

# INTERPRETING ARCHAEOLOGY

*Finding meaning in the past*

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# The visibility of the archaeological record and the interpretation of social reality

*Felipe Criado*

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The questions which are posed in this article are based on a series of specific characteristics of the archaeological record which, although essential and well known, are nevertheless important and useful for the analysis of this record and the social practices which created it. These self-evident facts can be listed as follows.

- For the greater part of prehistory human action did not significantly alter the surrounding environment.
- The construction of artificial 'monuments' only took place in relatively recent times. ↪
- Despite many specific exceptions, in general it is true that the use of precious, imperishable materials in the creation of material culture is an equally recent phenomenon.

The late occurrence of these features shows that the construction of a social landscape using artificial elements of material culture is a rare event, and not the universal which it is erroneously taken to be within modern ideology. Moreover, this event (the construction of a social landscape) is paralleled by the simultaneous appearance of other phenomena which are inextricably bound up with the intensification of social complexity. Under our interpretation the emergence of these social facts implies that the societies involved were fundamentally transformed.

Now, if we examine these transformations, we can clearly see that they are based upon a previous modification of cultural orientation towards nature and a new understanding of the relationship between society and the latter. Some points which support this interpretation are as follows.

- The absence of 'technology' in primitive societies and its subsequent emergence as a specialised and autonomous domain of social activity underlines the dislocation of society and nature in order to further the social control of nature by technological means.
- There is an accompanying growth of 'production' and economic rationalities which tend towards the maximisation of production.
- There is the fact that the first long-lasting monumental constructions of human societies were intimately bound up with the exercise of power and its ideological control.
- The first social images of time (understood as tradition or social memory) are correlated with the development of the first monuments, an increase in social inequality, and the appearance of social groups 'wielding' power.

In the light of these observations we believe that the social transformations imply a change in the management of spatial rationality within the societies involved. The change would, by the same token, also imply new ways of conceptualising time and

space as basic correlates of new social strategies involving the *construction* of the landscape.

Given this interpretation and the theoretical perspective which underlies this text, it must be acknowledged that the modification of concepts of space and time is not merely 'bound up' with social transformations: it constitutes the fundamental horizon of their possibility.

This argument can be made more specific if, in the light of anthropological evidence, we consider different conceptions of space as these are documented within different socio-cultural complexes. The idea may be developed that some forms of landscape construction are related to a cultural rationality typical of primitive societies and the 'savage mind', so we have tried to relate this dynamic of the social construction of the landscape in prehistory with a (pre)historicisation of Lévi-Strauss's model (1966 and after) of the 'savage mind' and the 'domesticated mind'.

This does give rise to several problems. The first is that the 'savage mind' does not lend itself to being historicised in this way. To cope with this problem we propose a reading which isolates and excludes the generic and abstract component of Lévi-Strauss's 'savage mind' and concentrates on the concrete and historical aspects which can be applied to specific social configurations. Put in another way, our reading distinguishes between a 'savage' syntax and a 'savage' semantics. While it maintains the first to denote what Lévi-Strauss terms 'mind' or 'thought', it adopts the second (semantics) to further our understanding of specific social formations.

We also assert that, since the 'savage mind' has not always existed, but came into being at a determinate point in time, it must have been preceded and followed by qualitatively distinct modes of 'thought'. While any comments on the possible predecessors of the 'savage mind' remain hypothetical, its successors are accessible through historical and anthropological analysis.

In this way we can formulate a general model of which the salient features are outlined below. However, it is difficult to explore this field of possibilities in prehistory, through archaeology. In order to exhaust this field of possibilities we shall try to formulate a theoretico-methodological limit which permits us to read and characterise the archaeological record in accordance with the interpretive scheme just outlined. This model derives from our conviction that the *conditions of visibility* of the archaeological record and material culture are one of the most important resources which can be deployed to understand the relationship of the latter with the social reality from which they derive. In this way we can come to understand the cultural rationalities, attitudes towards space, and modes of conceptualisation of the nature/culture relationship which characterise specific archaeological contexts. To this end we have adopted a strict materialist perspective, of which, as it underlines all aspects of our analysis, we shall give a brief account.

