are broadly concerned with the conscious, creative activities of individuals within limits established by historically specific social structures and cultural values. Theoretical work by Bourdieu (1977) and Giddens (1979, 1984) provides the intellectual warrant for exploring the

reflexive relationship or "dialectic" between agency and structure. Among the social relationships or "structuring principles" highlighted for analysis by archaeologists are those involving social power, ideology, and gender. Each is a blindspot in ecosystemic theory (Miller and Tilley 1984b; Wylie 1991; Paynter and McGuire 1991). Empirical work documents the causal efficacy of the dialectic between these structuring principles and human action (contributors to Hodder 1982a; Miller and Tilley 1984a; McGuire and Paynter 1991; Gero and Conkey 1991; also Shanks and Tilley 1987a). Moreover, these principles help shape societal responses to environmental change (Paynter and McGuire 1991).

Social power is of particular interest to agency approaches. In fact, power serves as the major touchstone for considering the operation of other structuring principles like gender and ideology. Drawing on work by Foucault (1979, 1980) and others, agency theories start with the assumption that *all* societies are predicated on power differences and conflicts of interests among individuals (Tilley 1982:36, 1984:114; Rowlands 1982:168; Miller and Tilley 1984b; Pearson 1984:61; Miller et al., 1989; Paynter 1989a; Paynter and McGuire 1991). The operative notion of power in these approaches is complex, however. Power is not viewed as a unitary thing or quantity that is doled out in society, but rather is seen as a property of all social relationships (Miller and Tilley 1984b; Paynter and McGuire 1991). All people have access to practical power or "power to," defined as the capacity to intervene in events so as to alter them. Fewer people have access to "power over," or the power that comes with control of strategic resources and which in turn forms the basis of social domination (Miller and Tilley 1984b). But even domination is accompanied by resistance: the ability to challenge or subvert relations of "power over." Fi-

nally, both domination and resistance are viewed as heterogeneous. They take a multiplicity of forms and are expressed at a variety of institutional sites in society (e.g., household, school, workplace, state), as well as at a variety of spatial scales (Wolf 1990; Marquardt 1992).

For "preclass" societies, social power has been linked to differential control of the means of reproduction (i.e., marriageable women—see Meillassoux 1972), socially necessary "prestige goods," and esoteric knowledge (Tilley 1984; Shennan 1987). For "class" societies, domination has been linked to differential control of luxury goods, subsistence resources, and productive property (Gilman 1981; Kipp and Shortman 1989; Paynter 1989b). In all social formations, power is sought out, resisted, and negotiated. These dynamics produce conflicts between individuals, interest groups, "classes," and other constituencies. Individuals and groups manipulate technologies and social relations as a way to pursue their respective interests, though not always with the intended results. They also struggle over the ideologies which deny, naturalize, or universalize relationships of domination (Giddens 1979:193–197; Miller and Tilley 1984b; Hodder 1991).³

Agency theories have been a good thing for archaeology. They have balanced our perspective on the past by bringing people, tension, and social conflict into view. But, like all theories, they have their own internal inconsistencies and contradictions. Showing these inconsistencies and contradictions—and their interpretive consequences—is the proper aim of Marxist criticism (Saitta 1991).

Several problems have already been identified in other critiques. Patterson (1990), for example, has challenged the methodological individualism that informs some agency theories (see also Tilley 1982:27; Braun 1990, 1991). Methodological individualism privileges the *biological* indi-

vidual as the subject of inquiry, at the expense of the wider social structures and institutions that create individual subjectivities and shape a wide variety of self- and social consciousnesses. Johnson (1989) has challenged other agency approaches for failing to apply in practice what they advocate in theory. He shows how some concrete applications slide into functionalism or fail to explore the perceptions and actions of people occupying a variety of social positions ranging from the dominant to the subordinate.

From a Marxist perspective, however, the most important problem with agency approaches in archaeology is their relative neglect of the surplus labor process in social life and the differential role of individuals and groups within it. Although control of social surplus labor is linked by agency theorists to power relations (see Webster 1990 for an explicit consideration of this issue), the conditions of labor's production or "mobilization" are rarely examined. That is, there is little explicit attention to the precise *form* or *mechanisms* of labor appropriation in a particular instance, the social conditions which sustain those mechanisms, and the reproduction of the whole (see also Gilman 1990:146–151; Arnold 1993:83). Instead, the tendency is to focus on how already-extracted surpluses are *used* by emergent or established power-holders to support and reproduce themselves via competitive displays, feasting, material exchanges, and other calculated political activities (e.g., Gledhill and Rowlands 1982:145; Kristiansen 1982; Lightfoot 1984; Earle 1987; 1990b; Webster 1985:381). In effect, the surplus labor process is subordinated to or at best conflated with power relations.

What are the interpretive consequences of this tendency to marginalize the surplus labor process and its structural position in society? One consequence is that without problematization of the surplus labor process *any* transfer of social labor between

parties (in the form of either goods or services) could be mistaken for exploitation of one party by the other. The "prestige good" model widely used by archaeologists to interpret prehistoric tribal and chiefly political economies serves as a case in point (Friedman and Rowlands 1978; Gledhill 1978; Kristiansen 1982; Upham 1982; McGuire 1986; Earle 1987; Shennan 1987; Peregrine 1991, 1992; Cobb 1991). In prestige good models social integration depends upon access to non-local valuables deemed socially necessary for marriage transactions, initiations, and the validation of other life events. These valuables are controlled by kin "elites" (usually lineage elders), by dint of their control of inter-societal exchange networks. The allocation of valuables to kinfolk (as well as nonkin) creates producer debt, which is repayed with surplus labor or product. Through this arrangement, elites gain political and economic power: they exercise dominance over, as they simultaneously extract surplus production from, their dependent following of kin and nonkin. Elites are variously described as "usurping", "co-opting", "pre-empting" or, more frequently, "controlling" the surplus labor of dependent producers (Upham 1982:119–123; Tilley 1984:112–114; McGuire 1986:252–253; Peregrine 1992). Under certain conditions this dynamic can result in patron-client relations (Webster 1990; Sebastian 1991) or tributary relations (Earle 1987; Gilman 1990). Whatever the precise language used, the implicit message of many prestige good models is that primary subsistence producers are removed from the appropriation of their own labor, and excluded from any role in determining both the conditions of production and the amounts of surplus appropriated. In other words, they are exploited (Wessman 1981: 182–183).

However, it is not certain that elite-producer relations in prestige good economies are *always* best understood in this

way. There is little unambiguous evidence in either the ethnographic source literature on prestige good systems (e.g., Friedman 1975; Ekholm 1978 and references therein) or in the archaeological contexts where the model has been applied to support the idea that elites in every case directly appropriate the surplus labor of producers, or that they exclusively determine the conditions and amounts of surplus production. By most accounts primary producers in kin-based societies have the ability to resist elite demands for labor should conditions warrant (Wolf 1982; Bender 1990), and in some accounts elites also perform surplus labor (e.g., Friedberg 1978).

