Problems, functions and conditions of archaeological knowledge

FELIPE CRIADO BOADO

Laboratory of Archaeology and Cultural Forms, University of Santiago de Compostela, Spain

ABSTRACT

This article deals with some of the critical issues and problems facing archaeological theory and practice in a postpositivist world. It tries to explore a third way between objectivist and subjectivist method-ological alternatives. In particular reviewing the concept and practice of interpretation as being the only way of obtaining understanding from the archaeological record. Avoiding neo-empirical reactions as much as individualistic or hypersubjectivist standpoints, this article highlights the possibility (and problems) of interpretation as a positive practice, exploring a methodology that could allow archaeology to construct an intersubjective understanding of material meaning.

KEYWORDS

archaeological record ● cultural heritage ● hermeneutics ● interpre-tation ● postpositivism ● poststructuralism ● social archaeology ● theoretical archaeology

■ SITUATION AND CONTEXT

Problems

This article questions what social archaeology could be in the year 2001. Its proposals are the result of a personal view that tries to give a critical response to *my* specific work. Therefore, beyond criticizing particular authors, the text problematizes some general trends that underlie present archaeological practices and mirror the modern impulse towards knowledge. Its starting point must be the recognition that today, underlying the apparent 'coming of age' of archaeology and the recent empowerment of professional archaeology around the world, there is a certain predominance of reactionary archaeology, particularly visible in greater use of neo-empirical methods, an emphasis on high-tech research, improved technical standards, heritage management and the professional marketplace. These last factors in particular appear to seek uniformity for the discipline as a whole, from research and practice to teaching and dissemination.

At the same time, archaeological practices and politics are increasingly localized, self-absorbed and destructive. Global theory, instead of being actively revised through a local perspective, is confronted with parochial squabbling. There is also a paralysis within theoretical archaeology, which does not offer new paradigms with which to read archaeological reality, and a domestication of critical archaeology, which has ended up being cushioned by the institutionalization of the 'critics' and their subsequent power games and strategies of academic reproduction. In fact, instead of theoretical production drying up (volumes such as Yoffee and Sherratt, 1993; Bietti et al., 1996; Andersson et al., 1998; Bate, 1998; Karlsson, 1998; Holtorf and Karlsson, 2000, would contradict this hypothesis), theoretical archaeology has ceased to set the working agenda. It has been replaced by an empiricist reaction (well represented in Mediterranean countries, e.g. Eiroa, 2000, as reported in Clottes, 1992: 227 but also found in the Anglo-American environment as noted by Coudart, 1999: 163) that emphasizes data and is doubtful of any type of grand theory or interpretation, losing sight of the epistemological evidence that all knowledge is interpretative to a lesser or greater degree. Cognitive or evolutionary orientations are good examples of this displacement of archaeological theory (Renfrew, 1982; 1994; Dougherty, 1985; Barton and Clark, 1997).

Meanwhile, the general context does not offer much help. Without needing to refer to current conditions (such as globalization), it is important to insist on the centrality that subjectivity and individuality have acquired in social theory and in social life. We have moved from foreseeing the death of the human in the 1970s, to predicting its resurrection in the 1990s. And meanwhile, we forget that the economic boom of the 1980s was based on the restoration of the individual as a consumer object. Design and

fashion, material culture and the body, were all essential elements for this strategy. In fact, although this has never been properly studied, the post-processualist arguments which recovered the individual as agent, free interpretation, and the active role of material culture, converged with neoliberalism, neo-hardline conservatism and the yuppies. We still need to undertake a social archaeology of postprocessualism that would critically explore the hypothesis that, despite its explicit political pretensions and the personal ideologies of its founders, postprocessualism may have been part of the will to knowledge of that will to power, in the same way that new archaeology had before been part of the functionalist-positivist will to knowledge of the will to power of technocratic modernity.

Since the early 1990s we have witnessed a certain neo-humanism in archae-ology. Although it is true that reference to the human being is necessary in order to 're-humanize' the world, present politics and practices repeatedly show that the rediscovery of the human is anything but innocent. The selec-tive forgetting of this evidence within an anthropology and archaeology bent on re-thinking the object of their disciplines from the self is part of a human-ist nostalgia faced with an internet present and a virtual future. Above all it is inseparable from the rampant neo-liberal ideology in the *Pax Americana*: it is its zero degree, or basic condition of possibility, since it gives the foun-dations for today's exclusive and profitable neo-individualism. I am not refer-ring here to the subject as an argument of Gidden's sociology, Gadamer's hermeneutics or intentional psychology (Dennett, 1987); but instead to the individual person who acts, increasingly more so, as the reference to and supreme justification for mundane common sense. But (contra Morris, 1994: 1) merely invoking the individual is not a way to explain the real. Increasingly the individual is indicated as the origin and end of what really exists: there is a disregard for the possibility of achieving a genuine understanding of the processes, forces and motivations which underlie social reality. If the indi-vidual is invoked then this should be done in a radical manner, accepting that the person is merely a point: a point in a space fractured by power relations and refitted by knowledge relations (i.e., cultural paradigms).