Our perspective is based on four fundamental and complementary principles which are causally linked.

- Reality is produced through human labour, social practices. This principle is linked to the thought of the young Marx in which 'infrastructure' was originally understood as human labour, and 'superstructure' as the results of that labour.
- The real is criss-crossed by a fundamental material unity which implies that all segments of reality are linked and mutually determined.
- Reality is not simply constituted by the material, but also by the ideal and the imaginary. So the 'real' character of a phenomenon does not derive from its physical attributes, but from its ability to produce real effects (this is defined by Foucault as the materialism of the incorporeal).

- The ideal is frequently the basic infrastructural condition of the material world, since objects and labour itself must be thought before they can be practised.

## POSITIONS

We adopt the definition of material culture (elaborated by Shanks and Tilley) as the objectification of social being. This is a useful definition as it implies that the transformation of a brute material thing into a cultural object involves the gathering together of a series of determinate traces of the socio-cultural context within which the object is produced.<sup>1</sup>

Now, in order to remain consistent with a materialist perspective we must acknowledge that these traces are not confined to the domain of material culture: they permeate all forms of social action and are the results of these actions. To the extent that the material reality of the archaeological record is, in fact, *constituted* by these effects, we must pay careful attention to the comments above.

So the archaeological record should be thought of as not simply being the traces which have survived the effects of cultural postdepositional factors which remain accessible to the archaeologist through an analytical process realised within a determinate contemporary social and economic context. It must also be stressed that these formal elements are patterned by specific attitudes towards surrounding 'reality'. Thus we can speak of three distinct moments in the formation of the archaeological record: the pre-existing social reality, the physical processes of decay and preservation, and the contemporary act of reading.

We suggest in this article that within the first set of social factors or 'attitudes' underlying social action we can isolate a specific 'will' to render the result of social action visible or invisible.<sup>2</sup> This 'will' is evident where the efficacy of a social process depends upon its manifest visibility (rituals, displays of power, military manoeuvres, etc.). The formal aspects of the results of social action can clearly be influenced by this 'will' to visibility, and can, in fact, be divided into two distinct groups, in each of which action 'corresponds' to pre-existing social reality in a different way. In the first the formal elements of the action and its results are intrinsic, in the second, extrinsic.

The first group consists of 'products'; that is, the results of a process of 'production', whether intentional or not, which gather together their social conditions and preconditions within a formal unity. The second are simply 'effects'; that is to say, the traces or indirect consequences of social actions. This dual classification will act as a fundamental schema with which we shall classify the effects of social action on the environment.

If we take into account the necessary correspondence between social being and social action, then we must recognise that the 'will to visibility' can be explicit and conscious, or implicit and unconscious, quite independently of whether the related social actions are intentional or non-intentional. By this we mean that the actors involved are not necessarily capable of representing such a 'will to visibility' to themselves. Instead, to the extent that ideological functions which presuppose the visibility of a social grouping or subset of social actions are in operation, we can legitimately infer and describe such a 'will to visibility' from the manifest cultural effects of such a will. Similarly we must remember that it is the rationality of a specific socio-economic formation which determines which cultural traces will be visible and which will not. For example, we should not expect to find traces of the fundamental transformation of nature in hunting societies, nor should we expect traces of permanent settlements from mobile communities.

We must stress that the term 'will' does not refer to individual psychology or intentionality, or imply that the 'will to visibility' expresses a conscious intention. Instead it represents an intrinsic, rational, non-empirical ground of social processes. In some cases it is consciously used by these processes, in others it is identical with them, while in others its existence must be inferred as part of our own contemporary reading.<sup>3</sup> The first case would be exemplified by the construction of a commemorative monument which perpetuates an ideological discourse of domination. An example of the second class would be the iconic message purveyed by medieval sculptures which presuppose visibility but are not explicitly preoccupied with it. An example of the third group is the way in which we must interpret the *absence* of oppressed groups such as the result of a dominant ideology which secures their visibility.