In light of this, one could just as reasonably treat the producers of surplus labor in prestige good economies as *communal* appropriators of surplus. That is, they extract surplus from themselves as members of a communal entity. In this view, the flow of surplus labor from producers to elites is a non-exploitative, communally allocated transfer (what I will below term a communal "subsumed class" payment) which is granted by producers to elites as compensation for the latter's role in procuring the valuables deemed requisite for the reproduction of communal social life. Elites thus have a measure of power that can derive from their roles in brokering long-distance exchange (as well as from their roles in administering local production, distributing stored resources, and redistributing excess population—e.g., see Paynter and Cole 1980), but such authority does not necessarily translate into direct or coercive control over labor. In other words, elites can occupy *different* positions in social structures of power and surplus flow.

Another way to make this point is to say that prestige good models often conflate three distinct kinds of material transfers: (a) the extraction of surplus from one party by another, (b) the subsumed distribution of surplus by one party to another, and (c) the reciprocal exchange of goods and ser-

vices between parties. This conflation appears in some of Earle's (1987, 1990b) discussions of chiefdom political economy. Earle discusses the transfer of surplus from primary producers to chiefly elites in two ways—as "rent" extracted from producers in return for access to arable land (1987:294), and as an "explicit reciprocity, a return [of labor] for service" (1990b:71–72). On a Marxist view, these are two very different relationships: the first being exploitative, the latter non-exploitative. As noted above, it is also possible that this transfer of surplus from producers to elites is a non-exploitative subsumed labor flow. Establishing the precise nature of material or labor transfers in a specific case is important, because different relationships imply different developmental potentials.

This point goes directly to a second consequence of the tendency to marginalize the surplus labor process in society. Specifically, where surplus appropriation is conflated with power relations social change often proceeds teleologically, according to a predetermined, ahistorical logic. Because power and surplus flow are conflated in prestige good models (i.e., elites exercise power while they simultaneously extract surplus labor; producers lack power while they simultaneously perform surplus labor), the dynamic of these models is "top-down" or "one-sided," that is, focused upon the activities of kin elites. Elites push their dependent producers to generate surpluses and take advantage of any opportunity to expand their fund of political and economic power, i.e., their control of goods and labor. Political competition and expansion are viewed as inherent to the system (Earle 1990a:13; Peregrine 1991:198; Cobb 1991:178–180) and as inevitably pushing societies to limits established by technoeconomy or social organization (Friedman and Rowlands 1978; Kristiansen 1982) at which point the system disintegrates. The key actors in these models—kin elites—are bound by few if

any structural constraints beyond status rivalry with other elites and the ability of their kinfolk to resist extraction when technoenvironmental circumstances no longer permit the exploitation (for example, they are unconstrained by the conceivable demands made on labor by *other* social agents, or the conceivably competing demands upon elites to support *multiple* ways of extracting surplus). The upshot is that alternative, structural impulses to change are ruled out a priori, undermining the notion of historical contingency otherwise valued by agency approaches. This in turn provides fuel for those critics who find social agency models to harbor an unwarranted power essentialism (Kent 1987; Braun 1991).⁴

The tendency for archaeologists to marginalize the surplus labor process and, especially, to conflate it with power processes thus has significant consequences for theory. If we are concerned to explore alternative organizational arrangements and dynamics in prehistory then we need to reformulate theory in a way which clarifies the *nature* of social labor processes and how they are reproduced. From a Marxist perspective, this is best accomplished by disaggregating the extraction of surplus and the exercise of power and imagining alternative linkages between these and other aspects of social life. Resnick and Wolff (1986) have argued the need for disaggregating power relations and processes of surplus flow (as well as property relations) in a consideration of capitalist political economies. They show how there is no need in capitalism for power holders to appropriate surplus labor, appropriators of surplus labor to own property, or property owners to hold power. Resnick and Wolff note that significant changes in power and property relations can still leave capitalist forms of surplus production—and economic exploitation—intact.

We might expect a similar “relative au-

tonomy” of social processes to hold in the fluid social matrices that characterize kin-based social formations. Feinman and Netzel (1984), for example, have already shown how a number of societal variables such as status differentiation, leadership functions, succession rules, and so on do not neatly correlate in such formations. Arnold (1993:82–93), following Webster (1990) and others, adds the organization of human labor to this mix of variables, and highlights its complex relationship to social power. Below, I build on this work by breaking down the organization of labor flow into its constituent processes and more closely examining their structural positions in society.

This argument for disaggregating power and surplus flow does not deny that there is always an element of power in labor relationships. It is only to argue against reading straightforwardly from a reconstructed set of power relations to the mechanisms and conditions organizing surplus labor flows, i.e., against deducing the latter from the former. In Marxist theory the concept of class is crucial for facilitating a more nuanced appreciation of the linkages between power and labor. Class analysis allows distinctions to be drawn and social constituencies to be theorized that can produce alternative models of social action and change. I discuss this class-analytical framework in the next section.

SURPLUS, CLASS, AND AGENCY IN MARXIST THEORY

For Marx, the process of producing and distributing surplus labor in society inevitably created differences between people. Specifically, it sorted them into producers, appropriators, distributors, and recipients of surplus. Marx provides a basis in his work for seeing these differences as *class* differences (Marx 1973:258; 1977:92). This conception is in contrast to non-Marxist definitions of class as the differential pos-

session of wealth, property, power, or some combination of these resources (Resnick and Wolf 1986). On this view, class is an appropriate concept for analyzing *all* kinds of societies.⁵

At the same time, Marx recognized that how surplus was produced and distributed—i.e., the precise *form* of class processes—varied considerably across time and space. A vast literature examines these structural variations (e.g., Marx 1964; Hindess and Hirst 1975; Wessman 1981; Wolf 1982; contributors to Seddon 1978 and Kahn and Llobera 1981). Among the forms of the class process that have been defined are the communal, tributary, and capitalist. Each form of surplus production is broadly governed by different social relationships: by kinship relations in the communal form, by political-jural relations in the tributary form, and by the marketing of human labor power in the capitalist form. In Marxist theory, a single organizational entity (e.g., society, community, household, etc.) can contain one or more ways of producing surplus labor. Only some of these class processes (e.g., tributary, capitalist) involve an exploitative division between surplus producers and extractors.