I am not saying that psychological anthropology was a failed project, or dismissing the relevance of the individual for understanding society; what I criticize is any purpose (current in everyday life) to (i) extend our category of subject to other societies (as argued by Latour, 1993; Strathern, 1995; Blanton et al., 1996: 65–6; Sökefeld, 1999), (ii) build up an understanding of the social from the self, and (iii) justify interpretation just on the individual. The subject (versus point [i]) is one of the core categories of western think-ing and played a fundamental function in shaping modernization (Taylor, 1989; Bermejo, 1989: 126–70; Giddens, 1997). Despite its centrality to modern societies, we cannot presume the same relevance in different societies (see in this respect Dumont, 1982; 1987; Carrithers et al., 1985; Viveiros, 1996) that enjoyed a sociocentric concept of the human (Shweder

and Bourne, 1984). In such contexts (versus point [ii]) interpreting social reality needs distinct categories (finding a new relation between society and the self as defended in Cohen, 1994: 192; or Hernando, 1999a), and thinking *alteridad* [otherness] as a way to reopen a general perspective of culture (as argued by Berthoud, 1992: 15, 163–99), but (versus point [iii]) moreover a distinct model of founding interpretation is needed. This matter constitutes the core problem of this article.

The individualistic humanism is redoubled in the present hegemony of hermeneutics. The last 20 years correspond to a hermeneutic direction within the modern system of knowledge. There has been (in the most progressive thought) a massive acceptance of hermeneutic values, even becoming an interpretative *koiné* which has formed the new shared dogma, the new intelligentsia of the period in which late modernity is breaking down, in which it is said that nothing exists but interpretation (Rorty, 1991). This proposal would be one of the key points of postmodern knowledge (Vattimo, 1991). The emphasis placed on the metaphor in the 1980s (the new intellectual medium upon which knowledge and science were to be reconstructed, e.g. Lakoff and Johnson, 1980 for epistemology, Lakoff and Turner, 1989 for literary criticism, Tilley, 1994, 1999 for archaeology), the emphasis on narration from the end of the 1980s (e.g., Cruz, 1987), and the emergence of narrative knowledge in the first years of the 1990s (e.g., McCullagh, 1984 or White, 1987 for narrative history, or Clifford and Marcus, 1986 for rhetorical anthropology) are the result of this hermeneutic turn and are largely neo-idealistic. Their difficulties within the field of history (and accordingly archaeology) have been fittingly demonstrated by the criticism of Bermejo (1994: 91–125; 1999: 207–25).

In the midst of this whirlpool, there has been an increasing influence of interpretative archaeology in the last 20 years. While reactionary archaeology (empiricism or some kind of renewed new archaeology) is still dominating the vast majority of our field (in the USA, Mediterranean countries, Latin America or Asia), for many of us the archaeological record, or even reality, may only be interpreted; our relationship with the elements which form it is only interpretative. However, the theoretical debate from the last decade about interpretation has reached a false ending: the excessive emphasis on interpretation did not have the necessary critical tools to control its negative effects. This false ending has provoked an explosion of hermeneutics: shielded by the principle that everything is interpretation, hermeneutics degenerated into hyper-hermeneutics. In 1990 Eco said that the 1990s would be the years limiting interpretation. He then devoted a full volume to rethink a limited or slight interpretation (Eco, 1992). But, 11 years later, this prediction has failed to come true. Therefore interpretation is still a problem. What do we mean by the interpretation of the archaeological record? How, when and why is it interpreted? Who does the interpreting? And overall: How could we discriminate between interpretations?

Requirements

To deal with this situation, archaeology has to re-socialize itself, meaning that it has to face up to social aspects, overcome the individualist reduction proposed by neo-liberalism and re-discover within social aspects the foundations of reality. The resocialization of archaeology does not mean creating a social archaeology understood as social prehistory, as foreseen by the new archaeology (Renfrew) and appropriately criticized by Tilley (1990), but instead understanding archaeology as a contemporaneous social practice that produces discourses about past social processes and present social values.