So in some cases the 'will to visibility' is an intrinsic part of social action which is explicit in the archaeological record (the minority of cases); in other social contexts (the great majority) it is *we* who must posit such a will in order to understand this record. In both cases, however, we believe that this model can legitimately be used in archaeology, as it manifests a logic which is homologous to that which constructed the record being analysed.<sup>4</sup> Therefore we can expect that the various components of material culture and the results of social action will demonstrate different degrees of visibility in accordance with the underlying social rationality. We will refer to those formal characteristics of social actions which relate to their degree of visibility as *conditions of visibility*. These conditions indicate a variety of modes of emphasising the process of objectivation which gives rise to material culture, and the orientation of society towards the world. We shall label these as *strategies of visibility*.

## DEVELOPMENTS

Having arrived at this point, we want to go beyond a set of empty theoretical imperatives and convert them into concrete methodological proposals. We shall attempt to do so by tackling the following questions:

- How can we recognise and characterise *strategies of visibility* within the archaeological record?
- Once we have recognised those strategies, how do we reconstruct the 'will to visibility' which they represent and analyse how this is related to a specific cultural rationality?
- Finally, how do we relate this will to visibility with determinate historical social formations?

## THE RECOGNITION AND DEFINITION OF STRATEGIES OF VISIBILITY

In order to resolve the first of these questions we must define how these strategies operate, what mechanisms they function through and, most important, the system of existence of such strategies of visibility.

The latter is constituted through a combination of specific elements, dimensions and resources of diverse kinds. Different strategies of visibility, the achievement of specific forms of visibility or invisibility, depend on such unique combinations.

So, from a logical point of view, the existence of a determinate strategy of visibility presupposes that a choice has been made whether to render social action visible or

invisible. As noted above, this choice can be conscious (intentional). In the latter case the 'choice' corresponds to the intrinsic logic of the socio-cultural formation concerned. This very duality, which is inherent in all social/human action, is necessarily found in the subsequent choices made in the construction of visibility; from here on the repertory of possibilities is doubled.<sup>5</sup>

The 'will to visibility' is objectified through a variety of elements. We may call these the *raw material* from which visibility is constructed. Essentially, they fall into three categories: material culture products, the effects of social action, and social practices themselves. Considered dynamically we must ascribe a genetic priority to the last of these 'raw materials'; that is, social practices. Visibility is manifested first in this domain, then through its effects (whether conscious or unconscious), and lastly through material culture itself. So the presence of any of these classes of elements might imply the visibility of the 'genetically prior' elements.

Once an element of raw material has been mobilised for the production of visibility we must consider the dimensions along which this process is projected. From our point of view these are, essentially, those of *space* and *time*. The first refers to an essentially episodic, temporally discontinuous visibility manifest *only in space*. The second refers to visibility which persists through time, which has a definite duration. Logically we might isolate different forms of this temporal visibility according to the extent of the duration implied.

Lastly, the construction of visibility presupposes specific material resources which help determine the unique character and configuration of a form of visibility. They assist in determining, for example, whether cultural acts are projected along a spatial or temporal dimension. As these resources are dependent on highly specific social, cultural and historical factors, it is impossible to list the repertory of choices. However, they do seem to fall into two basic categories: the reutilisation of natural elements, and the construction of artificial elements.<sup>6</sup>

If we consider the totality of logical possibilities formed by combining these four levels (relying only on the principal choices within each class), we obtain a total of 384 different combinations, each denoting a distinct strategy of visibility. Obviously, many of these 'possibilities' have only a theoretical significance, logically conceivable but not practically significant options.

However, despite the great number of such possible strategies, we can take four principal types to represent most of the variability present.