The Marxist economists Resnick and Wolff (1987:109–163) further clarify the nature of these labor relationships where they break the class process down into two different, but closely connected kinds of surplus flow. One kind of flow is the initial production and appropriation of surplus labor. This can be termed the *fundamental* class process. Using conventional Marxist categories, we can distinguish communal, tributary, and capitalist forms of the fundamental class process. Producers and appropriators of surplus within each form are thus the fundamental classes in society—they occupy fundamental class positions. In capitalism the fundamental classes are capitalist buyers of labor power and the wage-earning sellers of labor

power (Marx 1973:108). In tributary social formations the fundamental classes can include what we term “chiefs” (depending on circumstances) and commoners, or “feudal” lords and peasants. In communal societies, primary producers are both appropriators *and* performers of surplus labor; that is, appropriation is collective in form and producers fill dual class positions (Amariglio et al. 1988; Saitta 1988). Communal formations are thus the only ones which lack a class *division*. This situation does not diminish the utility of the class concept, however, as there are still differences to be theorized as concerns the distribution and receipt of surplus labor.

The second kind of surplus flow—the *subsumed* class process—captures the distribution and receipt of surplus. It refers to the distribution of surplus labor *by* the appropriators *to* specific individuals who provide the political, economic, and cultural conditions that allow a particular fundamental class process—or multiple fundamental class processes—to exist. Such individuals may include people who make decisions about the allocation of labor to productive tasks, who regulate the distribution of necessary factors of production (e.g., tools and land), who distribute surplus product to non-producers, and who help create forms of consciousness among producers that are compatible with particular productive relationships. Distributors and recipients of surplus labor are thus the subsumed classes in society and occupy subsumed class positions. A number of different subsumed classes can exist in society, which in turn place a variety of drains on appropriated surplus. For example, landlords, moneylenders, and merchants function as subsumed classes in capitalism (Resnick and Wolff 1987). Big Men, “chiefs” (again, depending on circumstances), and various ritual specialists can function as subsumed classes in kin-based, communal social formations (Gailley and Patterson 1988). As Keesing (1991)

points out, however, anthropologists have tended to take a narrow view of leadership in kin-based societies, in turn masking important variations and complexities in subsumed class structures. A challenge for Marxist theory is to identify these subsumed classes, how they function to reproduce particular conditions of labor appropriation, and how they draw support via allocated shares of surplus labor.

In Marxist theory, fundamental and subsumed class processes provide the conditions of each other's existence. They are also influenced by a host of *nonclass* social processes. These nonclass processes do not involve flows of surplus labor, but rather other kinds of interactions that affect the production and distribution of surplus. Nonclass processes are thus as important as class processes in organizing social production and reproduction. Power relations can affect who is placed in what class position(s) and how they perform their roles. The nature and status of social exchange relationships (e.g., the existence of various forms of debt and obligation) can influence decisions about the conduct and intensity of household labor appropriation. Traffic in cultural meanings—meanings which shape the self- and social consciousness of producers—can affect the willingness of people to participate in particular class processes. People not only confront each other in these nonclass relationships but also the rules that govern access to, and control over, nonclass social positions and practices. Some of these rules and practices are, as mentioned, provided and reinforced by the activities of subsumed classes.

This analytical framework thus expects complexity in the everyday lives of individuals at *all* ranges of societal scale. Individuals can participate in a variety of class and nonclass processes in both domestic and wider public spheres. And, they can participate in a variety of class and nonclass struggles over surplus flow and its

conditions of existence. Fundamental classes can struggle over the *amounts* of necessary and surplus labor produced in society, and over the *form* surplus labor takes (goods or services). Subsumed classes can struggle with fundamental producers and also among themselves over the *size* and *distribution* of shares of appropriated surplus. Finally, people differentially positioned in nonclass processes can struggle over the power relations, various economic conditions (e.g., how labor is divided and exchange regulated), and cultural meanings that sustain fundamental and subsumed class processes. In short, in this approach there is no "essential" or "primary" source of social struggle and change.

The factors activating class and nonclass tensions and struggles are also expected to be many and varied and encompass those deemed important by other agency approaches and the New Archaeology (e.g., changing fortunes of regional exchange, demographic change, and environmental risk and uncertainty). This plurality of causes is accepted by many archaeological approaches; the theoretical challenge is to explore how a given factor might affect individuals and groups having different positions and interests within a complex web of social relationships and with what consequences.

Finally, the diverse tensions and struggles specifiable by Marxist theory produce multiple trajectories of social change. These include change in the amounts of surplus labor produced and distributed in society, change in the nonclass processes that sustain a particular fundamental class process, and change in the social prevalence of one or another class process, if multiple forms exist in society. Such variable pathways often go unrecognized in contemporary archaeological theory, Marxist and non-Marxist. This is because archaeologists have marginalized the surplus labor process and underestimated its

complexity, or employed models of society (such as many prestige good models) in which change trajectories are narrowly prescribed by the model itself. For Marxist theory, the precise trajectory followed depends upon specific historical circumstances and thus is a matter for empirical investigation.

In sum, the Marxist approach described here both dovetails with and adds to agency theory in archaeology. It recognizes the structure-agency dialectic, acknowledges the heterogeneity of power and meaning, and embraces historical contingency. What it brings to our study of society is a fuller awareness of the surplus labor process, the social differences created by this process, and the relative autonomy of struggles over class, power, and meaning. In so doing this class-analytical Marxism provides a broader basis for theorizing alternative organizational possibilities, impulses to change, and historical trajectories. In the next section I consider what this means for archaeological interpretation and illustrate my argument with case material from the Mississippian archaeological record.

IMPLICATIONS FOR ARCHAEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION, AND MISSISSIPPIAN EXAMPLES

Bridging Arguments and Marxist Theory

To the extent that Marxist theory expects variability in the way that class and non-class processes articulate, as well as alternative pathways of change, it complicates the interpretation of archaeological patterns. Specifically, it suggests that we cannot read directly from archaeological evidence to a conclusion about the mechanisms and conditions organizing flows of social labor. This is not a novel claim. It is widely accepted by archaeologists that interpretation is always problematic, even in

situations where the formation processes of the archaeological record (Schiffer 1987) are fully controlled. That is, interpretation inevitably depends upon theory-laden assumptions about the meaning of archaeological observations (Dunnell and Simek 1984). What Marxist theory does is problematize several of the "bridging" assumptions conventionally used to assign meaning to archaeological remains.