The social multidimensionality of archaeology implies at least three requirements:

- ▣ Faced with the exclusive hegemony of heritage management, or the technification of archaeological practice, it is worthwhile to reconsider the functions of the discipline, both its objectives and objects of study, i.e., its ontology.
- ▣ Faced with neo-empirical or hyper-hermeneutical temptations, it is necessary to reconsider its cognitive foundations, i.e., its epistemology, theory and method.
- ▣ And faced with local politics and neo-humanist strategies, it is necessary to propose a progressive synthesis between the universal, the local and the individual, i.e., to seek a critical, and even ethical foundation for archaeological practice.

All this has to be carried out by inventing points of contact with other disciplines, overcoming the narrow field of view of the habitual subjects of archaeological research and, instead, seeking areas of inquiry that are shared with other disciplines which also deal with the same problems. I deal with these points systematically in the following sections.

▣ THE FUNCTIONS OF ARCHAEOLOGY

More than anything else, we reconsider the objects studied by archaeology, and from these the functions of archaeological knowledge.

Objects of archeological practice

Because of its genealogy (in a Foucauldian sense) and character, the archaeological record (AR) has a complex and plural nature, in which multiple stress lines and planes of reality are interwoven. On one hand it has a dual reality, since it is both a document of historical societies and raw

material for modern societies; on the other, it has a bidimensional reality, as it is simultaneously a physical entity and an intellectual value, thing and concept, object and representation.

These two coordinates for defining the AR give rise to a complex matrix, because as an object the AR is both past and present, and as a representation it had an original meaning and has come to acquire another modern significance.

From this observation important implications are derived in order to conceive of and practice the interpretation of the AR. For example: which sense has to be produced by archaeological interpretation: the original or that of the present day? Which of its two dimensions has to be given priority: its value as archaeological material or its present-day use?

The nature (and accordingly the potential) of the AR offers us the challenge of adopting an attitude towards it which combines (1) the production of knowledge about history represented by the AR, with (2) the satisfaction of social demands connected to the AR and with (3) innovations in procedures and working criteria to deal with the AR for reaching the previous extents.

In this respect, the actual objectives of archaeology must be to evaluate the historical meaning of the elements which form the AR, to offer innovative methodologies of analysis and intervention in the AR and to transform this knowledge into a technology for the present-day management of the AR (reverted into archaeological heritage). In reality these imply constructing, reconstructing and deconstructing social memory through the AR (see below).

A re-socialized archaeology needs to consider cultural heritage, to assume that this is today's point of reference for archaeological practice but also needs to overcome the acritical and technocratic identifications with heritage which dissolve all archaeological work down into a professional and market-oriented perspective (Jones, 1984; Macinnes and Wickham-Jones, 1992), as anticipated in Hodder's words: 'Heritage is central to the issue of whether we are floating images or historical agents' (1992: 280; see also Boniface and Fowler, 1993; Prentice, 1993; González, 1996). The previous discussion about the concept of the AR makes it possible for us to propose that any remnant of culture, any remnant of identity (those of the present and of the past) comprises cultural heritage: monuments, material culture, archaeological material and much more. In fact, cultural heritage is made up of the remains of memory. A correct definition would say that cultural heritage is the representation of memory. But this conception is presentist and made from the perspective of our identity. The memory which is re-presented is only our own memory. What then happens to the memory of other cultures and identities? What happens to the monuments which exist despite ourselves, forgotten and affected by our (or others') destructive actions? What happens with this oblivion? Despite running the

risk of arriving at a holistic, overly comprehensive definition of the notion of heritage, we have to accept that cultural heritage is the vestige of memory and oblivion. It is formed by the ruins of memory, what we remember about our own identity, what we decide to overlook about ourselves and what we no longer remember about other cultures. Whereas our memory is made up of both material and immaterial elements (ideas, stories, knowledge), the memory of otherness is only presented to us in material form, either ruins, remains or effects of past actions.

In this way we ensure that cultural heritage includes those elements (pieces and fragments) which the ever-changing strategies of the technologies of memory decide to evaluate as being significant today, and insignificant tomorrow. Cultural heritage could be a way to avoid the strategies (Karp and Lavine, 1991) to manipulate past and present through heritage displays.

