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Theory in the Field

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Abstract and Keywords

Archaeological fieldwork is normally treated as a matter of applying techniques that are designed to recover particular data sets, which have been identified either on the basis of research priorities or by the concerns of cultural resource management. The data are treated as objectively secure, whilst their interpretation might be open to question. The role of theory is widely assigned to the process of interpretation, and therefore often treated as an optional aspect of the analysis that is excluded from the process of data recovery. We counter this characterization by treating theory as one of the essential tools required by the fieldworker to enable the critical evaluation of the procedures by which archaeological knowledge is constructed. Such a theorized perspective pre-eminently requires that the procedures of fieldwork help fieldworkers to develop an interpretive archaeology of people in an informed way at the moment of fieldwork.

Keywords: craft, epistemology, fieldwork, ontology, architectures of life

Introduction

This contribution will not attempt the impossible by using a chapter-sized discussion to extensively review the numerous theoretical traditions in archaeology and their potential application to various field methodologies. Instead, we make the case that theory is a way of clarifying our thinking, expressing our objectives, and making our assumptions explicit, and that it is a key component of the toolbox of procedures available for use in field archaeology. Nor do we distinguish between fieldwork initiated by institutions assigned to either the 'academic', 'commercial', or 'cultural resource management' branches of the discipline. This exploration of the issues that confront field archaeology grows out of a conversation between the two authors, who in some respects differ in their views on where the discipline of archaeology currently 'is' in terms of fieldwork and theory, but who are united in the belief that field archaeology is central to the exploration of the worlds and traditions of people in the past. That exploration is not, in our view, highly

enough valued. In part this is because much field archaeology is failing to realize the potential it offers when addressing the challenge that we all face in striving to understand the histories of human diversity. One reason for this failure lies, we believe, in the discipline's desire to establish and maintain over-rigid and exclusive procedures of field identification and excavation, and its recording, via fieldwork manuals and standardized recording sheets. In Anglo-American field practice, this ongoing rigidity exists in tandem with the dominance of processual archaeology—its theory and approaches to method. This situation is out of kilter with the wide range of theory traditions of archaeological synthesis and interpretation that now exist.

The entrenchment of rigidity of practice

UK archaeologists have primacy in the origins of an interest in establishing formal procedures of archaeological field practice and recording. This interest stretches back to the late nineteenth-century field and finds-recording methods of Pitt Rivers and contemporaries (Bowden 1991: 55ff.), and is subsequently expressed in W.M. Flinders Petrie's 1904 book *Methods and Aims in Archaeology* (particularly chapter 5). The same interest intermittently occurred in early twentieth-century Continental Europe. A notable example is the recording forms and small-finds cards developed by French archaeologists Ferdinand Scheurer and Anatole Lablotier (1914) to document the hundreds of excavated graves at the Merovingian cemetery of Bourogne (Belfort) and repurposed in Edouard's Salin's (1946) *Manual of Excavations* (see Pavel 2010; 2011). In the United States, the influence of George Reisner's Harvard excavations at Samaria, Palestine (1908–10), with their detailed recording of archaeological stratigraphy, are credited with leading to the standardized, pre-printed site record forms used by Robert Heizer (1949; discussed by Pavel 2011: 262). However, the first largely nationwide uptake of preset recording procedures lies in the UK's postwar construction boom of the 1960s and 1970s. Here, the rapidly growing need for rescue/salvage excavations led to the setting up of UK commercial archaeology units; and in the wake of this, a wealth of pre-formatted field recording frameworks and recording sheets were developed (e.g. Stewart 2013). The MoLAS (Museum of London Archaeology Service) archaeological site manual, its tradition of single-context recording, and its associated use of the Harris Matrix to sequence contexts famously became a UK 'bible' for urban archaeology recording (Harris 1979; Westman 1994). Internationally, the establishment of standardized recording formats has been more localized, relating to differing field traditions, and to the ease or difficulties of identifying archaeological remains. For Continental Europe, Italian superintendencies had primacy in taking up the use of pro formas at the end of the 1970s and in adopting the Harris Matrix from the mid-1980s (Brown III and Harris 1993: 1), while Catalan archaeology was the first in Spain, in the early 1990s, to adopt the Harris Matrix and formal recording procedures (Trócoli 1993). Members of the French CNRS (Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique) developed major recording systems and feature sheets for the site of Lattara (Bats 1986; Py 1991), and context sheets for the international 'Grand Site de France' excavations at Bibracte, Burgundy (Pavel 2010, 279). Wider dissemination of various formal recording systems was often the circumstantial

outcome of specific international missions and transnational contacts between archaeological teams. For example, MoLAS field archaeologists and MoLAS recording methods were introduced into Lebanon in 1994, and MoLAS recording systems were subsequently adopted by the Lebanese directorate of antiquities (Perring 1997–1998; Thorpe 2012: 48).