- First we have the cases where there is absolutely no interest in highlighting (or hiding) the presence of social action, and its results. This context implies the absence of any strategy designed to render social products visible *as* products. For this reason we might call such strategies *inhibitory*. We can assert the presence of this 'inhibition' as it produces neither intentional results or products nor non-intentional results. It can, however, give rise to non-intentional products which survive in the archaeological record and reveal the presence of human groups marked by this 'absence'. These groups have probably constituted the majority of human societies on the earth.
- We can also pick out a second group of strategies concerned with *hidings*. These are characterised by a conscious strategy to hide or mark the presence of social action and its results. This strategy leads to the disappearance of social products as products. It is distinct from the previous strategy, which simply involved the *lack* of recognition of such products, not an active attempt to hide their existence.
- A third group of strategies are those which aim to exhibit the processes or results of social action *within* the social present. They are concerned solely with



*spatial* exhibition through which they emphasise the natural character of social products as products. So we can label them strategies of *exhibition*. These strategies produce intentional results in space, but some of them may also have an involuntary temporal dimension. Moreover, in this way they can generate products and effects which have both a spatial and temporal character.

- Lastly we have strategies similar to the previous group but through which social processes and results are projected temporally. These strategies attempt to highlight the visibility of social creations both within the social present and through time, controlling and overcoming the temporal dimension of change. These strategies can be described as *monumental*. Monumentality produces intentional results (both products and effects) projected both in space and time. But it can also produce non-intentional results which project in both dimensions.

The most representative product of such strategies is the *monument*. From our point of view, a monument can be defined as a cluster of intentional results, made concrete in the form of an artificial product which is visible through space and which maintains this visibility through time.

Now, if we were to interpret this definition in simple univocal terms, it would obscure subtle distinctions between monuments which do not fit within such categories easily. However, although there are cultural creations which do not present the correlated and complementary elements which we consider to characterise monumentality (material product – artificial element – spatial visibility – temporal duration), we may legitimately label everything which has some form of spatio-temporal projection as a specific type of monument.

The first consists of natural elements, rocky outcrops, topographical peculiarities (caves, hills) which are endowed with a specific social significance. By nature these features are visible through space and time, and this facilitates their use by social groups as symbols of the continuity and perpetuation of the group, a means of naturalising social discourse. Therefore it would seem reasonable to describe them as genuine monuments. Here we have a configuration of the following four elements: imaginary product – natural element – spatial visibility – temporal projection. The principal difference from the category of monumentality outlined above is that once the event which ascribes meaning to the natural element is over, and the social group involved has disappeared, there is no easy way to recognise such natural elements *as* monuments. Sometimes, however, cultural continuity has preserved traces of the significance of these elements: a fact often attested amongst peasant societies which may incorporate natural features into their own cultural traditions which were once significant in proto- and pre-historic societies. We shall call this type of monument (for reasons to be explained later) a *savage monument*.

Another type of monument is that which displays the classic configuration of elements, but in which spatial visibility is *not* clearly manifested. An example would be human constructions which are endowed with monumentality through the proximity of an older natural feature which contributes to their spatial visibility and temporal duration but which may be difficult to detect without prior knowledge of the social rationality at work in each specific context. We could label such a feature an *ambiguous monument*. An example would be those megaliths which occur near rocky summits or outcrops. Their presence is both emphasised and partially hidden by such natural features. Similarly, petroglyphs carved on conspicuous outcrops may be invisible from a distance owing to the slight alteration of the rockface.

## THE INTERPRETATION OF THE WILL TO VISIBILITY

Our proposals so far simply provide a means of ordering and systemising the archaeological record. However, we think that its usefulness can be taken for granted as we can employ it to reconstruct the presence of a specific 'will to visibility' and then go on to interpret the cultural values which it presupposes. We must begin by examining the conditions of visibility of the results of social action as revealed in the formal and contextual characteristics of that part of the archaeological record being studied. This does not mean that we *assume* a specific meaning behind a strategy of visibility; instead we carry out a formal analysis deriving from our own operational logic outlined above.

Once we have achieved a formal self-contained description, we must proceed to the next level of analysis. This presupposes that the will to visibility implements specific concepts of space and time, which are themselves related to the way in which the society concerned conceptualises its own relation to nature and the environment. A regularity is established between all these domains which determines that each will to visibility reflects a specific cultural rationality and is related to social representations and ideological discourses, as it constitutes a fundamental mechanism whereby such discourses operate.