While avoiding the imperialism of the present and the triumphant identities of the past, this definition poses practical problems. By including ruins from another time within cultural heritage, we accept the obligation of managing them in the present, protecting, preserving and studying them (Quagliuolo, 1996). Just as by widening the concept of heritage plurality, multiculturality, diversity and multilocality is guaranteed, so we should guarantee the conservation of this extended heritage. Once established, heritage, unlike memory, cannot support a process of selective preservation. We do not only have a right to memory: we have a right to forget; and above all the memory of others has its own rights, usually forgotten by ourselves. The rights to cultural heritage become rights of cultural heritage, the right to be conserved, studied, valued and used independently of the strategies of memory and identity, the masquerades of knowledge and power (see the debate in Hispania Nostra, 1997 in regard to these topics).

Finally, in a social archaeology it is necessary to reconsider the relationships between time and space, to forget one and concentrate more on the other. The displacement of a hegemony of time towards a recovery of space is useful for attempts to consider the social landscape, and also historical problems (i.e., Bermejo, 1994: 139–53; Hernando, 1999b). But it goes beyond that; it represents, for Jameson, the oscillation between the cultural order of modernity and postmodernity. Although this may well be the case, it is in reality a much more deeply-rooted subject. Spatial thinking characterizes structuralism (from Lévi-Strauss to the dying breaths of the post-structuralist wave), in the same way that it has always characterized a line of thought which is an alternative to the hegemonic metaphysics (as suggested in Bermejo, 1989: 160–7 or Criado, 1993: 15–19) within which we may include Bartolomé de las Casas, Rousseau or Nietzsche. So it was for primitive humanity (I always use the concept 'primitive' in Clastres's 1979 sense: Criado, 1989), those historical formations which tried to avoid the teleology of time, the destruction of space or social division.

Objectives of archaeological knowledge

Archaeology is (or should be?) ready to consider the final question of all scientific disciplines: what is knowledge for? In our case, what is archaeology for? Using a re-socialized archaeology, it is possible to answer this question in three different and successive ways.

- Archaeological practice establishes the point up to which prehistoric knowledge is a type of re-cognition, through which modern societies legitimize themselves by creating interpretative models of the past which redouble their contemporaneity. So critical study of archaeology may increase critical conscience about our own reality, and would serve to think about our society and our own present, seeing how each social context creates its own image of the past and thus recreates itself. Archaeology would then be a discourse about ourselves before being about others, whose critical nature would make it possible to discover the rationality of the present in certain phenomena (the interpretation of the past, the concept of time, temporality and history, the notion of social evolution, etc.). In this way archaeology is a technology for criticism which acts, like history, to deconstruct the relationship between society and the past, and shows how this is a construction which legitimizes the present.

- Archaeological practice discovers long-term socio-cultural processes in prehistory, fundamental in the history of humanity, which may only be perceived from afar, in cycles of observation which transcend the limits of history and antiquity and sink into the rich loam of prehistory; these include inequality, private property, the origins of the state, the development of peasant societies, etc., as well as the domestication of animals and plants or the process of hominization itself. It would also encompass the transformation of the patterns of rationality, the change in ways of thinking and the progress of what Lévi-Strauss would have called the human mind in prehistory; the study of these subjects is only possible if prehistory is included, as only this presents us with realities which are radically different from those which we know. The weight of otherness is greater in prehistory than in anthropology. In this sense archaeology is a technology of memoirs, and serves better than history or anthropology to study, recognize, reconstruct and historicize processes which are only visible in the lengthy period of prehistory.

- Archaeological practice proposes positive forms of action in order to organize, protect, conserve and re-assess archaeological heritage, or, put another way, to manage a huge and important collection of cultural heritage, to offer active solutions for managing the AR in the present day, and to thus contribute to transforming the elements

within it into cultural resources for the present. Here archaeology is a technology for the management of cultural heritage and serves, unlike history (which keeps to the study of archives and the past), to construct an applied knowledge which makes it possible to resolve problems and conflicts which the remains of yesterday cause to the present.

Archaeology is therefore resolved between a deconstructive function, another which is reconstructive and another which is simply constructive, which are also successively ways of translating, understanding and transforming social reality. And, although these references appear to place archaeology at first within, then above and finally apart from history, in reality they bury the roots of its practice in a good theory of history. Archaeology cannot exist if it is not within a theory of history and society.

These are the principal lines which archaeological research may follow. These consider theory and practice, theoretical groundwork and applicability, fundamental investigation and applied orientation as indivisible and complementary horizons of the same task. More specifically, the option of critically linking archaeology with cultural heritage management repositions the relationships of the discipline with social reality and gives it a new character which helps to transform it (Criado, 1996; Junyent, 1999).

▒ THE VICISSITUDES OF INTERPRETATION

I now consider the cognitive foundations of archaeology, reviewing, albeit briefly, the epistemology, theory and method of interpretation. I deal with the analysis of the conditions, limits and possibilities of interpretation. I argue that we should control interpretation: instead of stimulating a free and endless interpretative spiral, we need to provide a context for interpretation.

