ANTIQUITY

Radical archaeology and middle-range methodology

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Methodologies for learning about the past are currently at issue within archaeology. This paper considers learning from the standpoint of a 'radical' archaeology. One strand of a radical archaeology's approach to learning – a Marxist strand – is discussed, and its main methodological challenge identified. This challenge is the development of middle-range frameworks for recognizing what Binford and others term 'ambiguity' – unexpected variation in the archaeological record from which fresh insights about the past can be produced. Concepts and ideas for constructing appropriate middle-ranges for a radical archaeology are discussed.

Introduction

Much has been written of late comparing different archaeologies – processual archaeology and the 'radical' alternatives (Earle & Preucel 1987; Kristiansen 1988) – in terms of their respective potentials to teach us new things about the past (Earle & Preucel 1987; Binford 1987a; 1989; Schiffer 1988; Patterson 1989; Hodder 1991a; 1991b; R. Watson 1991; contributors to Preucel 1991). Radicals charge processualists with an unreflective scientism that projects modern capitalist rationality on the past, while processualists counter that radical prehistories amount to unwarranted speculations and 'just-so' stories. Discussion and debate have brought questions of methodology to the fore – questions about how we investigate the past, how we justify knowledge-claims about the past, in short how we *learn* about the past (Sabloff *et al.* 1987; Kosso 1991).

This paper considers the matter of learning from a position sympathetic to the radical archaeologies. I argue that learning is not incompatible with a radical epistemology. Further, I argue that learning in radical archaeology can happen in a way that allows a *rapprochement* with processual archaeology without endorsing eclecticism or compromising radical theoretical commitments.

I use the term radical in the sense of Earle & Preucel (1987), broadly to describe the archaeologies otherwise known as postprocessual, critical, contextual and Marxist (Leone 1986; Patterson 1989; Hodder 1991a). Obviously, there is a lot of variation in this group as concerns specific details of epistemology and social theory. I limit myself to examining only one strand of a radical archaeology's approach to learning, the Marxist strand. And, within this body of work, I draw primarily on recent North American perspectives. In so doing I follow the lead of Patterson (1990: 198), who argues for carefully distinguishing the various threads of a radical archaeology so as to allow closer examination of their respective assets, liabilities, and implications.

I first specify what I mean by a Marxist approach. This allows clarification of some important epistemological and theoretical commitments (see also Patterson 1989). It also allows a response to some criticisms of, and worries about, the character of a radical approach to learning (Trigger 1985; Earle & Preucel 1987; Schiffer 1988; Binford 1989; Gilman 1989).

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I then consider the main methodological challenge confronting a radical archaeology. In contrast to some other proponents of a radical archaeology (e.g. Hodder 1991a: 107–20), I take this challenge to be the formulation of 'middle-range' theory. Middle-range theory is a problematic concept for which several definitions currently exist (Schiffer 1988; Kosso 1991). The definition used here is one shared by Binford (1987b) and Leone (1988; see also Leone & Potter 1989b). Specifically, middle-range theory refers to descriptive grids or frames of reference for recognizing 'ambiguity' in the archaeological record – differences between what is expected based on ethnographic, documentary, or other background knowledge and what is found archaeologically. It is from these differences or incongruities that fresh insights about past social realities can be produced (Handsman 1991).

The final part of the paper explores some potentially useful ideas for building middle-range theory within a specifically Marxist approach to prehistory. The bottom line of my discussion is that radical archaeologies need aggressively to develop middle-range frameworks relevant to their specific theoretical interests in social difference, tension, conflict and negotiation. This seems necessary in order to tap the 'surplus of meaning' inherent in archaeological data (Shanks & Tilley 1987b; Hodder 1991a), especially where ambiguity is high. It also seems requisite if radical archaeologies are to penetrate the irreducible difference of past social realities and thereby productively contribute to learning.