For example, evidence for the development of house size differentials, settlement hierarchies, centralized storage, craft specialization, and labor investment in monumental architecture is often assumed by archaeologists to indicate the emergence of noncommunal, exploitative forms of surplus appropriation. Such evidence is used in several recent studies to document the emergence of "patron-client" or "chief-commoner" distinctions—i.e., fundamental class divisions—in several areas of Europe and North America (e.g., Webster 1990; Sebastian 1991; Arnold 1992). For Marxist theory, however, this evidence could alternatively indicate change in the form and configuration of basically *communal* class and nonclass processes, rather than a qualitative transformation of the political economy toward noncommunal, exploitative relations of production. In a Marxist model of communalism, *equal* access to resources and power is not required (Patterson 1991; Keene 1991; Lee 1992). What matters is the maintenance of *guaranteed* access to socially determined portions of necessary and surplus labor, or what Rosenberg (1990, cited in Lee 1992: 40) terms "entitlements." Neither does communalism require the absence of formal, even institutionalized political hierarchy; what matters is the specific relationship between hierarchy and surplus appropriation (Resnick and Wolff 1988). Political hierarchy can in fact be crucial to the reproduction of communal production if power holders function as communal subsumed classes. This point is missed by

Arnold (1993:85) and many others who assume that social ranking and communal production are inherently incompatible. Communalism, in Marxist theory, can be compatible with a variety of socially regulated forms of economic and political inequality as might be archaeologically indicated by the patterns mentioned above. In short, a change in the social processes regulating access to property, power, or other resources (i.e., a change in nonclass processes) does not necessarily imply a change in the form or mechanisms of surplus appropriation (class processes). Just as we cannot deduce "inequality" from "complexity" (Paynter 1989a:370), neither can we deduce exploitation from inequality.

Substantiating the existence of communal and/or noncommunal class processes in an unknown instance and distinguishing alternative trajectories of change are of course complex matters. Minimally, one must employ many lines of archaeological evidence to reconstruct the circumstances shaping surplus flow, including population size, land availability and productivity, resource production and distribution patterns, and existing ideologies. Again, this is not a novel idea; it is commonplace to advocate the use of diverse lines of evidence to reconstruct past societies. Adopting an explicit theoretical focus on social labor is the key, and in anthropology this strategy has been best developed in the Marxist tradition (especially Wolf 1966; Cook 1977). Marxist concepts of communal, tributary, and capitalist class processes—to the extent that they specify mechanisms of surplus appropriation—can help us better ascertain whether particular archaeological patterns indicate the presence or absence of fundamental class divisions or structures of exploitation. They can also facilitate more meaningful comparisons of labor arrangements across time, space, and environmental context.⁶

These analytical concepts are still a minor part of everyday archaeological dis-

course. As Paynter (1989b:411) notes, it has only been very recently that the word "capitalism" has been admitted into polite company among historical archaeologists, with useful results. I suggest, following Wolf (1982) and others, that archaeologists investigating prehistoric societies consider the utility of the other Marxist concepts that address strategic relationships of labor flow and the social differences created by those relationships. Not only can such concepts better facilitate the comparison of social forms, but they also provide useful touchstones for building theory about the forces creating change within social forms. This raises a point about causality in the studies of European and North American social change referenced above. Each assumes that "aspirants to power" exist in all social formations, and that changing environmental conditions *per se* is what allows power-seekers to co-opt social labor toward specific political ends (see also Hayden and Gargett 1990:17 for a stronger argument based on beliefs in a fundamentally acquisitive "human nature"). What is missing in current theory is an account of how specific preexisting forms and conditions of labor appropriation *allowed* specific agents to change the terms of surplus appropriation under circumstances of environmental stress so that they could begin maneuvering to their own advantage; i.e., begin creating long-term, exploitative liens on labor (but see Arnold 1993:88 for an especially good start in this direction). This *structural* context [e.g., mechanism(s) of surplus extraction, depth of labor divisions, nature and extent of subsumed class demands on labor] needs to be better established in order to determine whether communal class processes are in fact being transformed in a specific case and to avoid "volitional" accounts of social change. And, such a structural context is best provided by Marxist theory.

Finally—and especially germane to this part of the paper—Marxist theory can offer

a useful way to deal with "ambiguities" in archaeological interpretation, or differences between what is expected based on ethnographic, documentary or other "source-side" information (Wylie 1985) and what is found archaeologically (Binford 1986; Leone and Potter 1989; Saitta 1992). Such ambiguities are our best clue to the irreducible "otherness" of past social realities. Prehistoric North America, among many other places, abounds with ambiguities. Several prehistoric sequences display variable and sometimes incongruous patterns in settlement behavior, production and exchange relationships, and labor investment in monumental architecture. These ambiguities challenge traditional interpretive models and notions of causation and serve as raw material for building new interpretive models.

Ambiguity and the Mississippian Record

Some particularly good examples of ambiguity characterize Mississippian developments (ca. AD 700 to 1700) in the American midcontinent. The societies described as Mississippian show varying degrees of emphasis on maize agriculture; inter-regional trade in exotic items including certain cherts, shell, copper, mica, and other materials; and the construction of monumental public architecture in the form of large earthen mounds and other structures (Steponaitis 1986). Mississippian societies are usually described as chiefdoms varying in organization from simple (or "low-level") to complex (Peebles and Kus 1977; Smith 1978, 1986; Steponaitis 1986; Muller 1987). The specific details of Mississippian organization—e.g., mechanisms of trade and political decision-making—are much more uncertain (Muller 1987; Kelly 1990; Brown et al. 1990; Milner 1991b).

Similarly uncertain are mechanisms of surplus extraction and distribution. Some scholars see the flow of goods and labor

from primary producers to chiefs as tribute (Steponaitis 1978, 1986; Anderson 1990; Peregrine 1991; several contributors to Barker and Pauketat 1992). This implies a fundamental class division between surplus producers and extractors.⁷ Others see these material flows as "voluntary" and as embedded in a communal ethos (Muller 1987:19). Several recent formulations use a model of prestige good economy to account for material flows between producers and elites (Brown et al. 1990; Cobb 1991; Steponaitis 1991; Welch 1991; Peregrine 1992; Kelly 1991b; Pauketat 1992). As discussed above, the precise nature of labor relations in such models is rarely made explicit. There does seem to be general agreement that if class divisions existed anywhere in the Mississippian area it was at the largest mound centers (Smith 1986; Anderson 1990).

However, several reviews of Mississippian research suggest that even for places showing the strongest development of social hierarchy there is no particular reason to rule out communal forms of surplus production and distribution. The prevalence of communal class processes is suggested by accumulating evidence that economic activities throughout the Mississippian area were primarily household-based (Smith 1978, 1992; Muller 1987; Muller and Stephens 1991; Milner 1991b), although households were clearly embedded in wider social networks. Further, mortuary evidence from around the Mississippian world suggests complex patterns of political succession based on achievement, ascription, and combinations thereof (Blakely 1977; see also Steponaitis 1986: 390; Hatch 1987; Scarry 1992). Any of these arrangements could be consistent with a communal ethos on the theory sketched above (see especially Goldstein 1981). Finally, and perhaps most significantly, health data on Mississippian skeletal populations from major mound centers does not suggest a significant nutritional sepa-

ration between "elites" and "commoners" as expected on a classic tribute model (Powell 1992:48–49). This may indicate that Mississippian social orders guaranteed producer access to communal pools of basic economic resources. It is striking that empirical patterns at even the most impressive and well-studied Mississippian centers—such as Moundville—fail to unambiguously indicate the existence of tribute relations or other kinds of deep social inequalities (Welch 1991:179–199).