The archaeology of interpretation

In order to focus upon the debate regarding the interpretation of the AR, it is necessary to take as a starting point two theoretical reflections derived from a critical philosophy of modernity that will function as principles of practical action. I formulate these principles in terms of dilemmas, and therefore refer to one as the dilemma of the present and to the other as the dilemma of reason (understanding 'reason' in a Hegelian sense as the pattern of rationality which underlies the phenomenal reality of a historical epoch).

The dilemma of the present: we need to create methodologies for positive action in the present, within a postpositivist social and theoretical context.

The dilemma of reason: we must recognize that reason is configured subjectively, but that subjectivity does not constitute reason.

Both principles may be applied to all interpretative practice, and chiefly to the interpretation of the AR: interpretation is a subjective construction and as such is neither positivist knowledge nor may it establish foundations for rationality; however, it should be aimed at positive action. In reality, we are faced with two new dilemmas which are partly the consequence, partly the cause and partly the reflection of the two previous: the dilemma of knowledge and the dilemma of interpretation.

The dilemma of knowledge: in contrast to the proposals of positivist thinking, we know that an understanding of reality cannot be based on explanatory objectivism, but that instead it is always an interpretive practice. However, in contrast to the phenomenological tradition, I argue that hermeneutic subjectivism does not offer any kind of alternative, as it does not make it possible to lay the foundations for positive types of action (i.e. of homogeneity of opinion, of correspondence between the real and its representation, of the legitimization of knowledge).

The dilemma of interpretation: therefore the question within a post-positivist context is finding a subjectivist methodology for representing the world which may be applied objectively in order to act positively on the world. At this turn of the century the question is how to transform the world with interpretation without falling into the trap of merely transforming or (even worse) reifying individual subjective states.

In my proposal, these dilemmas adopt the following morphology: the AR is signified through interpretations, to a lesser or greater degree, of subjective origin and nature. They are therefore conjectural and contingent, and do not allow for positive action. Is a particular type of hermeneutic liberalism ('free interpretation, free consumption') consequently the only practical alternative to relate with the AR? Must an explosion of free subjectivities surrounding the AR be accepted? Must the liberty of manipulation of the AR and, through it, of prehistory and history, be allowed?

Or is there a chance of reaching an interpretation which controls subjectivist excess and has a capacity for positivist action? What are the elements which support it? In case there is, what conditions should this interpretation comply with? How may these elements be adapted to attain this?

The interpretation of the archaeological record

Concept, models and politics of interpretation   The most common definition of interpretation is 'discovering the intention of an author or subject when he or she did something'. Thus, postprocessual archaeology, which has

contributed strongly to the recuperation and re-establishment of interpretation, understands the construction of archaeological knowledge as 'an interpretative action which consists of the deciphering, by a present-day contextualized subject, of a historical record or "text", actively created by other subjects'. In this context, deciphering is, essentially, discovering the original intention of the subjects who constructed the 'text' being considered (Hodder, 1991, and most recent adaptations in Tilley, 1994; Hodder et al., 1995 or Thomas, 1996).

Yet even this simple definition comes up against unavoidable problems (see criticism in Johnsen and Olsen, 1992). The mere metaphor of naming sociocultural products 'texts' could be problematized. But the most important questions raised go beyond that point: to whom does the intention we are trying to discover belong? The author, making it a given intention? The interpreted text itself, therefore making it an autonomous intention? Or the interpreter, making it a free intention? Interpretation may be the search for the *intentio auctoris*, the *intentio operis* and the *intentio lectoris*. Although it may appear obvious, it is often forgotten that legitimate interpretation should move among these three levels of meaning simultaneously (Eco, 1990; 1992). Today it should be accepted that present-day readers do not make an interpretation but instead take part in a reproductive practice, related to a text which has significant capacities independent of its original context, and which were produced in a context and with a matrix of particular values. The philosophical problem of interpretation lies, as Eco said, in establishing the conditions of interaction between ourselves and something offered to us (the interpreted text), and whose construction obeys particular constrictions (its original context of production). He added: 'this is the problem with Peirce's philosophy, with Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, with Piaget's psychology, with cognitive sciences . . . with Kant, and with epistemology from Popper to Kuhn' (Eco, 1992: 18). Vattimo (1995: 41) makes a similar comment, saying that existentialism, neo-Kantism, phenomenology, neopositivism and analytical philosophy agree that there is no experience of the truth except as an interpretative action.