If we examine the visibility of human action, society and people as they emerge from these strategies, we can refine our understanding of the concepts of space and time underlying these four general types of strategy of visibility (defined above) by using analogies derived from anthropology.

So, although our interpretations offer a way of ascribing meaning to the archaeological record, they are themselves derived from the anthropological models we discussed earlier (we shall return to this point in the last section).

## THE CONTEXTUALISATION OF WILL TO VISIBILITY AND STRATEGIES OF VISIBILITY

The regularities which we can establish between a will to visibility and a specific pattern of social and cultural rationality can be interpreted in two different ways.

First, as a diachronic succession: that is, a series of cultural constructions which follow each other and represent different social formations. However, this does *not* imply an evolutionary progression from one state to the next.

Second, they can be interpreted in a synchronic and social manner. Here they are seen as a means of constructing distinct cultural identities within specific historical contexts in terms of the conflicts present in the relevant social formations and the specific nature of the social formation as a totality. So each society can be characterised by a unique will to visibility or this will may be interpreted in terms of conflicts between social formations or tensions within a social grouping. The latter case may seem more relevant to complex societies, in which an increase in social distinctions leads to a greater variety of social expectations and aspirations. However, we must remember that the construction of gender is virtually a universal social process and a basis for the development of inequality within the 'simplest' societies. So we may posit the existence of conflicting strategies of visibility within such societies which played an important role in expressing and elaborating the conflicts arising from the social construction of gender.

'Monumental' material culture characterises a 'divided society' (in the sense developed by Clastres). On the archaeological level it represents late-Neolithic peasant communities and their proto-historic successors; ceremonial monumentality is the most important expression of such a divided society.

Strategies which simply 'exhibit' material culture characterise those societies based on the maximal exploitation of nature where we can detect the opening of a rupture between society and nature; post-glacial art exemplifies this form of cultural rationality.

Strategies of 'hiding' characterise those societies which remain immersed in the natural order, and do not risk the opening of a gap between nature and culture; this would be exemplified by Palaeolithic art.

Strategies of 'inhibition' would have dominated the greater part of human prehistory. Here people did not consider themselves the masters of creation and world. The fragility and scarcity of archaeological evidence for such societies in itself constitutes a significant marker of such 'inhibition'.

## PROBLEMS

The previous points suggest that we adopt a visual metaphor to understand the archaeological record.

The validity of this metaphor is based on the fact that the will to visibility is a condition of the constitution of the archaeological record as such. So the morphology of this record, with all its inherent absences and failings, can itself be turned into a core of meaning, through which a specific will to visibility is revealed. 'Absent' archaeological events are pregnant with meaning, as their lack of existence can in fact be understood as their most intrinsic and intimate mode of being.

This model offers a profoundly different set of perspectives on the archaeological record from those which dominate at the present time: the physical metaphor of the New Archaeology and the textual metaphor of postprocessual archaeology.

Given that the former has been superseded by the latter, we must refine our analysis, which, we believe, enables us to go beyond the textual metaphor. Although this textual metaphor has encouraged the development of archaeology through the last decade,<sup>7</sup> we feel that it has been incapable of solving the basic problem of *reading* material culture. This problem lies in presupposing a meaning lying within the text which demands and solicits a reading.

As is well known, this is not a problem as such for hermeneutics which asserts that the act of reading is an interpretive act which, rather than providing a transparent interpretation of an external text, increases our self-understanding *through* the text. This solution is acceptable on the condition the text and its reader share a single cultural and linguistic horizon. For it is only within a single horizon of understanding that comprehension of the text is necessarily converted into the self-understanding of the world obtained by the reader. What proponents of a hermeneutic approach tend to forget is that Archaeology, Anthropology and History are, for the most part, concerned with radically *different* cultural horizons. In this case interpretation as self-understanding is simply not feasible, for self-understanding through a (pre-) text is simply an excuse for the tyrannical domination of that text by the reading subject.