The structural variation in labor flows suggested by archaeological patterns is also suggested by ethnohistoric accounts (e.g., see Swanton 1946; Turner 1985; Barker 1993). Such accounts highlight (albeit sketchily) the variable positions of Southeastern elites within flows of social labor. Elites are described extracting *and* performing surplus labor in ways consistent with communal class relations, tributary relations, and combinations thereof. Ethnohistoric accounts are useful in warranting the conceptual separation of power and class discussed above and also in illustrating the fundamental and subsumed class activities of Southeastern elites. However, they are limited as a source of direct analogies for interpreting the past given the problem of European ethnocentrism as well as the social disruption suffered by Southeastern societies during the early historic period (Blitz 1993a:6–10). They are also limited in that the archaeological patterns described above hint at *novel* organizational arrangements for Mississippian societies. All things considered, archaeological inquiry is perhaps best served by bringing new theories to bear on the material record. Ideas about alternative conditions for communality—such as found in Marxist theory—can help create new insights when developed in light of specific case material.

Communal Class Relations and Organizational Change at Cahokia

I wish to illustrate this point with the archaeological record at Cahokia between AD 1000 and 1400. Drawing on the theory sketched above, and in contrast to many current interpretations, I will argue that the Cahokian record suggests a political economy where (1) labor extraction was largely communal, (2) prestige goods functioned not as instruments of political control but rather as means to reproduce communalism, (3) change was borne not from prestige competition but from a variety of struggles over communalism's conditions of existence, and (4) long-term dynamics culminated not in organizational collapse, but in a reorganization of communal political economy in the American Bottom. In making this case, I will draw on both the primary and secondary source literature about Cahokia. I am aware that some of the empirical patterns discussed by Cahokia scholars and cited below are problematic and open to alternative interpretations. My aim is to offer a trial reconstruction only, in the interest of framing new ideas, questions, and debates about Cahokian political economy.

With its elaborate public architecture, high density of exotics, and distinctive ceramic styles (Fowler 1974, 1975, 1989) Cahokia is widely thought to be the most complex and regionally influential political entity to have evolved in prehistoric North America. Many scholars view Cahokia as a complex, and presumably tribute-based, chiefdom (Griffin 1983; Dincauze and Hasenstab 1989; Kelly 1991b; Emerson 1991; Peregrine 1991; Pauketat 1992). Some see it as a tributary state (e.g., Gibbon 1974; O'Brien 1989, 1991; Yerkes 1991). Milner (1990, 1991b) accepts the inference of chiefly complexity but believes that arguments for strong political centralization and regional domination are exaggerated.

Others follow suit in seeing the Cahokian polity as more dynamic and unstable than previously thought (Emerson 1991; Kelly 1991a; Pauketat 1992). These latter arguments are couched in alternative models of Cahokian political economy which open new windows on Cahokian social dynamics.

Pauketat (1992) develops one such model. This model is informed by prestige goods theory and a concern for the ideological dimensions of Cahokian life. In Pauketat's model Lohmann (AD 1000–1050) and Stirling (AD 1050–1150) phase patterns at Cahokia reflect the regular mobilization of tribute and corvée and attendant strategies by elites to maintain and legitimize their political authority (1992: 40). For Pauketat, class divisions between elites and commoners were created by differential control of prestige goods and reinforced by the distinctive iconography of Ramey Incised pottery (Pauketat and Emerson 1991). In Pauketat's model change derives from the inherent competitive dynamic and factionalist tendencies of the prestige goods economy (Pauketat 1992: 42). Specifically, increasing sacralization of political authority associated with the rise, by Stirling times, of a paramount elite led to a concomitant fall-off in political expansion and prestige goods acquisition. Pauketat's analysis of Tract 15A and the Kunnemann Mound suggests that fewer prestige goods appear in Stirling phase deposits than expected (Pauketat 1992:39); however, he notes the lack of good phase affiliations for many Cahokian exotics (see also Kelly 1991a:63–74; Kelly 1991b:84). Such a decline, if real, would have activated factionalist struggles among subordinate elites over access to socially necessary prestige goods. Some elites responded by emigrating from Cahokia to outlying areas where they could establish their own social networks (see also Emerson 1991:233–236). Around AD 1100, inter-

elite competition and factionalism at Cahokia culminated in a loss of paramount control, decentralization, and eventual political disintegration.

Pauketat's model is compelling in its recasting of the Cahokian "climax" as a tension-fraught prelude to collapse and in its specification of a "dialectic of dominance" involving different interest groups. Like other models of Mississippian political economy, however, it stipulates class divisions between elites and commoners and is largely concerned with elite behavior (see also Milner 1991b:13, Kelly 1991b:86–87; Emerson 1991; Peregrine 1992). A class-analytical model accounts for other social agents and relationships and highlights producer resistance as well as elite domination. On this view, the Stirling phase at Cahokia is one of a series of crises in, and struggles over, the social appropriation of basically *communal* surplus labor rather than a long-term and relatively narrow struggle among political elites in a well-established tributary economy based on prestige goods. This alternative view does not deny that tributary relations existed at Cahokia. Rather, it stipulates that such tribute relations (1) grew out of struggles over the production and disposition of communal surpluses, (2) existed alongside but were always *secondary* to communal relations of surplus appropriation, and (3) were regularly truncated by producer resistance.

The case for communalism as the dominant way in which Cahokian surplus labor was appropriated begins with the observation that subsistence behavior in the American Bottom is consistent with that documented elsewhere in the Mississippian world, i.e., based on domestic productive autonomy (e.g., Milner 1991b:33). In addition, Johannessen (1993) finds no evidence that sumptuary rules regulated the distribution of food at Cahokia, nor much evidence for social variation in the

food system across American Bottom communities. Further support for communal relations of production comes from skeletal data. Milner (1991a) reports that health in the American Bottom was generally good across all social classes during periods for which skeletal data are available. Once again, these observations suggest that producer access to strategic resources was guaranteed in the Cahokian political economy.

In the nonsubsistence realm, Milner (1984; 1991b:38) notes that exotics are broadly distributed in sites across the American Bottom (see also Muller 1987), and that the opportunity for primary producers to acquire exotic goods survived the dissolution of Cahokian regional organization in the 13th century. Local access to foreign goods is fully consistent with a tribute-based prestige good model; what is at issue is whether exotics were functioning as elite instruments of political control. Kelly (1991b:87) states that it is unclear at present what the distributions of objects like shell really mean, and Pauketat (1992:39) notes that exotic items conceivably were distributed through "lateral" or non-elite controlled networks. These observations provide a warrant for interpreting exotics as something other than instruments of political control as theorized in prestige goods models. Specifically, and in keeping with ideas discussed above, we might view Mississippian exotics as *communal social entitlements* which moved against other economic goods and labor so as to reproduce communalism's nonclass conditions of existence. On this model, elites participating in the acquisition and distribution of exotics have the status of communal political functionaries who draw support for brokering exchange from communal allocations of surplus labor (communal subsumed class processes) rather than from tribute extraction or some other exploitative relationship. Other subsumed class

activities may have included those described for historic Southeastern chiefs by Blitz (1993a:20)—e.g., the management of public granaries, the allocation of stored maize, and the regulation of ceremonial activity. Further, such duties could have been handled by *different* subsumed class agents just as historic Southeastern polities divided responsibilities between "civil chiefs" and "war chiefs" (Swanton 1946; Adair 1968; Hudson 1976). Whatever the case, this model of communality in exchange and other aspects of social life dovetails with Milner's (1984:482) observation of the basically communal emphasis of mortuary activity in the American Bottom and his hypothesis that such activity reflects the overall "structuring" of Mississippian society.

