

Archaeological Theory: Progress or Posture?, edited by Iain M. Mackenzie. *Worldwide Archaeology Series Vol. 11*. Avebury/Ashgate Publishing, Aldershot, Great Britain, and Brookfield, VT, USA, 1994. xviii + 164 pp. \$51.95 cloth.

by

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What might Friedrich Nietzsche, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Jacques Derrida, Anthony Giddens, Claude Levi-Strauss, Louis Binford, Michael Shanks, and Daniel Miller have in common? What are the relationships between McGuire's *A Marxist Archaeology* (1992) and *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* (Persig 1974)? If you like the conjunction of paradigms from philosophy and psychology, reflections upon science and the humanities, refreshing reconsiderations of the processual and post-processual debates, and mental gymnastics, you will undoubtedly enjoy a majority of the essays found in this unique book.

The goal of this volume is to reflect upon recent theoretical issues in archaeology. The commentators are, in the main, practicing archaeologists educated in the British tradition with substantial backgrounds in social anthropology, social theory, and philosophy. Therefore, some North American-trained anthropological anthropologists may find the scope of this interesting and introspective volume uncustomary and controversial, perhaps even disjointed and diffused. The work goes beyond the "Old" and "New" Archaeology paradigms, modernism and post-modernism, objectivist and processual versus contextualist and post-processualist approaches, as well as other theoretical (and methodological) dichotomies. A majority of the authors are concerned about the major debates on archaeological theory that have taken place during the past two decades — for example, science and interpretation, and processualism and post-processualism. Likewise, the papers concern the interrelationships of archaeology and contemporary social theory and draw from philosophy, the structure of science, gender studies, and ethics, among other humanities and social and physical sciences. In sum, the book engages an important question: Has contemporary theory in archaeology moved from constructive, "progressive" dialogues to a series of defensive, intractable positions or "postures?" Mackenzie also states that the idea that archaeologists "... can disengage their personal, social, and political context from their work must also be construed as posturing" (p. 26). There are many fresh voices and divergent opinions presenting some invigorating ideas and challenging theoreticians of archaeological discourse.

At the time of its publication Iain Mackenzie, the volume's editor, was a lecturer in the Department of Politics at The Queen's University of Belfast and a doctoral candidate on contemporary social and political thought at Glasgow University. A majority of the twelve contributors were archaeologists holding master's degrees or working toward doctoral degrees, and eight of the authors were affiliated with Glasgow University. Two others were British-trained archaeologists (Cambridge and University of Bradford), and two held graduate degrees from North American institutions.

This very expensive 182-page volume, published only in a hardcover edition, contains an introduction, four parts comprising twelve chapters (varying in length from 4 to 22 pages), and a general index of less than three pages. Each chapter has separate sets of references — ranging from none to 53 — and there are no illustrations (save a collage of Joan Miro lithographs as cover art). I shall review the salient points found in each chapter and then reflect upon the volume as a whole.

Mackenzie's introductory essay entitled "Progress and Posture in Theoretical Archaeology" sets the tone for the contributions that follow. In his remarks, the editor states that he hopes to demonstrate that there is a common concern running through many of the papers in this volume, and he comments that these essays

...examine many different issues, in a variety of styles, relating to current debates in theoretical archaeology. From feminist perspectives on methodology to the question of categorization in Bronze Age metalwork to re-evaluating the application of textual metaphors regarding material culture, the diversity of these issues testifies to the richness of contemporary research in the area. ...there is a desire to avoid the paralyzing impasse created by the theoretical debates of the early and mid-1980s; a desire to recast the issues in a way that emphasises the multi-faceted character of archaeological practice without privileging one aspect over another, a desire to search out conceptual tool-boxes that can be taken from the field, to the library and 'outside' archaeology.

In addition, he points out that by recognizing that the "problem" exists does not imply that there will be a single solution. Mackenzie outlines four possible responses to the "'problems' of methodological enquiry in archaeology": 1) The option of "practical skepticism" in which the pragmatic role of archaeology in the public sector is emphasized (Moore's essay in this volume). 2) The option of "generating methodological principles" that aid to conjoin disparate factions (Wylie's contribution). 3) The option of redefining the "character of archaeology" (Shanks and Harry's articles). And, 4) the option of questioning "limited transcendence," including the critique of attempts to devise "grand theories" (Campbell, Bartley and Barrett, and MacGregor's writings in this volume).