This follows from the structuralist and poststructuralist position that the meaning of a sign is found in a system of differences between signs. However, as most signs are absent within the text their 'original' meaning can never be discovered. To do so would imply an external perspective on the text or phenomenon being interpreted. Now, this external rationality would be an imposition on the text-phenomenon by an alien subjectivity – rationality. So, when Derrida (for example) states that there is nothing outside the text, he is not so much saying that there is no *meaning* within the text, but that this meaning is not *present*, it does not *exist now*, and if it ever

did 'exist' its meaning would in fact be a redoubling of the context through which the reader faces the text. This meaning would in fact be a form of subjective reification.

It is for this reason that, as poststructuralism has pointed out, the presupposition of an implicit meaning necessarily reinforces the philosophy of consciousness and the modern conception of subjectivity. This simply maintains the traditional values of the subject, time, History, universality. . . .

This debate has preoccupied archaeologists for the last few years. Although there seems to have been a provisional victory for the hermeneutic camp which reconstructs archaeology as an interpretive practice (developed by Shanks and Tilley, 1987a and 1987b) (which merely concedes that the interpretive process must recognise certain 'natural' limits of the text which contain any subjective excesses), this simply conceals the fact that from a poststructural perspective archaeology as such *is not possible*.

If we acknowledge the absence of many of the signs which constitute meaning from the archaeological record, we must also admit that 'our discipline' simply cannot gain access to any original meaning owing to the fragmentary nature of the totality of signs as this is presented to us. The only way of 'solving' this problem is through an excess of subjectivity which functions by supplying the 'missing signs' which are absent from the record.

Now, placing ourselves in this abyss of madness, engaged in a debate over the possibility of limits, we must acknowledge that the very same problems can arise through our own use of a visual metaphor. For if we assume that a specific will to visibility represents a distinct rationality, are we not ourselves imposing a universal rationality on the specific configurations of material independently from their unique social and historical context? Are we not simply reconstructing an evolutionary, taxonomic scheme typical of modernist discourse, one which should be firmly excluded by a postmodern epistemology?

The limitations of the visual metaphor are revealed by the fact that it be seen as reinforcing the ideology of exhibition and social visibility which seems so typical of the will to power-knowledge of the 1980s.

It would be ingenuous to argue that these problems are foreign to our text because they are not amongst its explicit aims and its basic proposals and their development render such an outcome impossible. We have known for a long time that the text goes beyond the intentions of its author and in order to solve these problems we must subject the text to a quite different discipline.

So I have tried to construct a methodology and practice which is not based on a super-interpretation but on the development of an intuition (namely, that the production of the archaeological record is criss-crossed by a will to visibility) which then leads on to a systematic description of material culture based on merely *formal* relations. This system consciously adopts *our own* perspective to study the archaeology. Our interpretation widens out from this point: *not* based on the reading of a given meaning but on the reordering of formal relations, their significant juxtaposition with relations preserved in other codes and deriving from other social contexts. In particular, we rely on insights provided by anthropological theory. Nevertheless, these procedures, however rigorously applied, are not in themselves sufficient to subvert the risk of meaning.

From a theoretical and interpretive perspective this risk can only be dissolved through an operation which has been the ground of success of structural anthropology. This operation consists in basing interpretations on patterns of rationality and subjectivity which are radically different from our own.

Archaeology, faced with the dilemma of excessive subjectivity or its disappearance as a discipline, can only mitigate these difficulties and reduce the subjective risk of positing absent meanings by grounding its interpretations in patterns of rationality which are not exclusively our own. Or, in other words, if there is nothing outside the text we must insinuate new texts within the traditional text.<sup>8</sup> We believe that most of postprocessual archaeology has failed in this task; but has, instead, simply extended the domain of the archaeologist's subjectivity – a modern Western subjectivity – however much this process is disguised using the conceptual apparatus of hermeneutics and the ethical justification of political radicalism.

So what begins as *our* analysis ends up as something quite different (by using concepts derived from the work of rationality which are attested anthropologically). At the very least these facts and models permit us to use this starting point heuristically and convince us that our hypothesis is a legitimate framework for archaeological analysis. Our method would have the advantage of corresponding to the very patterns of rationality which constitute the archaeological record; patterns which subvert our own traditional values and rationality.