Several lines of evidence thus point to the communal constitution of labor flows in Cahokian society. As noted, however, it is difficult to deny at least the periodic existence of exploitative class divisions at Cahokia. Tributary relations are most dramatically indicated by the famous Mound 72 retainer sacrifices and, perhaps, by material inclusions such as the Mound 72 arrow bundles (Fowler 1991; Milner 1990:12; O'Brien 1992:166). Less certain indicators are also evident. O'Brien (1992:163), for example, interprets palisades as an additional indicator of economic exploitation. Better lines of evidence speak to the existence of an ideology for legitimizing class divisions. Smith (1992) interprets the Woodhenge "observatory" (Wittry 1969)—built on elite-annexed residential space—as an "authoritative resource" (sensu Giddens 1984) which visually reminded commoners of solar-derived chiefly power and authority. And, Pauketat and Emerson (1991; also Emerson 1991) make a good case that Ramey Incised ceramics served as a way for elites to communicate to commoners their special, "mediative" relation with the cosmos in order to legitimize po-

litical control and the extraction of tributary surpluses.

Together, these patterns add up to a compelling case for tributary relations. However, the apparent *timing* of material culture changes as described in the Cahokia literature suggest that these relations were episodic in their appearance and also relatively short-lived. This suggests an alternative social dynamic for the Cahokian polity, one driven by historically constituted communal class struggles rather than endemic status competition between chiefly elites. Specifically, I suggest that the impulses to domination we see evidenced at Cahokia represent strategic initiatives by communal subsumed classes to build tributary relations during times when communalism's conditions of existence were threatened. These strategic initiatives in turn met with producer resistance and, ultimately, failure.

Evidence in support of this proposition is discussed in recent syntheses of Cahokian research. For example, Fowler (1991:23) notes that all of the activities associated with Mound 72 fit well within the Early Mississippian Lohmann phase (see also Kelly 1991b). The major elements of Monks Mound (as well as those of possibly the entire Cahokian site) were also in place by AD 1000 (Fowler 1991:24; Collins and Chalfant 1993). Fowler interprets Mound 72 as a monument to a single ruler or lineage presumably responsible for engineering the construction of Monks Mound. Using Trigger's (1990) ideas about the political functions of monumental architecture, we can see both Monks Mound and Mound 72 as reflecting efforts by would-be tribute takers to consolidate social control over labor under conditions when political power was "up for grabs," i.e., incompletely consolidated one way or another. Collins and Chalfant (1993:319) argue similarly where they interpret Monks Mound as a "purposeful political tool for the ma-

nipulation of mass psychology." As viewed here this psychological manipulation served the larger purpose of building tributary class relations.

The precise circumstances that threatened communalism and stimulated efforts to build tributary relations during the Lohmann phase remain to be investigated. A more tractable issue concerns the degree to which tributary relations actually took hold in Cahokian society. Collins and Chalfant (1993) implicate the dominance of tributary relations where they take Cahokian data to indicate "conspicuous centralized control over the expenditure of effort not only on public works but at all levels of society" (Collins and Chalfant 1993:330). However, several empirical patterns for the Stirling Phase suggest that chiefly power to institutionalize tributary relations as the dominant way of appropriating surplus at Cahokia remained unconsolidated at this time. The early-middle Stirling Phase Kunneman mound north of Monks Mound shows at least 20 horizontal or vertical additions or resurfacings (Pauketat 1992:37). This could certainly indicate established corvée relations; however, it could also indicate periodic elite attempts to build tribute relations within a wider communal social field or a communally based construction cycle of some (ritual?) sort. Further study of Cahokia's mounds along the lines suggested by Smith (1978:487) would seem required in order to evaluate these alternative possibilities and thereby clarify early Stirling phase labor relations.

Better indicators of the unsettled nature of labor relations at Cahokia lie in other Stirling phase patterns. Milner (1991b:32) notes that Cahokia is less a carefully planned settlement than a complex amalgamation of residential, public, and ritual space. Cahokia's amalgamated character may testify to the spatial consequences of struggles over surplus flow and its condi-

tions of existence. Precision is difficult to achieve at this point, but *some* sort of struggle-based social dynamic is suggested by the "massive and multifaceted reworking of the cultural landscape" between AD 1000 and 1100 (Smith 1992:17). The Cahokia palisade was rebuilt three times during the Stirling and subsequent Moorehead (AD 1150–1250) phases (Fowler 1974, 1975; Iseminger et al. 1990). As noted previously, the public space containing Woodhenge was carved out of existing residential space, and Woodhenge itself was rebuilt four times within the Stirling phase. The Woodhenge locality was ultimately reclaimed for residential use by Moorehead times, as were other public areas (Smith 1992).

Patterning in other classes of Stirling phase material culture likewise challenge a model of chiefly hegemony and tribute flow and hint instead at communal tensions and struggles. Ramey Incised ceramics abruptly appear without precedent and are produced over a short period of time (Pauketat and Emerson 1991:922). Extending an idea suggested by Pauketat (1992: 40) I would see the Ramey symbolism as part of an ideological strategy implemented by would-be tribute takers not so much to "mystify" primary producers as to create in them a particular consciousness compatible with relations of tribute flow. Such a strategy may have been intended to reinforce those involving mound building under conditions where the latter were insufficient as a way to consolidate power for extracting tributary surpluses. The most interesting potential indicator of communal class struggles, however, is the evidence for increasing intra-household storage in rural areas during the Stirling phase (Milner et al. 1984; Pauketat 1992: 40). This may reflect strategies by fundamental classes of communal producers to conceal household surpluses from would-be tribute-takers. Such popular resistance

combined with the logistical difficulties of transporting surpluses from outlying areas to the center (Milner 1990; see also Blitz 1993a:15–16) would have compromised the ability of Cahokian chiefs to consistently extract tribute.