Once again, archaeology offers a good metaphor for the complexity of interpretative practice, as the authentic interpretation of the AR implies: the archaeologist, the original context of the production of the AR and, between them, the postdepositional history (including both the natural processes and the cultural traditions which re-interpreted it).

When we refer to 'interpretation', its original 'genealogy' (prior to being rescued by German romanticism and idealism, for example, by Schleirmacher and Dilthey, in order to explain the products of the human spirit) is often forgotten. The *hermeneutiké tékhne* was born in Greece in order to understand myths, was applied in Rome to define the meaning of judicial texts, was used by primitive Christianity to interpret the Scriptures, the texts of the Fathers and the conciliatory texts, and was consolidated in the debate

between reform and counter-reform regarding by whom (the reader or the Church) and how the Scriptures should be interpreted (Domínguez, 1993; Ferraris, 2000). The origins of interpretation are anything but innocent. From such beginnings, three principal models are used to conceive interpretative practice:

- Firstly, interpretation according to delayed Enlightenment (Gadamer, Giddens), which emphasizes interpretation as a circle or interaction between the individual and the group, the horizons of intersubjectivity, intercommunication between subjective horizons and, in the end, the production of a consensus.
- Secondly, interpretation according to the North American postmodernists of the 80s (Hassan, Venturi, Jenks) who emphasized interpretation as an instrument of constitution and reaffirmation of individuality, an unchained rhetoric, a free aesthetic, creative reasoning and, above all, individualism, but closed understanding of the social (as pointed out recently by Anderson, 2000: 29–36). The best expression of such orientation is in the so-called theory of heritage interpretation (Tilden, 1977; Padró, 1996).
- We finally have interpretation according to poststructural thought (Derrida, Bordieu, Vattimo), which emphasizes the impossibility of all interpretative reductionism, the de-subjectivization of interpretations, their intercontextuality but autonomy, the reason of language and, consequently, the illusion of consensus and individualism.

Conditions, limits and possibilities for interpretation   *On conditions and limits*: It may appear highly provocative to argue that 'the initiative of interpretation belongs completely to the subject who interprets', yet it should not be taken to the extreme of giving this complete priority: 'even the most radical deconstructionist accepts the idea that there are interpretations which are completely unacceptable. This means that the interpreted text imposes restrictions upon its interpreters. The limits of interpretation coincide with the rights of the text (which does not mean that they coincide with the rights of the author)' (Eco, 1992: 19).

It is necessary and possible to define the limits of interpretation. Interpretation always supposes a subjectivity; thus it generally leads to a reconstruction of subjectivity, and an exaltation or culmination of the subjective.

On conditions and possibilities: Yet there are ways of controlling this excess of subjectivity, the risk of subjective reconstruction inherent in all interpretative practice. Bearing in mind the interrelation of subjectivity-context-rationality, knowing that if all interpretation needs a subject (an 'I') in order

to be constituted, then it also needed one in the past (in the original context of the interpretation) in order to exist.

In this way, interpretation does not only refer to a subjectivity, but also (although this is often forgotten) to a context and a rationality. Without rationality (a basic cultural paradigm) there is no interpretation. Neither will this occur without a context, in which a subjectivity interacts with other elements and with a social process.

This is what forms the horizon of intelligibility of interpretation, i.e. the base upon which this may be formed. This horizon is therefore not only the 'I' and individual intention, in which case interpretation could not be understood socially, nor would it have either social validity or function.

There are certain bases in order to define the possibilities of interpretation. Firstly, interpretation always needs a context or horizon of subjectivity or rationality. Secondly, this is a dual horizon, actual and inherent to the subject who interprets, and previous and original to the subject-object that is interpreted. Thirdly, this dual horizon is what shapes the effective horizon of interpretation, the foundations upon which the interpreted otherness come into existence.

In fact interpretation is an intellectual operation with a triadic base. Interpretation occurs when knowledge is obtained (an enunciation is made) regarding a particular object (a part of the AR) through its interaction with a horizon of actual subjectivity (of the interpreter) and its calibration or comparison with the original horizon of subjectivity (or a model which was close to it) of the object considered.

This triadic model of conceiving interpretation, unlike other models and as an alternative to them, has important implications for understanding social reality.

On the reinterpretation of interpretation: If explanation is not possible and the interpretation is insufficient, with marginal subjectivity not offering an alternative, we must construct a third way of interpreting. I call this a third way, as from an epistemological point of view it is a third alternative, located between the explanationist, positivist and objectivist alternatives, and the hermeneutic, phenomenological and subjectivist alternatives. There is a certain consensus to demand this sort of third alternative among old processualisms and radical postprocessualism, (e.g. Djindjian, 1996), 'beyond objectivism and relativism' (as demanded by Wylie, 1993: 25). And yet, does this third way exist?