It is precisely for this reason that we believe our visual metaphor is not simply an extension of the ideology of the 1980s; instead we believe that the application of this model can lead to conclusions which radically subvert and invert our starting point.

We assert these proposals in the knowledge that, if they are true, they are so at global level and not necessarily true at some specific levels. However, have we really escaped the risk of meaning, of conjuring up meaning with subjective strategies? Have we really put forward an alternative which owes more to poststructuralism than to hermeneutics? Perhaps in the end we haven't. For if we perform a phenomenological reading of Lévi-Strauss, we realise that a hermeneutic approach does underlie his work. If we observe that structural anthropology postulates a radical homology between the cultural and natural orders, that the very possibility of structural analysis is grounded on this homology and that the scientific pretensions of structural analysis presuppose the identity of structures of the human spirit with nature, then must we not admit that, to the extent that it goes beyond the subject/object division, it does so by recuperating the phenomenological *Lebenswelt*. Does this not acquire an ontological priority upon which the configuration and explanation of reality must be based?

If we recognise that the work of Lévi-Strauss is based on a form of radical objectivism which destroys the subject/object distinction on which the project of modern consciousness is built and that as a result it dissolves humanity in nature, can we not accept that what differentiates it from both positivist objectivism and phenomenological subjectivism is the absolute refusal to base this new (postmodern) project on a founding subjectivity and to recuperate this subjectivity through the results of the analysis? When Lévi-Strauss defines his work as neo-Kantianism without a transcendental subject he is referring precisely to this duality, one pole of which is absent. For while it tries to construct a theoretical model of transcendental objectivity which takes account of the relationship between nature and culture, it attempts to do this *without* elevating the notion of man as a transcendental subject.

The death of man, as postulated by anthropological structuralism, is nothing more than a piece of *a priori* and *a posteriori* caution, designed to avoid the recuperation of the classical philosophy (metaphysics) of consciousness. Anti-subjectivism becomes an ethical option which enables us, at the last moment, to prevent the speaking subject from recuperating discourse. In the absence of any emerging new pattern of subjectivity we must resort to nihilism. At the end nothing guarantees

that our text will not have reproduced the pattern of subjectivity from which it originated and will not have been converted into a useful tool for reproduction of the system.<sup>9</sup> For us, the only option in this situation is the ethical position asserted above. We must consciously or deconstructively choose to remain outside discourse casting a philosophical smile (to quote Foucault) on discourse once it has been accomplished. At the same time we must exhaust the risks of basing archaeological practice on other patterns of subjectivity, because it is only in this way that archaeology can contribute to the urgent project (urgent in the present crisis situation) of constructing new patterns of subjectivity through which to contrast the adaptation of society to nature with the very bases of social reality.