The book is organized into four parts: 1) Politics and Experience (two chapters); 2) Self-Reflexivity and Practice (four chapters); 3) Agency, Time, and Categorisation (three chapters); and 4) New Approaches (three chapters). The first section is designed to introduce the dominant themes of recent debates in theoretical archaeology (Wylie versus Shanks). Both authors move beyond simple restatements or summaries of their previous positions, thereby adding substance to the debate.

Alison Wylie, a frequent contributor to treatises on archaeological theory, contributes a provocative essay entitled "Facts and Fictions: Writing Archaeology in a Different Voice" (16 pp., 53 references). This contribution is a revision of her 1992 Canadian Archaeological Association banquet address published originally in *Canadian Journal of Archaeology* (1992b). She is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Western Ontario, having received her Ph.D. from SUNY-Binghamton, where her dissertation was "History and Philosophy of the Social and Behavioral Sciences." Wylie considers the diverse challenges that archaeology faces both from within and outside of the discipline, comments on the politicization of archaeological science, and sees archaeology as strengthened by divergent interests and perspectives. Likewise, she notes that archaeology is "a thoroughly social, political undertaking" and that archaeologists "have responsibilities that go well beyond the limits of their professional community" (pp. 14-15).

The second chapter, "Archaeology: Theories, Themes, and Experience" (22 pp., no references) is a dialogue between Mackenzie and Michael Shanks (Lecturer in Archaeology at the University of Wales, Lampeter). The latter has made his theoretical positions clear in a number of works (Shanks 1992; Shanks and Tilley 1987, 1992). The dialogue centers upon the need for an assessment of archaeological theory or a critical self-consciousness, hence, the need for a "theoretical archaeology." Shanks opts for the use of the term "interpretive" archaeology rather than post-processual but decries labels and talks about theory as an attitude. Labels, he states, "can stop good aspects of outmoded schools being taken seriously" (p. 22); Mackenzie challenges him by proposing the idea of posturing rather than progress in theory building (hence, the subtitle of the book). Shanks is "more concerned about the lack of research funding and the means of its dissemination" (p. 21) and that archaeological theory might become just another "expert field" or specializa-

tion. Archaeology, Shanks contends, should be a critical and liberating science, and he incorporates archaeology in that branch of the sociology of knowledge which has focused on science (p. 24).

Section two contains four chapters (Chps. 3-6) devoted to the relevance of archaeology outside of the "rarified confines of academia" (p. xiv). Chapter 3, "The Ironies of Self-Reflection in Archaeology" (14 pp., 32 references) is a thoughtful essay prepared by Lawrence E. Moore. He holds an M.A. in anthropology from the University of Montana and is now an archaeologist with the County of Fairfax, Virginia. Moore promotes an American perspective and considers the funding of archaeological research and trends that produce archaeological work that is obfuscatory and over specialized. Self reflection (the concept of "reflexivity") is accomplished by hypothesis testing, peer review, published critique, and commentary. Processual archaeology is said to be dehumanized, while post-processual archaeologists, who wish to liberate the individual from society, claim that they can humanize archaeology by reintroducing cultural content into the literature (pp. 55-53). However, Moore contends that this denies the scientific foundation of social studies and is just another way of dehumanizing archaeology. Citing Hodder (1985), Moore states that "obscuring the debate will only damage the credibility of the discipline with the public (p. 45).

Chapter 4, "A Reply to Moore" (4 pp., no references) by Ian Mackenzie considers the political relevance of the past as a cultural phenomenon, the role of archaeologists as "experts," and the need to be accountable to the public are considered. Mackenzie refutes Moore's self-reflexivity argument contending that a result would be the "downfall of the discipline," and states that Moore's "worry is not (primarily) ontologico-epistemological but pragmatic" and implies that there is a "hidden [political] agenda in Moore's critique of self-reflexivity" (p. 57).