Why were efforts made to build tribute relations at Cahokia beginning in Lohmann times and continuing throughout Stirling times? As noted above the Lohmann situation is unclear and requires an analysis of Emergent Mississippian (Edelhardt Phase, AD 950–1000) political economy. A possible answer suggests itself for the Stirling phase, however. I suggest that one motivation behind elite efforts to build tributary relations is the decreasing availability of exotics tentatively recognized by Pauketat. This decrease—perhaps stimulated by changing fortunes of exchange in outlying frontier areas (see Kelly 1991a: 79)—may have compromised the communal subsumed class incomes sustaining those Cahokian elites responsible for organizing long distance exchange and distributing its products. As a response to a real decline in subsumed class incomes these social agents may have used their positions (in ways that are still unclear, but which likely were informed by earlier Edelhardt-Lohmann phase precedents) to build exploitative, tributary relations of production. This would have brought elites into conflict with fundamental classes of communal producers (themselves conflicted by the loss of socially necessary entitlements), resulting in the struggles over surplus and space discussed above.

A decrease in the availability of exotic materials also could have had serious consequences for other social agents such as craft specialists, traders, and ritual specialists. The social positions and activities of these agents vis-à-vis surplus flow are not accommodated by prestige good models which narrowly focus on elite behavior

and inter-elite competition. The fall-off in exotics acquisition easily could have complicated their positions as producers, purveyors, and consumers of finished objects. This in turn would have conditioned specifically subsumed class struggles over the allocation of shares of social surplus in deteriorating conditions of communal production, distribution and exchange. Kelley (1991a:78) speculates about the existence of Mississippian traders and suggests that the distribution of "long-nosed god" masquettes throughout the Mississippi Valley may indicate their presence. A better case has been made for the existence of craft specialists at Cahokia (Yerkes 1991; O'Brien 1989, 1991; Peregrine 1992:101; cf. Muller 1987). Yerkes (1991:58) suggests that craft workshops were concentrated in elite areas of the settlement during the Stirling phase. If so, then the spatial proximity of craft specialists to subsumed political functionaries likely would have exacerbated subsumed class struggles.

It should be emphasized that in the model suggested here Cahokian craft specialists function as subsumed classes—they receive cuts of communally appropriated surplus labor as payment for carrying out their productive activities. In this context craft specialization is neither "independent," where the specialist controls their own labor and has rights of alienation over finished products, nor "attached," where specialist labor and its products are controlled by an elite patron (see Brumfiel and Earle 1987 and Clark and Parry 1990 for discussion of these distinctions; also Costin 1991 for a more expansive typology). Rather, specialization is embedded in a wider set of communal relations of production. This notion of *communal* craft specialization may in fact fill the conceptual void created by Yerkes' belief (1991:61) that the "flexible" nature of Cahokian craft production (as indicated by evidence for specialist production at outlying sites as

well as at the elite center) cannot be fully explained with models derived from Western economic history or Southeastern ethnohistory.

Whatever the precise relationships between and among fundamental and subsumed classes at Cahokia, Stirling phase efforts by communal elites to institutionalize tribute relations did not succeed. The beginning of the end of efforts to build tributary relations at Cahokia is indicated in part by the outflowing of population from the settlement during the Stirling phase (Emerson 1991). By the end of Moorehead times the Cahokian polity was in the midst of real change. Milner (1990: 31; 1991b:36) describes how subsequent Sand Prairie phase (AD 1250–1400) settlements throughout the American Bottom show increased local autonomy and a much deeper emphasis on community affairs. These developments suggest that social tensions and struggles at Cahokia were resolved in favor of communality, although in reorganized forms.

This alternative Marxist model of American Bottom political economy and social dynamics parallels the prestige good model in several ways, especially in its view of the Cahokian "climax" as crisis-laden (Pauketat 1992; see also Smith 1992), and in its linking of change to social rather than technoenvironmental factors (Pauketat 1992; see also Steponaitis 1991 for additional arguments against ecological explanations of Mississippian change trajectories). However, it departs in problematizing the status of surplus flows (recognizing communal flows as prevalent over tribute and corvee) and in its different understanding of prestige goods exchange, political hierarchy, and craft specialization. It also differs in casting the Stirling phase crisis as a complex struggle over the terms and conditions of communal labor appropriation rather than a relatively narrow struggle among status-seeking elites

in an already well-established tributary formation.

These are significant differences because they balance our perspective on Cahokian social life, more closely specify social relations and struggles, and open up new areas of research. Peregrine (1992:101) notes the unbalanced, "top-down" dynamic of prestige good models (see also Cobb 1993: 64). The Marxist theory discussed here moves toward a more balanced picture by recognizing a variety of struggles (fundamental, subsumed, nonclass) among a diversity of agents (political functionaries; primary producers; craft specialists, traders, ritual specialists) over surplus appropriation and its conditions of existence. Specifying these social dynamics for particular Mississippian cases is the challenge for future theoretical and empirical work. Interpretive models need to clarify the relationships between labor flow, political power, and cultural meaning in Mississippian politics, how communal and tributary relations coexisted during times when both were present and with what consequences, and the dimensions of struggle between and among different fundamental and subsumed classes.

Such work also needs to proceed with a heightened awareness of local contexts and histories. It is clear that comparability across space of the causes and outcomes of Mississippian social change cannot be assumed, given demonstrable variation in the size, scale, and occupational history of Mississippian settlements (Steponaitis 1991). Many scholars have argued that Mississippian polities were more variable, dynamic, and unstable than previously supposed (Hatch 1987; Anderson 1990; Milner 1990; contributors to Barker and Pauketat 1992; Blitz 1993a). Blitz's (1993a, 1993b) work on the Mississippian polity of Lubbub Creek near Moundville nicely demonstrates how interesting organizational variation can be illuminated by a lo-

cal level, or what he calls a "bottom up," perspective (Blitz 1993a:184). Specifically, Blitz finds that the production and distribution of prestige goods in the Lubbub Creek polity was more dispersed and less centralized than previously thought (Blitz 1993a:176–178). That is, small farmsteads were both producing and importing wealth items on a regular basis. The same pattern may in fact hold for the Moundville polity (Blitz 1993a:183–184). These observations are striking in that they independently warrant a view of prestige goods as communal social entitlements rather than elite instruments of political control. Blitz also critiques the conventional two-class, "elite-commoner" model of Mississippian social structure where he presents evidence that "the person tending a farmstead maize field in June may be the *same individual* who consumes choice cuts of venison with kin in a ceremonial building atop a mound in December (Blitz 1993a:184, emphasis added; see also Blitz 1993b:93)."

Blitz's analysis implicates a fundamentally communal social order for Lubbub Creek, albeit one that was probably distinctive in how it articulated economic and political life. Even if Blitz's individuals were *different* people—occupying different positions in a political hierarchy—they could still be bound into communal relations of production. This sort of communality may in fact have existed at Moundville, given the theoretical arguments and archaeological patterns discussed above. However, a version of the Lubbub Creek model of communality should not be ruled out even for this larger polity. Moundville has yet to be put in "bottom up" perspective, and thus its precise political and economic character remains to be clarified (Blitz 1993:24–29).