Specifying a Marxist approach

My specification of a Marxist approach begins with some of the more widely expressed criticisms of that approach. These criticisms are quite varied, and attest to Marxism's distinctive position in contemporary social thought. Processualists have indicted Marxism for being anti-science, relativistic and politically opportunistic (Binford 1987a; 1989; Schiffer 1988; R. Watson 1991). They have also criticized Marxism for what is believed to be an unjustifiable, ethnocentric assumption that power struggles are natural and universal (Kent 1987: 519). Postprocessualists have challenged Marxism for an excessive scientism and an economism that neglects the specific content of

ideology and symbolic meaning in past cultures (Hodder 1991a: 57–79; also Shanks & Tilley 1987a: 45–51, 194). Finally, advocates of Marxist theory criticize each other for helping to promote relativism (Trigger 1985; Gilman 1989: 71), for straying too close to a subjective idealism (Trigger 1989b: 33) or for not being political enough (Gilman 1989: 71–2).

A couple of points concerning epistemology and theory help clarify the version of Marxism that informs this paper. Where epistemology is concerned, Marxism supports the emerging agreement between mainstream and radical thinkers that a real world of archaeological experience exists that constrains what we can say about it. Even the toughest critics of positivism concede this point. Shanks & Tilley (1987a: 104; 1987b) speak of data as providing a 'network of resistances' to theory, and discuss the importance of allowing data to challenge our presuppositions. Leone & Potter (1989b) acknowledge the potential for 'ambiguities' to exist in data which can contrast with proffered theory. Finally, Hodder (1991b: 12) argues that material remains have an independence or 'otherness' that can confront our interpretations, provide unexpected answers, and force the revision of theory. For all of these radical critics, the existence of this partly independent or 'objectively organized' (Hodder 1991b: 12) realm of experience guarantees that surprises and contradictions will emerge as data are probed with available theory. I understand all parties to agree that it is out of these ambiguities, surprises and contradictions that fresh insights about the processes organizing past cultural realities will also emerge.

All of which is not to deny the fundamentally post-positivist and widely-emphasized radical claim that pasts are, ultimately, constructed. As Wylie (1982; 1989) notes, the understanding of what ambiguity means in any given case is inevitably paradigm-bound; that is, it is intimately linked to a priori conceptions of culture and culture change. In Wylie's words a 'rich theoretical judgement' (1989: 100) is required to make sense of the difference between the theoretically expected and the empirically observed, judgements which govern the reworking of theory. This appears to be another important point of convergence between the various archaeologies (both mainstream and radical) that exist today – a shared notion that

empirical truths are not given but rather are always constructed. If not speaking explicitly about the 'dialectic' of theory and data (e.g. Kohl 1985; Hodder 1991b), many mainstream archaeologists are now speaking of a reflexive, 'back-and-forth' movement between independently constituted frames of reference and the world of archaeological facts (P. Watson 1986; Sabloff et al. 1987; Dunnell 1989: 36). Kosso (1991) calls attention to such common ground in showing that mainstream and radical archaeologies share the same 'epistemic predicament' as concerns learning (see also P. Watson 1991). That is, the content and justification of theories are influenced by observations, while the content and justification of observations are influenced by theories. Stated differently, both archaeologies are structured by a 'hermeneutic circle' or dialectic between theory and observational evidence (see also Hodder 1991b: 11; Whitley 1992: 58–9). This is not to say, however, that such circularity is inevitably vicious or self-serving. As will be discussed further below, 'independent' middle-range frameworks for mediating the dialectic can serve as a check against such circularity (Kosso 1991).

A more serious bone of contention between alternative archaeologies is, however, the matter of evaluation, and specifically the question of how explicitly the social and political interests served by different knowledge-claims should be considered as part of the evaluation process. A broadening of evaluation beyond empirical and cognitive criteria to include these political interests is endorsed by Marxism. This does not reduce to judging the 'qualities of mind' that produce knowledge-claims, as asserted by Binford (1987a: 403), but simply the interests conceivably served – usually unconsciously – by those knowledge-claims. Harvey (1973: 150–2) provides one Marxist-inspired framework for evaluating the political interests served by theories where he distinguishes 'status quo', 'revolutionary', and 'counter-revolutionary' theories. Other, less inflammatory frameworks are imaginable. For some, this strategy amounts to socio-political moralizing (Binford 1987a: 402) or promotes a delusion that archaeology can affect social change (Bettinger 1992: 145–9). For others, it helps clarify the subjective values and ideals inevitably affecting the scientific process (Patterson 1989;

Leone 1991) and connects our discipline to contemporary peoples and realities (Tilley 1989; Marquardt 1992: 108–13).