I believe it does. Some others also agree: in fact Wylie (e.g. 1993) managed to discriminate between interpretations. However, this alternative has nothing to do with the alternative of the postmodern right, nor the social democratic third way, since (quite paradoxically) this parallels the second epistemological alternative. 'Politically' opposed to it, it criticizes the hermeneutic excess (smoothed to entropy) of modern times. It accepts,

following poststructural thinking, that postmodernity is hermeneutic. But it takes from the enlightened alternative the need to seek intersubjective horizons of reference for interpretation, and from late positivism the requirement of contrasting interpretations so far as possible. And it returns to poststructural thinking to seek references, methodologies and guarantees for interpretation. For more details, I recommend Vattimo (1995) and Eco (1992).

In this way, placing ourselves between the two classic epistemological alternatives of modernity, we opt for producing a knowledge which is in some way interpretative (as it may only appear as a narration or interpretative description, as it is constructed through narration and is expressed in the form of a particular type of story), although instead of stopping with an endless hermeneutic impulse, we opt for controlling interpretations and producing meaning objectivizing and contextualizing them.

The interpretation has to desubjectivize itself, to overcome the possibilities of an excessive subjectivism in which subjectivity has lost its way. To do so it is necessary to contextualize the narrative and to domesticate interpretation through the conjunction of two methods which appear successively: a method to contrast the validity of interpretative hypotheses, which is then completed by a method for interpreting these interpretations. It may appear paradoxical to 'interpret an interpretation', but in reality this is an operation to objectivize interpretation: the interpretative proposals are only valid in relation to the subjective context within which they are enunciated, although this does not mean that subjects which are outside this context may comprehend and participate in their significance. My proposal (outlined in Criado, 2000: 193) would be to unfold archaeological interpretation into two moments in time: a first moment in which the validity of the interpretative hypothesis is checked, and a second in which this hypothesis is decoded, translated and signified: its meaning is discovered.

The first may be carried out by examining if the regularity or structure described by the interpretative hypothesis reappears in other environments or codes of the same cultural formation analysed. It would therefore have to be in areas of theoretical principle (with structural-materialist roots) which favour the structural compatibility between codes of the same culture. The second may be carried out by incorporating different horizons of subjectivity upon which it is possible to contextualize archaeological interpretation. This entails introducing meaning not from our subjectivity alone, but from other rationality, through a contextual model which good reasons (theoretical and empirical) or simple common sense will show is justified. (Appealing to common sense may appear perilous: I do so in the same way as Eco affirms that in many cases, particularly those where 'the text is, simultaneously, object and parameter of its interpretations', the best way of interpreting the intention of a text is to abide by the text itself [Eco, 1992: 16].)

The criticism of interpretation I have offered here impels us to adopt, as an interpretative reference (as a horizon of intelligibility of interpretation), a model of rationality which may be that of the original context of what is interpreted, or, given the practical impossibility in prehistoric archaeology of contacting the original context, one which comes close to it, and which functions as an external subjective instance (meta-subjective) in order to constitute interpretation.

An objective interpretation would be made from within the actual horizon of subjectivity to which the interpreted phenomenon belongs, instead of from the pure subjectivity of the interpreter. Such horizon will not be available in prehistory, as the linguistic subjects who had spoken about it have disappeared. Nevertheless, it is possible to construct models of a hypothetical nature based on the theory of history, ethnology, structural anthropology etc.

Implications for a post-interpretive archaeology   I now reveal some practical implications of the previous observations which may function as draft guidelines for the interpretation of the AR. The proposal is post-interpretive while it is still interpretative (as Lyotard, 1987, says that postmodernity is still modern).

- It is necessary to apply criteria of economy of methods in interpretation, as proposed by Eco.
- From a wider perspective we may recognize above all that the phenomenological intuition upon which Lévi-Strauss' structuralism was based, inasmuch as it proposed that there was a correspondence between the structures of the mind and those of the world, today appears quite plausible, and it is possible to understand the world, given that we form part of it. This point, together with the following two, give us an operational foundation from which to obtain plausible interpretations with positive value.
- On a more particular scale, although still moving at a theoretical level (the step of interpreting interpretative hypotheses), we must recognize that archaeology is within a discourse of history, and it is only within a theory of history that interpreting the AR produces meaning. Historical or social theory take the place of the original horizon of subjectivity in the interpretative triad which we examined earlier in this article.
- In the case of distant pasts, particularly in the case of the AR from prehistoric periods, the place of this theory of history may be occupied by patterns of cultural rationality (ways of thinking, horizons of subjectivity, whatever they may be called) derived from anthropological investigation. Examples of these would be Lévi-

Strauss' savage and domesticated thought, Sahlins and Shanin's peasant rationality, etc. (as proposed in Criado, 1993, 2000).