What Mississippian polities illustrate, then, is interesting variation in the form and configuration of class and nonclass

processes in ancient North America. Unless we attribute incongruities like those observed in the Mississippian record to incomplete data or to random "noise" in the functioning of a classic tributary or prestige good economy, they are tipping us off to novel organizational arrangements and dynamics for which we may lack ethnographic and ethnohistoric analogues. What is needed is new theory for engaging available data, especially the empirical surprises and contradictions which provide our best clues to social plurality, tension, and agency. In this paper I have used Marxist theory to explore alternative linkages between politics, economics, and ideology in Mississippian society. These proposed linkages can account for existing empirical patterns and they lend themselves to further evaluation with new data. Interpretive models specifying such linkages promise to broaden and enrich our perspective on Mississippian social life as well as the processes which create instability and change in "middle-range" (Feinman and Neitzel 1984; Milner 1991b:31) societies generally.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Agency approaches have proven their utility in balancing our perspective on the past and in opening up new lines of research. Like all approaches, however, they have their limitations. One important limitation is the relative neglect of the surplus labor process—the class process—in society. Marxist class analysis directs attention to the social labor process, its varied forms, and their diverse conditions of existence. It provides a theoretical basis for defining different kinds of labor flows, social agents, structural instabilities, and trajectories of change. In so doing, it offers a way to expand archaeological inference in the social realm.

This paper has also discussed the impli-

cations of a class-analytical approach for archaeological interpretation. A Marxist theory of social forms challenges some traditional assumptions about the social meaning of particular archaeological patterns. At the same time, it provides a potentially useful framework for addressing the interpretive ambiguity that confounds archaeological study of certain times and places. Starting with labor and recognizing the relative autonomy of class, power, and consciousness allows one to imagine alternative organizational possibilities for past societies. A view of the Mississippian world and, specifically, 11th–14th century Cahokia from this perspective suggests alternative interpretive models and new research directions.

A final point concerns the wider social relevance of a class-analytical archaeology. Several recent review articles about Marxism and archaeology offer compelling arguments that theories of the past affect real people in the present and thus constitute an important arena of political practice (Tilley 1989; Marquardt 1992; see Binford 1987:402 and Bettinger 1991:145–149 for very different opinions). Accepting this, any Marxist theory must deal with the issue of the social interests served by archaeological knowledge (Gilman 1989). Archaeology is well-positioned to consider social struggles and alliance formation in diverse historical circumstances and to highlight the factors that influence the success of various social movements and strategies. A class-analytical archaeology that starts with surplus labor attempts to bring more of these historical dynamics into view, and thereby contribute a deeper time perspective on issues related to class formation and strategies under different conditions of life in the modern world. The Marxist perspective outlined here thus not only allows us to learn new things about the past, but also positions us to conscientiously engage the activist social interests

of Wolf's—and anthropology's—ghostly interlocutor.

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fruits (surplus product) is required to replace tools and other items used up in the production process; provide insurance against productive shortfalls; care for the sick, infirm, and other nonproducers; fund administrative positions; and satisfy common social and cultural needs (Cook 1977:372).

² The distinction I make between a Marxist or "class-analytical" approach and various non-Marxist approaches does not deny the sometimes significant overlap between these paradigms. A single, "pure" Marxist theory does not exist. What distinguishes the Marxist approach advocated here is its distinctive analytical entry point: the appropriation of social surplus labor.

³ Kent (1987) and Gibson and Geselowitz (1988) suggest that these theoretical commitments universalize the existence of inequality when we should be investigating its origins. A rapidly expanding body of theoretical and empirical work, however, justifies the assumption that inequality and domination exist in all societies; what matters is their form and material consequences (Miller et al. 1989; Flanagan 1989; see also Paynter 1989a). Marxism's position is perhaps more distinctive still. Instead of asking about the origins of inequality Marxism asks about the origins of *exploitation*, or that situation in which primary producers determine neither the amounts of surplus produced in society nor its conditions of production (Wessman 1981; see also Gilman 1990). Inquiry into this question is not dependent on starting at some simple, egalitarian baseline.

⁴ There are other reasons for questioning the broad applicability of the prestige good model beyond its underspecification of labor relations and its power essentialism. Shennan (1987:372) provides empirical reasons where he notes that, at least for prehistoric Europe, a uniquely good fit between the model and prehistoric data has not been demonstrated. Roseberry (1989:134-137) provides theoretical reasons where he links the elite-producer dichotomy and expansionist logic stipulated by the model to the impact on kin-based societies of tributary states and mercantilist empires. Meillassoux (1981) makes the same point and warns against the extrapolation of ethnographically observed "exploitative" elder-junior relations to pre-contact settings. These critiques (see also Cobb 1993:63-65) suggest the need for new models for investigating kin-based societies in prehistoric, non-capitalist contexts.

⁵ This understanding of class thus challenges the distinction between class and "pre-class" societies maintained in most Marxist anthropology (e.g., contributors to Spriggs 1984). It is generally acknowledged that Marx did not consistently develop a concept of class in his writing (e.g., see Williams 1976: 51-59), and it is also not clear that he meant to exclude kin-based societies from class analysis (Marx

NOTES

¹ By "surplus labor" I mean the time and energy expended beyond the amount required (termed "necessary labor") to meet the subsistence needs of individuals. That all societies produce surplus labor was one of Marx's key insights, and this basic idea has been developed in anthropology by Harris (1959), Wolf (1966) and Cook (1977). Surplus labor or its

1977;344). In *Capital* and the *Grundrisse*, Marx waffles between property, power, and surplus labor definitions of class. Definitions of class as differential access to property and power existed long before Marx came on the scene, and they continue to inform non-Marxist analyses of social life (Resnick and Wolff 1986). The surplus labor definition thus provides the most distinctively Marxist understanding of the term. For another defense of class as a general tool for studying social forms, see Bloch (1985).

⁶ Kristiansen (1990:17) makes basically the same point where he argues that the current enthusiasm for viewing social variation as a "continuum" of complexity masks sharp structural differences between societies as concerns socioeconomic relationships. Kristiansen specifically calls for rethinking the orga-

nizational properties of "intermediate" or "middle-range" societies (tribes, chiefdoms) in a way that draws out these structural differences. As argued here, Marxism's interest in exploitation and its theoretical focus on the mechanisms and conditions of surplus labor flow are well suited for clarifying these differences.

⁷ Blitz (1993a:14), however, rightfully points out that "tribute" has historically been used by South-eastern archaeologists as a "catch-all" term for the elite mobilization of materials and labor. Thus, the term may or may not imply exploitative class divisions. This situation needs to be remedied, for continued use of the term as a catch-all risks conflating the extraction, subsumed distribution, and reciprocal exchange of labor previously discussed.