My second clarifying point about Marxism concerns theory. Marxist philosophy, at least in its non-essentialist version, accepts the relevance of a variety of theoretical entry points to the analysis of archaeological subject matters. This version of Marxist philosophy was pioneered, if not always consistently, by Louis Althusser in several works including For Marx (1970, especially the essay 'Contradiction and Overdetermination') and Reading Capital (Althusser & Balibar 1970). Resnick & Wolff (1987: 38–108) provide an extended discussion of a non-essentialist Marxist philosophy that is tolerant of multiple theoretical entry points to social analysis. Among these entry points are the so-called 'internal variables' or 'structuring principles' favoured by contextualist and feminist thinkers (Hodder 1991a; Wylie 1991; Engelstad 1991). These variables include power, gender and ideology. Concrete ethnographic and ethnohistoric work has established the importance of these variables in shaping human behaviour (e.g. Hodder 1982a; contributions to Hodder 1982b; 1989; Leone & Potter 1989a; McGuire & Paynter 1991). The relevance of power and gender to an understanding of the past has been cogently argued (e.g. contributors to McGuire & Paynter 1991; Gero & Conkey 1991). The relevance of ideology and meaning has also been argued (Miller & Tilley 1984a; Hodder 1991a), but is perhaps less readily apparent. In defending these latter entry points Hodder (1991a: 127–8; 1991b: 13) emphasizes that structures of meaning are not 'ideas in peoples' heads', but rather they are social and public (for a specifically Marxist rendering of the same idea see Roseberry 1989: 36–7). These structures organize human action and material culture, and are reproduced in the practices of everyday life. Practices lead to repetition and pattern in material culture, and thus meaning structures are relevant objects of inquiry for contemporary archaeology. Research into the everyday functioning of power, gender and meaning structures has further established that change in these domains of life can occur on a temporal scale visible to the participants in a culture. That is, the changes are accessible to human consciousness (Paynter & McGuire 1991). All of this suggests that study at an

ethnographic 'microscale' is just as important as study at the systemic 'macroscale' championed by Binford and others, or that level where process is invisible to the participants in a culture (Binford 1986: 469). The task should not be to privilege one or another scale as providing the truth about past cultures, but rather to recognize that work on both scales can lead to richer, more nuanced understandings of the past (Tringham 1991: 99–103).

It is interesting that mainstream theory is also tending in this direction, i.e., towards a more nuanced appreciation of microscale dynamics in past cultures. For example, recent versions of evolutionary theory (e.g. Mithen 1989; O'Brien & Holland 1990; Braun 1991; Shennan 1991) emphasize several of the same themes as radical theory. These include a view of social practices as potentially quite variable, individual human agents as active producers of variation, and causation as historically-contingent. Important differences between radical and evolutionary theories also exist, however. Radical theories are more focused on how people are differentially-placed within the same social practices, and with what consequences for their respective well-beings. Radical theories are also more inclined to deal with issues of social power and resistance, and to ask of any change in society the question 'Adaptive' or 'Fit' for whom? Thus, in spite of their various convergences, radical and mainstream theories remain distinct discourses with different scientific interests, productivities, and consequences.

One particular internal variable is especially important to the radical archaeology discussed here. This variable is class, which I specifically define as the process of producing and distributing surplus labour in society (Resnick & Wolff 1986). This definition stands in contrast to those that define class as differential access to wealth, property, power or some composite of these relations (Resnick & Wolff 1986). On this definition, all societies are class societies, in that every society requires the production and distribution of surplus labour (Harris 1959; Wolf 1966; Cook 1972). The production and distribution of surplus labour sorts people into 'fundamental' classes of producers and appropriators of surplus, and 'subsumed' classes of distributors and recipients of surplus (Resnick & Wolff 1982; Saitta in press; see also

Terray 1975 for a broadly similar view). Individuals can, however, occupy a number of these class positions simultaneously depending on social circumstances (for example, fundamental appropriators of surplus labour are also often subsumed distributors of surplus). People are, of course, also differentially-positioned in power relations, exchange relations and a host of cultural relationships that give meaning to their lives. These non-class processes push and pull individuals in various and sometimes contradictory directions, and thereby inevitably influence the class process.