Chapter 5 is Moore's rebuttal entitled "Getting back to Work: Reply to Mackenzie" (5 pp., 9 references). Mackenzie believes that Moore is a post-processual archaeologist — but the latter denies this. Moore's reply considers the role of "the public," scientific objectivity, distinctions between theory and practice, and the heterogeneity of the past (i.e. many "pasts" rather than one "past"), and he defends the position that self-reflection/reflexivity is relevant to American society. Interested readers may wish to review the articles on Robert Precuel's edited work *Processual and PostProcessual Archaeologies: Multiple Ways of Knowing the Past* (1991).

Chapter 6, "The Use of Theory in Archaeology" (11 pp., 31 references) is authored by Pete Rush, a specialist on Roman archaeology and mortuaria. Rush holds a master's degree in archaeological science and a doctorate from the University of Bradford, and is a research assistant in Bradford's Department of Archaeological Sciences. He examines the use of theory in archaeology, how it has been employed, and what effect it has had upon archaeological practice. In addition, he ponders the links between theory, practice, and data as exemplified by North American theoreticians (Binford; Clarke; Watson, LeBlanc and Redman; and Trigger) contrasted with British practitioners (Hodder; McGuire; Shanks and Tilley; Tilley; and Thomas, among others). Public perceptions of archaeology and questions of federal support for science, scientism, the New Archaeology, process, post-process, post-structuralist, and Marxist archaeology are among the topics considered. He writes (pp. 73-74) that

theory has been used for more than the provision of explanatory schema; its role in providing authoritative backing for particular archaeological accounts is clear in the claims of scientific objectivity of processualists through the use of positivist philosophy and in the use of the work of French post-structuralists within post-processual archaeology.... Theory has also been utilised in attempts to reduce the level of indeterminacy in archaeology. That is, a new theoretical elaboration is presented as enabling the analysis of either new phenomena or phenomena where previously the level of archaeological information available was thought inadequate.

Rush, therefore, concludes that the use of theory in archaeology is “problematical” because it cannot be constructed in a neutral, objective way independently of all social and political influence and neither can it be tested against an independent data set.” (p. 74) No theory is sufficiently comprehensive to fully account for human behavior, and Rush suggests that post-processualism has the unfortunate result of closing off archaeological discourse.

Three chapters (Chps. 7-9) are included in part three, “Agency, Time, and Categorisation.” Chapter 7, “Post-Processual Archaeology: The Hidden Agenda of a Secret Agent” (13 pp., 36 references) is prepared by Gavin MacGregor, who holds a B.Sc. in archaeology from Glasgow University and is taking post-graduate work at the same institution. MacGregor reviews the complex issues of the relationships between “structure” and “agency” in archaeological texts and discusses what he terms the “myth” of post-processual archaeology, citing social theorists such as Anthony Giddens, Foucault, and Hodder. He states that “there has been little seriously critical attention to the concept of the human agent” (p. 81): the human agent vs. a human agent (a humanistic metanarrative). Archaeology, he perceives “... is empowered by its very concern with the past ... the plurality of that past is noted by archaeologists but often lost through reference to the agent” (p. 89), archaeology needs to “engage creatively with the material residues of the past in a critical and challenging manner, rather than engage in constant self-criticism that at times has the appearance of superficial political correctness” (p. 89).

Chapter 8, “Time and the Privilege of Retrospect” (22 pp., 41 references) is authored by Robert Squair, a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Glasgow, who is researching the Neolithic of the West Isles. Squair addresses the issue of time as a philosophical presupposition and the ontological foundations of archaeological time. He seeks to deny the ontological supremacy of abstract chronology over the various social identities attributed to time in social production (p. 109). The past, he argues, has become a contemporary social construction. Time is interpreted in experiential rather than chronological terms and, therefore, is a “dimension as opposed to a measure” of agency (p. 110). He elaborates three statements about the concept of time: 1) it has not been adequately theorized nor understood in social history, 2) it is a fundamental factor integral to social agency, and 3) it is an abstract phenomenon, an experiential notion of our temporal dimension chronological problems. Chronology is an epistemological umbrella, while chronologies are social constructions. Squair argues that a dichotomy exists between abstract linear chronological time (a tacit form of pragmatic narcissism and a covert form of social time) and indigenous “capricious” social temporality. The archaeologist resides in the future of some particular past’s present; and enjoys the privilege of retrospect. Shanks and Tilley (1992:9), view the past as completed and perfect, while the present is ongoing, incomplete, and imperfect. Squair criticizes Binford (1986) for not recognizing that “archaeological interpretation is a product of his own social context, one still fragmentary and contingency, its infinite nature unrevealed, always imbued with uncertainty, with possibilities, these remaining perhaps to detract from or enhance his stated intellectual position subsequently” (p. 106).