- In some cases interpretation may be derived almost directly from the actual materiality of the elements being interpreted, since the original sense which produced these elements may have determined their form (as proposed in Criado, 1995). This is what happens, for example, with monuments, and which makes it possible to carry out a symbolic archaeology of the landscape (Criado, 1989).

- The last three points convey sufficient resources to resist the alternatives of manipulation and simplification in the interpretation of the AR which some subfields (or specialists) of an essentially technocratic character propose. It should be understood that we are referring to some professional or technical attitudes towards archaeological heritage.

- In the final extreme, the proposal 'stop making sense' is also a good practical principle for interpretation: it means holding back an interpretative impulse or frenzy which gives nothing to the interpreted phenomenon and which only reports subjective satisfaction to the interpreter.

- Beyond this, it must be assumed that interpretation is already present in the process of constructing knowledge.

FINALLY, SUBJECTIVITY AGAIN

Let me finally consider the relationships between archaeological practice and subjectivity, in order to shed light on a critical, even ethical, perspective for our discipline, a common horizon within which we may reconcile individual, group and universal elements.

Today, as always, the strategies of individualization or the construction of individuals are a basic instrument of the system of knowledge-power. This is not only based on subjects, but also on certain types of subjects adapted to the needs and characteristics of each socio-cultural system (Thomas, 1989).

As we stand at the threshold of the third millennium, when the modern order reaches its end and we are on the verge of truly entering the postmodern age, we feel the urge to construct new models of subjectivity, and new ways of relating to the world.

The final meaning of archaeology could precisely be to contribute to this project. From the interpretation of the AR, through the comprehension of other forms of subjectivity (former cultural models), other subjectivities (the other actors involved in the process of interpretation), of our own subjectivity (or the experience of ourselves successively forming and dissolving our

identity in the heart of interpretative practice), through seeing that all interpretation refers to oneself, others and those who are not present, of subjectivity itself, cultural intersubjectivity and subjectivity. It is in fact a set of intentions as much as it is a set of references, of presences and evasions, a framework of reasons and dialogues both affirming and dismembering the 'I', an exercise of communication and participation, it is not difficult to foresee the opening of the fundamental experience of a new model of subjectivity.

A social archaeology, together with the deconstruction of the traditional practice of interpretation, ought to contribute to the urgent project (urgent in the crisis situation of late modernity) of constructing new patterns of subjectivity, which once and for all reconcile the post-industrial individual, split between the three successive identities of body, name and spirit, fragmented between the three opposing loyalties to the 'I', the community and humankind. This would make it possible to produce the conditions whereby a true postmodernity is possible, a horizon which we may anticipate, but which does not yet exist as a historical experience. An experience which, however, we are in need of.

In the mid 1980s Olsen and I developed in Cambridge the following principle (intended to be a form of resistance to academic hypocrisy): radical archaeology is not a way of writing but a way of being. Fifteen years later we may ask ourselves if we are still 'being', or if we have 'been'. Yet these 15 years have shown us all that, if Nietzsche could define the tragedy of modern individuals at the end of the nineteenth century as the dilemma between 'being Professor in Basle or choosing to be God', then today, when the system makes every individual a genius, we may paraphrase it to thus define the tragedy of the postmodern subject as the conflict between choosing to be God or a simple and honest professional. I therefore doubt what it is to be radical.

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FELIPE CRIADO BOADO took his history degree at the University of Santiago de Compostela, Spain in 1982, and completed his PhD on the origins of monumentality. He was until recently a senior lecturer on prehistory in the University of Santiago de Compostela and is now Research Professor of Prehistory at the Spanish High Council for Research (CSIC), and his research is focused on the archaeology of monumentality, the socio-cultural construction of landscape, theoretical archaeology and practical applications of archaeology for the management of cultural heritage. He is the Director of the Laboratory of Archaeology and Cultural Forms, a research unit which combines the investigation of the archaeological record with applied work to protect and socialize the archaeological heritage. He is a member of the Executive Board of the European Association of Archaeologists.
[email: phcriado@usc.es or pharpa@usc.es]