In this Marxist approach the class process is a universal structuring principle of social life, distinct from yet closely connected to relationships of power, property and meaning. However, the precise form of the class process varies considerably between societies. Marx initiated the study of these variations, including what we today describe as communal, tributary and capitalist 'modes of production' (Wessman 1981; Wolf 1982). To argue that people everywhere can be assigned a class position or positions is not to suggest that all societies are class-divided. By class division I mean a situation in which producers of surplus labour are distinct from the appropriators, i.e., the former have no say in determining either the amounts or conditions of surplus production. In other words, they are exploited (Wessman 1981: 183). Class divisions and exploitation distinguish tributary, slave and capitalist political economies. Such arrangements stand in sharp contrast to communal class processes, where producers of surplus labour are simultaneously the appropriators. In communal formations surplus appropriation is collective in form, and inter-personal exploitation does not exist. Finally, and importantly, this view of class does not suggest that class struggle is always and everywhere the primary 'motor of change'. Struggles over class – over the production, appropriation and distribution of surplus labour – can be found in all societies. But, like other social dynamics, their precise form and social consequences are fully dependent on historical circumstances.

Clearly, these are contentious ideas. Advocating the application of a concept of class to all societies will likely disturb Marxist (and non-Marxist) scholars committed to drawing a distinction between class and 'pre-class' soci-

eties (e.g. contributors to Spriggs 1984). However, it is generally acknowledged that Marx never consistently developed a concept of class in his writing, and it is also not clear that he ever meant to exclude 'primitive' societies from class analysis. In *Capital* and the *Grundrisse*, Marx waffles between property, power and surplus labour definitions of class. The surplus labour definition, however, would provide the most distinctively Marxist understanding of the term. As Resnick & Wolff (1986) show, 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. The historical baggage associated with the term should not keep us from rethinking it, especially in a radical epistemology where concepts are viewed as tools for analysis rather than entities that have timeless, essential meanings. A full defence of the surplus labour conception of class and its particular analytical utility cannot be elaborated here. Suffice it to say that this conception meets the need expressed by Bloch (1983: 141–72) and others (e.g. Wilmsen 1989: 52–63) who argue that the Marxist tradition should retrieve a concept of class in order to redress the eco-utilitarian determinism and teleology that have found their way into theories of 'pre-class' society.

The main point for the current argument is that the surplus labour process *qua* class process is a neglected variable in both mainstream and radical archaeology. Radical archaeologies mostly focus on the nature of, and struggles over, power and meaning. The class process tends to be ignored, marginalized or straightforwardly deduced from power relations, in turn creating some of the effects identified by Bloch (Saitta 1988: 151; in press). This neglect of class in the distinctively Marxist sense is curious because a focus on class perhaps best satisfies both the mainstream demand for scientific relevance and the radical demand for political commitment. Paynter (1989) makes the case for the scientific relevance of class particularly well. He sees material culture as central to relations of surplus flow, in that it both reflects and actively reinforces particular arrangements for mobilizing surplus in society. Handsman (1991: 342) adds to the scientific relevance of class by seeing it as a useful context within which specific structuring principles

like gender can be better understood. That is, struggles over class (surplus flow) allow a touchstone and context for writing specific histories of gender.

At the same time, a focus on class preserves the political commitment some see lacking in extant Marxist approaches (e.g. Gilman 1989). The political import of class models stems from the fact that contemporary Marxism still lacks any shared understanding of what class is, or agreement on what sort of class analysis is best suited for achieving the practical aims of Marxist theory (Resnick & Wolff 1986). As noted above, a welter of different definitions of class – as wealth differences, power differences, property differences, etc. – cross-cut the Marxist (as well as non-Marxist) literature. Different understandings even cross-cut single texts that explicitly use class as an entry point for analysing society (e.g. Wilmsen 1989). If we accept that processes of power, property and surplus extraction are different, then groups of people defined in terms of access to power, possession of property or position in the surplus labour process will also be different. A lack of consistency in defining class thus poses obvious problems for the consistent grouping of people in projects aimed at understanding social life and the dynamics of social change. My point is that a theoretical focus on class – however defined – is strategically important for Marxism today. The political relevance of the class-analytical archaeology advocated here lies in its delivery of a better understanding of cross-cultural variation in structures of surplus flow, their characteristic tension points and their long-term trajectories. Herein lies a response to Schiffer's (1988) quite reasonable challenge to radicals that they specify a bit better the interests served by their *own* theories.