Louise Turner is the author of Chapter 9, “The Classification of Bronze Age Metalwork: a Case of Missing the Wood for the Trees” (14 pp., 2 references). She is a graduate of the University of Glasgow with an M.A. honors in archaeology and is completing her doctoral dissertation on the Bronze Age metalwork of southeast England at the same university. Turner considers the perception of change over time as a component of archaeological typologies and addresses issues of approaches to classification and examines the weaknesses of chronological assumptions based upon traditional typological generalizations. Turner then applies a number of theories derived from philosophy, psychology, and linguistics to the analysis of hoards of Middle and Later Bronze Age metalwork from southeast England and proposes alternative explanations for change within the corpus and which is dependent upon the changing context of use. Cognitive psychologist E. Rosch (1978) proposed that categories have three vertical and three horizontal levels (superordinate, base, and subordinate) and Turner suggests that human agents operate most comfortably at the middle or base level, where categories are clearly distinguishable from one another (p. 120). In addition she challenges the

assumption found in some classificatory schemes that these constructs are valid reflection of what operated in the past. She also provides an historical overview of archaeological classifications and alternatives considered previously (see Miller 1984), and considers some problems inherent in typological classification as addressed by processualists' classification (imposing order) vs. categorization (natural order).

"Part Four: New Approaches," contains three chapters (Chps. 10-12) each of which attempts to reconcile the schism between "science and theory," e.g. processualism and post-processualism. Rachel Harvey, who holds a B.A. in medieval archaeology from University College, London, and is employed as a post-excavation supervisor by Glasgow University, wrote Chapter 10~ "Archaeology as Art" (9 pp., 13 references). She takes an artistic approach to material culture, arguing for a reconceptualization of archaeology as art, a "high quality endeavor," and insists upon the need for individual integrity, basing her approach on Wylie's (1992b) discussion of the polarization within archaeology: the Binfordian/New Archaeology objectivist, processual vs. contextualist, postprocessualist. The essay also differentiates art from technology (see Persig 1994) so that Harry concludes that "archaeology provides the data, not the hypotheses. She further states that "objectivity in archaeology is at once both an easy and an impossible target to shoot down because it simply does not exist. Archaeologists cannot choose objectivity ... we are left with what by chance is revealed to us." (p. 133). Harry makes the plea that "archaeology must free itself from the narrow restrictions imposed by an exclusive search of the answer. Art and archaeology are not manifest as opposing influences when the archaeologist is at work. The art of archaeology is concerned with the execution of a task with dignity and respect towards itself and the task itself" (pp. 138-139).

Chapter 11, "Traces of Archaeology" (12 pp., 9 references) is contributed by Lorna Campbell who holds an honors M.A. from the University of Glasgow and is an archaeology laboratory technician at Glasgow University. Campbell, borrowing from Deleuze and Guattari (1977, 1988), who also influenced Shanks (1992), stresses the need for a "radical plurality of archaeological experience." She contends that archaeologists must be self-critical of their work and that the critical archaeologist accepts the implications of this holistic plurality, and always looks for "grand theories" that seek to fill in disciplinary "gaps." She perceives "gaps" between: 1) the past and present (what survives in the archaeological record and what must be inferred), 2) archaeologists and their texts (what is recorded and reported or not cited), 3) sites and the landscape (what remnants survive), and 4) archaeologists and the public (perceptions and misperceptions about the discipline and its practitioners). Campbell points out that archaeologists must attempt to understand the structures on either side of these gaps rather than the gaps themselves. Campbell considers grand theories as synchronic constructions and that these create paradigms that are static modes of thought and interpretation. She also comments that we must "try to think of archaeology not in terms of the past but as a past consciousness of all present social and political economies" (p. 142) and states that we should not continue to bridge gaps with paradigms. In her analysis of interpretive theory, Campbell employs the analogy of a rhizome (an interconnected mass of roots and shoots and leaves) instead of a tree (with its roots, trunk, and branches) to explicate how components of the discipline archaeology ought to relate to one another and to the "human agency." The human agency must, she concludes, be a working variable in the production of archaeological writing and should not be a theoretical constant; the human agents, therefore, ought to be self critical.