## NOTES

- 1 Obviously, as asserted through post-processualism, these traces are not the direct reflections of the social circumstances in which they were produced.
- 2 Although we shall be dealing with the first of these moments within this article, we must admit that this partially influences the other two. Depending on whether the will to visibility is present in the first moment, the effects of the second and third on the archaeological record are altered. If, for example, an ornamental item is made out of perishable material, it is unlikely to survive in the archaeological record, whereas an object made from precious metal is much more likely to survive the effects of natural destructive agents and also acquire greater significance within the traditional processes of archaeological interpretation.
- 3 This use of the term 'will' derives from the concept of a will to power-knowledge in Nietzsche and Foucault.
- 4 Although the facts already cited tend to justify this assertion, we realise that this is in fact the primary root of the practical, methodological, theoretical and empirical problems which attend our proposals. These are considered at length throughout this article, particularly in the last section.
- 5 To support this statement we must firmly reject the theory of consciousness prevalent in the Anglo-Saxon world according to which human activity is always conscious or intentional. This position, exemplified in behavioural psychology, follows from the dominant strategy of the construction of the individual in modern societies as a conscious intentional agent; one who is always responsible for his or her acts. This process of individuation is particularly prominent, in Saxon, Nordic and Germanic societies; less so in Latin ones. It has constructed the type of subject on which Western bourgeois democracies are based. Despite the fact that Freud and psychoanalysis have radically deconstructed the bases of this position, it remains strong.
- 6 All these questions presuppose that we are dealing with non-literary societies. Given that writing (first epic, then as history) itself constitutes a specific form of visibility, and functions as a strategy of exhibition we must consider its effects on the other strategies of visibility listed. We must also take into account that in non-literary societies the function of writing is largely taken over by orality and oral tradition. The difference is that, whereas orality creates an episodic form of visibility and, therefore, ought to be treated as a specific form of strategy of exhibition, writing creates authentic 'monuments' and must therefore be classed as a strategy of monumentality.
- 7 In the sense that, as a form of discourse, it has changed the way we see things through and despite the dominating force of the words we use.
- 8 Thus, although History is faced with the same set of problems, it sets about solving them in a different way. Through written texts and historical documents it can gain access to the discursive systems of the society being studied. Using structural analysis or historical semantics it can uncover the pattern of rationality being expressed.
- 9 Some critics suggest (not without reason) that this is the very outcome of Lévi-Strauss's 'Structural anthropology' to the extent that it reproduces the context and subject/object of post-industrial culture.

Strategies which simply 'exhibit' material culture characterise those societies based on the maximal exploitation of nature where we can detect the opening of a rupture between society and nature; post-glacial art exemplifies this form of cultural rationality.

Strategies of 'hiding' characterise those societies which remain immersed in the natural order, and do not risk the opening of a gap between nature and culture; this would be exemplified by Palaeolithic art.

Strategies of 'inhibition' would have dominated the greater part of human prehistory. Here people did not consider themselves the masters of creation and world. The fragility and scarcity of archaeological evidence for such societies in itself constitutes a significant marker of such 'inhibition'.

## PROBLEMS

The previous points suggest that we adopt a visual metaphor to understand the archaeological record.

The validity of this metaphor is based on the fact that the will to visibility is a condition of the constitution of the archaeological record as such. So the morphology of this record, with all its inherent absences and failings, can itself be turned into a core of meaning, through which a specific will to visibility is revealed. 'Absent' archaeological events are pregnant with meaning, as their lack of existence can in fact be understood as their most intrinsic and intimate mode of being.

This model offers a profoundly different set of perspectives on the archaeological record from those which dominate at the present time: the physical metaphor of the New Archaeology and the textual metaphor of postprocessual archaeology.

Given that the former has been superseded by the latter, we must refine our analysis, which, we believe, enables us to go beyond the textual metaphor. Although this textual metaphor has encouraged the development of archaeology through the last decade,<sup>7</sup> we feel that it has been incapable of solving the basic problem of *reading* material culture. This problem lies in presupposing a meaning lying within the text which demands and solicits a reading.

As is well known, this is not a problem as such for hermeneutics which asserts that the act of reading is an interpretive act which, rather than providing a transparent interpretation of an external text, increases our self-understanding *through* the text. This solution is acceptable on the condition the text and its reader share a single cultural and linguistic horizon. For it is only within a single horizon of understanding that comprehension of the text is necessarily converted into the self-understanding of the world obtained by the reader. What proponents of a hermeneutic approach tend to forget is that Archaeology, Anthropology and History are, for the most part, concerned with radically *different* cultural horizons. In this case interpretation as self-understanding is simply not feasible, for self-understanding through a (pre-) text is simply an excuse for the tyrannical domination of that text by the reading subject.

This follows from the structuralist and poststructuralist position that the meaning of a sign is found in a system of differences between signs. However, as most signs are absent within the text their 'original' meaning can never be discovered. To do so would imply an external perspective on the text or phenomenon being interpreted. Now, this external rationality would be an imposition on the text-phenomenon by an alien subjectivity – rationality. So, when Derrida (for example) states that there is nothing outside the text, he is not so much saying that there is no *meaning* within the text, but that this meaning is not *present*, it does not *exist now*, and if it ever