In summary, the Marxist theory discussed here has clear scientific foundations. Marxist theory accepts the existence of a real world of archaeological facts, and embraces clear criteria (cognitive and non-cognitive) for evaluating knowledge-claims. Marxism is thus neither insulated from encounters with the real world, nor debilitatingly relativist (*cf.* Schiffer 1988: 467–9). Most importantly, Marxist theory preserves the opportunity for learning new things about the past. It recognizes that real world archaeological data, like all the other bits of everyday experience encountered by humans,

have a relative autonomy in influencing the scientific process. In probing these data with available theory, radical archaeology can encounter unexpected patterns, ambiguities, and contradictions. As noted, this is the stuff of which fresh insights about the past are made. Subsequent discussion across paradigms of the epistemological status and interpretive consequences of such insights in turn shapes intellectual growth and scientific change (Binford 1989; Saitta 1991).

The methodological 'frames of reference' required for defining variation in, and understanding the operation of class relations (and other structuring principles) are, however, in need of much better specification and clarification. The question of how a radical archaeology should experience its subject matter has been raised anew by Hodder (1991b), who has called for more work on a methodological level. In the next section I speak more specifically to the issue of methodology and its challenges.

Radical theory and the methodological challenge

As understood here, learning is the process of recognizing and theorizing the 'independent difference' (Hodder 1991b: 8) of past social contexts. That this difference exists is widely agreed upon by both mainstream and radical archaeologies. For Binford, middle-range frames of reference are required in order to recognize difference and minimize the circular or uncritical imposition of theory on data. More radically-inclined archaeologists make roughly the same point where they argue for ways to avoid collapsing and homogenizing the prehistoric variability in which we are interested and from which we hope to learn (Earle & Preucel 1987: 510; Conkey & Gero 1991: 18). The threat of circularity thus worries the critics (Binford 1989), advocates (Kristiansen 1988: 476; Paynter & McGuire 1991: 19), and discussants (Kosso 1991) of a radical archaeology alike. As I see it, the methodological challenge is the following: how are we to know when we have our hands on an existential reality that is fundamentally different from those present and historical realities with which we have greater familiarity, if not altogether perfect (i.e. objective) understandings? To me, the importance of middle-range theory lies in helping to measure the difference of past realities, and in delimiting the

'imagination space' for making sense of recognized ambiguity in a controlled manner.

Binford's well-described strategy for meeting the methodological challenge is compelling – using actualistic studies to develop independent frames of reference for detecting ambiguity in the archaeological record (Binford 1987b). Binford's specific frames of reference are built upon an understanding of biophysical processes, for example the economic anatomy of animals and aspects of stone and bone physics. These frameworks have proven quite useful in evaluating knowledge-claims about Pleistocene hunter-gatherers. Binford's research clearly shows how we can create an imagination space for developing new models when ambiguities between frames of reference and archaeological evidence are encountered.

As has been pointed out by others, however – most notably Hodder (1991a) – the problem for a radical archaeology stems from the fact that it seeks to investigate realms of human existence having irreducibly *cultural* significance: the microscale structuring principles discussed above (see also Moore & Keene 1983; Wylie 1989; Trigger 1989a). One can imagine the frames of reference that serve Binford as having some utility in this quest, but they clearly need supplementing. Alternative frameworks explicitly addressed to social structuring principles and their material consequences are required. It is inconceivable that such frames of reference could ever be paradigm-independent (Wylie 1989; Dunnell 1989; Trigger 1989a; Hodder 1991: 107). We can, however, develop *operationally*-independent frames – frames derived from cultural contexts existing independently of those about which we seek to learn – as a way to measure the difference between present and past realities (Binford 1982; Kosso 1991). There is also no *a priori* reason why structuring principles of the sort discussed above (power, gender, meaning, class) should be less amenable than principles of stone and bone physics to systematic investigation and justification. That is, they can be independently researched as a way to avoid a self-serving circularity of theory and evidence (Kosso 1991).