The final contribution, Chapter 12, "A Conversation in Two Acts" (10 pp., no references) is by John C. Barrett and E. A. Bartley. Barrett is a Senior Lecturer in Archaeology at the University of Glasgow, and Bartley holds a B.Sc. in design from the University of Cincinnati and is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Archaeology and the Department of Medieval History at the University of Glasgow. In this dialogue the authors scrutinize the philosophy of archaeology by examining the idea of performance, and stress the need for a way of thinking about the agency of past actors and the agency of present archaeologists that does not reify the continual process of critical thought. The examination of performance, they contend, allows for the insight provided by textual metaphor but in a more dynamic and unconstrained set of relations. Bartley

poses the queries and directs the conversation. Among the other topics discussed are the human agency, the search for meaning, and self criticism. The archaeologist is no longer a spectator and, therefore, performs in a different way than in the past.

Although the inclusion of a summary chapter would be a useful adjunct, the editor's introduction serves partially the need to place the contributions into the larger perspective of archaeology as science, as knowledge, and as a philosophy. In sum, this is a difficult book to read and to summarize because of the many diverse topics, approaches, and ideas that are presented, and in this regard the volume is reminiscent of the writings of Michael Shanks (1992; Shanks and Tilley 1987, 1992). The contributions in Mackenzie's volume vary in length, format, quality, orientation, and presentation. Potential biases in the interpretation of archaeological data, reflections upon the use and abuse of contemporary theory, broad versus restricted paradigm construction, the functions of and assumptions about chronology, archaeologists themselves as "human agents" and an unrecognized dependent variable, and the need for retrospective analysis or self criticism are among the potent topics considered in Mackenzie's book. There are carefully honed and documented arguments, rambling discourses, and expansive dialogues but, in the main, the essays are thought provoking and compelling. Likewise, the authors are not advocating Shanks versus Wylie, but are attempting to move beyond the theoretical statements made by these scholars. Interestingly, few of the contributors cite the writings of Wylie or Shanks in their essays.

The genesis of this compilation is unclear but is apparently not based upon conference papers with the two dialogues and Wylie's treatise appended for "balance.". Excepting Wylie and Shanks, the authors are younger, inspired voices from the new generation of archaeologists trained in the British/ Scottish tradition and a majority of the essayists are affiliated with Glasgow University. The contributors are philosophically informed and critically aware, and argue for an "open" philosophy of archaeology and raise issues relating to a reflective approach to the discipline. The essays are especially thoughtful in bringing us face-to-face with the "progress" versus "posture" dichotomies, and are responses to archaeological theory and practice during the 1960s into the 1980s. The discipline during these decades has been characterized by Shanks and Tilley (1992:247) as "an uncritical proliferation of eclectic borrowings from other social sciences."

British and Continental archaeological theory has been influenced by culture studies and a more widespread adoption of variations of structuralism and Marxism. A lack of theoretical sophistication and knowledge of philosophy and the history of science have been criticisms leveled at American-trained archaeologists by their European counterparts. The philosophy of archaeology as espoused by Shanks and Tilley (1992:103-115) was designed to offer potentialities rather than foreclose them, and this is also an attribute found in Mackenzie's volume. As in *Re-Constructing Archaeology: Theory and Practice* (Shanks and Tilley 1992), Mackenzie and his colleagues range widely across the social and philosophical literature, drawing from the philosophy of science, hermeneutics, structuralism, poststructuralism, and Marxism. While concerned with major theoretical issues, the contributions to Mackenzie's edited work also have import for field research and laboratory analysis as well as for the relationships between professional archaeologists and the public. The latter is a much neglected constituency. American archaeologists have not done an adequate job in establishing the relevance of archaeological research (let alone funding needs) to the general public, public and private philanthropy, and lawmakers. This was a clear message that came from papers presented at a symposium entitled "Archaeology in the Twenty-first Century" (organized by Bill Mayer-Oakes and Dan Pagano) at the Society for American Archaeology annual meeting in 1994.

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