Three further clarifications of middle-range theory as understood here are relevant at this point:

a   middle-range theory is not exclusively about
biophysical processes (*cf.* Engelstad 1991);

b   it is not about 'testing' theory in the present
    (cf. Hodder 1985: 12), and
c   it is not divorced from general social theory.
Thus, I do not regard its construction as a
separate undertaking which reduces, in some
radical views, to an exercise in instrumentalism
(e.g. Hodder 1991b: 8). Rather, I see it as an
inevitably theory-laden but nonetheless impor-
tant means for recognizing difference. One
could, of course, argue that middle-range theory
is what we all do when we move from theory to
data. If so, then its dimensions and character
need to be made more explicit if we are serious
about defining and exploring variation in the
structuring principles organizing past soci-
eties.

At present radical archaeology mostly con-
tains general statements about the kinds of
methodological procedures that should inform
the study of archaeological materials. Miller &
Tilley (1984b), Shanks & Tilley (1987a) and
Hodder (1991a: 121–55; 1991b: 10–13) discuss
these procedures. They argue for the use of
different types of evidence in interpretation,
and advocate a 'playing off' of different types
against each other (e.g. architecture vs pottery
vs burials). They argue that lines of evidence
should be allowed to move into contradiction
with each other rather than used as 'checks' on,
or affirmations of, each other. They claim that
this will allow more room to exploit the poten-
tial of the archaeological record to reveal brand
new cultural variation.

The specific background knowledge or 'forek-
nowledge' (Hodder 1991b) for achieving this
aim is still undeveloped, however. A body of
'projectible principles of connection' (Wylie
1989: 106) needs to be brought together. Follow-
ing Trigger (1985; 1989a: 386–91), I think it is
important for this body of ideas to contain
mid-level generalizations (as distinct from 'uni-
versals') that can be used to organize thinking
about archaeological materials. Generalizations
about the relationship between specific struc-
turing principles and material patterns do not
have to undermine or threaten violence to the
historical specificity of action – i.e., the parti-
cular form of power, meaning, gender and class
structures – which is an important concern of a
radical archaeology (Hodder 1991a). Rather,
they serve only as a means to explore such
specificity in a controlled manner. We are not
guaranteed, and probably should not expect, a

seamless match between middle-range frames
of reference and archaeological patterns. A rich
theoretical judgement about the meaning of
differences between frames and patterns inva-
riably will be required, and it is within these
judgements that the specificity of past action
and its causes can be revealed.

What the specific middle-range frameworks
capable of serving the analytical interests of a
radical archaeology will look like is still
unclear. A radical approach interested in class
processes needs to develop generalizations
about the arrangements of matter that are gener-
ated by particular kinds of communal and
non-communal class relations and struggles
(Paynter 1989). Concepts and ideas useful for
building such general frames of reference
already exist in the ethnoarchaeological and
archaeological literature. In the next section I
outline some of the concepts and ideas concei-
vably relevant for tracking class relations, their
social conditions of existence, and their associ-
ated tensions and conflicts.

Theorizing the middle-range for a Marxist prehistory

Implicit in each of the lines of analysis
discussed below is the notion that material
culture is an active element in the reproduction
and transformation of social forms (Tilley 1982:
37). As suggested by radical critics, no single
line of evidence is a foolproof guide to past
process and action; rather the best strategy is to
play each line of evidence off of a multiplicity of
others.   Rathje's (1978: 170–72) distinction
between social production that is 'dispersed'
versus 'withdrawn' suggests a useful middle-
range framework for organizing thought about
the nature of class relations and their attendant
conditions of existence. As a working proposi-
tion, where labour and its products are widely
circulated we might expect producers to play a
significant role in determining both the condi-
tions of production and the amounts of surplus
produced. Where production is withdrawn or
concentrated, we might look for the seeds of
exploitation. Cultural variation in the intensity
of 'exotics' exchange, in the investment in fixed
material culture (Gilman 1981) or monumental
architecture (Johnson 1989) and in ratios of
public to private storage would be among the
foci of such middle-range studies. Generali-
zations derived from known, 'source-side' con-

texts (Wylie 1985) about degrees of investment in these behaviours under communal, tributary and other socio-economic arrangements would provide starting-points for archaeologically distinguishing class relations of surplus extraction and distribution.

Rathje's framework is, however, in need of revision if it is to serve the interests in social difference, tension and conflict that focus a radical archaeology. The problem to be overcome rests in the binary opposition between dispersed and withdrawn production. The empirical record shows that this is not a neat contrast (Rathje 1978: 171). A more complex typology for describing the handling of social production is needed in order to capture the complexity of relationships expected by a radical archaeology (e.g. situations where, for whatever reason, social production is simultaneously withdrawn and dispersed), and to accommodate behaviours like resistance to surplus extraction (which can show up as withdrawn production, e.g. in the form of subterranean pits and caches). Alternative typologies for a radical archaeology are discussed by Hodder (1991a: 135–8), and more effort needs to be given to their development.

Many ideas exist about how architecture and the 'geometry' of built environments condition inter-personal interaction, sustain political and ideological relations and even resolve societal contradictions (e.g. Saile 1977; Fritz 1987; Wilson 1988; Handsman 1991; Sanders 1991). This would appear to be fertile ground for developing general principles of connection for use in the class analysis of past societies. For example, Hodder (1984) has linked the relative linearity of access into and the degree of decorative treatment of domestic space to the control of domestic labour under conditions of labour scarcity and group competition for labour. These conditions have been viewed as characteristic of pre-state social landscapes (Price 1984). Although Hodder's ideas have been criticized for lacking empirical support (Trigger 1985), they are nonetheless provocative and warrant further development in ethnographic contexts or contexts where documentary evidence exists. If substantiated, ideas about 'spatial sequencing' (Saile 1977) can help us explore variation in specifically *domestic* relations of surplus flow and authority structures in pre-state contexts. Donham (1990) identifies inter-

esting variation in the labour relations and authority structures that organize 'domestic political economies' in an ethnographic context, and there is every reason to expect additional variation in prehistoric contexts. Methodological frameworks for investigating the political economy of the domestic sphere – a key site of social tension and negotiation in *all* societies – are requisite to expanding our understanding of human agency in prehistory (Gero & Conkey 1991).

Other lines of investigation using built environments could focus on symmetries and asymmetries in architectural patterning at a variety of spatial scales in different cultural contexts. Such inquiries stand to contribute useful generalizations about how political and/or ideological commitments to communal and non-communal class relations are materially expressed. Fritz's (1987) comparison of built environments at egalitarian Chaco Canyon (New Mexico) and stratified Vijayanagara (India) shows how social equivalence and inequivalence are given material expression across multiple spatial scales, creating in each case a 'symbolic resonance' between the structural and the material. Departures from symbolic resonance, or the degree of symbolic dissonance at each scale, could indicate the existence of multiple ideologies, the depth of resistance to a dominant politics and ideology, and perhaps the specific social arenas in which struggles over politics and ideology were situated (see also Paynter & McGuire 1991: 11).

Extant ideas about formal variation in everyday portable objects are similarly fertile for the development of middle-range frameworks for evaluating alternative models of class relations. The amount of repetition in decorative patterns across a variety of object classes at a number of spatial scales might also indicate the intensity of cultural commitments to a collective politics and ideology. Rubinstein (1987) shows how a particular stylistic symmetry involving centre-marking and successive halving on either side of the mid-line shows up in textiles, canoes and other art forms (as well as houses and village ground-plans) in the Yap Islands of Micronesia. In this case, the style both reflects and actively sustains the principle of dual opposition that characterizes Micronesian social organization. Where tensions or contradictions threaten the reproduction of group life we might expect

material culture to play an intervening, mediating role, conceivably manifested by so-called 'trinal logics' in material patterns (Ingersoll & Nickell 1987). In trinal logics dualities confront each other in resolution or mediation, in turn yielding something new. Trinal logics thus imply a dynamic, transformative potential (Ingersoll & Nickell 1987: 212). A concrete ethnoarchaeological example would be Welbourn's (1984) study of Endo pots, where what can be described as trinal variation in the form and decoration of ceramic containers relates to the existence and mediation of tensions in gender relations and, by extension, in domestic political economies.

Themes of dual opposition and triadic resolution, or what Rubinstein (1987: 72) calls a 'triadic dualism' recur in several other recent studies of the active role played by material culture in contemporary social life (see the contributions to Ingersoll & Bronitsky 1987). The potential of these concepts and ideas for informing middle-range work – especially where the analytical interest is in the political conditions sustaining flows of surplus labour – would seem considerable. We might look for trinal logics or triadic dualism in a variety of object classes where the mediation of social tension is expected to be important to the reproduction of group life and specific sets of class relations. Interruptions or discontinuities in material patterns in these contexts could indicate deeper social pluralities, unmediated tensions and the existence of more open forms of resistance to the social conditions sustaining class relations (Handsman 1991: 349).

Concepts of social production (withdrawn, dispersed), spatial sequencing, symbolic resonance and triadic dualism are just a few of the concepts that could help organize the development of middle-range theory for an archaeology of class processes. These concepts, and the ideas they support, are in need of further theoretical development and empirical verification, and then synthesis into a body of projectible middle-range principles of connection. Upon verification, the ideas can be used in a manner which respects the relative autonomy of different lines of archaeological evidence and which fully expects discrepancies between frames of reference and actual empirical patterns. Theory and imagination applied to the study of discrepancies would reveal novel organizational realities and dynamics for past societies, thereby contributing to learning and furthering the development of general social theory. Approached in this way, the problem of vicious circularity in interpretation and the risk of masking past organizational variability is minimized. This approach dovetails with mainstream methodology in directing us to look for ambiguity upon which we can trade in gaining new insights about the past. It remains steadfast, however, in seeing general theory and imagination as indispensable to such a learning process (see also Tringham 1991).

Conclusion

This paper has argued that a Marxist approach – as one version of radical archaeology – can contribute to intellectual growth in our discipline. Marxist theory offers a clear philosophical alternative to the old objectivism and what some see as the new relativism. It explicitly addresses a key blind-spot in mainstream and radical theory (i.e. class relations of surplus flow), and its methodological commitments preserve the opportunity for encountering empirical ambiguity and hence for learning new things about the past. Thus a Marxist approach, like the other radical archaeologies, has the potential to illuminate difference and expand archaeological inference in the cultural realm.

At the same time, critics of the radical archaeologies are correct in arguing that the specific methodological orientation of these approaches needs greater clarification. Philosophers and archaeologists have effectively challenged the claims used to divide alternative approaches on an epistemological level, and have identified common methodological constraints and problems. Hodder (1991b) has responded in a useful, general way to the methodological challenge confronting a radical archaeology. Here, I have argued that the challenge must also be met with a more explicit set of middle-range strategies for experiencing data so that the independent 'otherness' of past social contexts can be more fully appreciated.

This argument for middle-range theory is not a call for eclecticism or for concessions to be made on what we can hope to learn about the past. Rather, the argument is about ways to better explore differences in social structures of power, gender, meaning and class. The argument responds to the charges of methodological indif-

ference and 'just-so' story telling that have been aimed at the radical archaeologies. Perhaps most importantly, the argument seeks to move discussion beyond the familiar claims and counter-claims by processual and postprocessual archaeologists about what constitutes a proper way of thinking about archaeological subject matters (see also Hodder 1991c: 36, 40).

Inevitably, however, the acceptability of any story or 'narrative' about the past is only partly dependent on the theoretical, methodological and empirical coherence of the story itself. The willingness of listeners to examine the relativity of their own preferred philosophical commitments, and to imagine alternative prehistories, always intervenes. By working at least part-time in the middle ranges of archaeological theory,

radical archaeologists can perhaps cultivate such willing audiences. And, in so doing, they can perhaps better meet their programme's scientific and emancipatory goals.

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