A trend of regularizing recording systems likewise prevails at a supra-level where national and international policy statements focus on necessary general fields, such as site categories, for recording field archaeology/heritage remains. For Europe, the Valletta Convention of 1992 on the Protection of Archaeological Heritages stipulates, for participating European states and federal regions, both the basic principles of developer-funded rescue archaeology and the required norms to be recorded for different categories of evidence (Kristiansen 2009). A concern for regularized systems of recording, again based on general required fields of recording, prevails in the individual Cultural Resource Management (CRM) statements by individual North American states, which were variously put in place during the later twentieth and early twenty-first centuries; the situation is similar in New Zealand (<http://www.heritage.org.nz/protecting-heritage/archaeology/archaeological-guidelines-and-templates>).

Thus, by the later twentieth century a concern with utilizing formal, often detailed recording systems in field archaeology existed in the UK, parts of Continental Europe, North America, and more widely—albeit inconsistently. Some forty years plus of this trend of regularizing defined good practice, legitimized by regional, national, and international government and professional frameworks, has been fundamentally at the expense of the questions of past human history being asked, and embedded, from the start-point of investigative archaeological fieldwork. The idea that archaeological field recording is a neutral mechanical process to register what is uncovered or encountered has long been contested (Hill 1972; Pavel 2012; Hodder 1999; Lucas 2001). However, the rationale and philosophical underpinning of standardized recording forms, with their various prompts and boxes, are the outcomes of a specific theoretical stance on archaeology, and structure the process of retrieving and interpreting data by its users. The traditional idea of fixed recording methods providing common ground for comparison is false. The pro formas or advised fields for recording—such as for contexts and features—often cannot be neatly compared from project to project within a country, never mind from country to country, due to differences in the terminology of the team, unit, region, or federal state. Therefore, we assert that theory's primary role here is to resist this increasing closing-down of technique in the name of established professional standards, by demonstrating the validity, and potential for co-use, of different paths of field investigation, recording, and production of knowledge. (Andrews, Barrett, and Lewis 2000).

Theory and craft

In this section we make the case that theory and craft (the skills of fieldwork used to generate evidence and meaning) should not be separated, but that there should be an active, symbiotic relationship between the two.

The critique of the New or Processual Archaeology that developed from the late twentieth century did so on two fronts of relevance to field archaeology. One was to question the authority of established fieldwork procedures and report writing (Bender, Hamilton, and Tilley 2007; Woodward, Barrett, and Freeman 2000). The second was to question the interpretation of past human behaviours as being determined by general factors, rather than as the expression of specifically motivated strategies (e.g. Hodder 1982; Shanks and Tilley 1987). One consequence of the critique was a turning away from archaeology as a science of human behaviour and the embracing of archaeology as the study of a culturally driven humanity. This 'humanistic turn' (cf. Vinsrygg 1988) resulted in an increased suspicion amongst a then younger generation of academic, mostly British archaeologists of the role of science in contemporary society. To them, scientific explanation was restricted to the identification of generalized and deterministic processes, as opposed to specific and historically contingent conditions of causation for which a more nuanced understanding of the philosophy of science would have been required. In our view, science is not a matter of the unquestioning adoption of established techniques and the blind acceptance of established laws of process, even if 'normal science' as defined by Kuhn (1970) might sometimes be characterized in this way. Instead it is a commitment to the public accountability of its claims about the world, which is fulfilled by making the reasoning and methods used in particular field projects explicit and open to assessment and replication. This view introduces the idea that the construction and validation of knowledge (epistemology) must be relevant to the kinds of reality (ontology) that are being investigated, for, as Binford wrote: 'I cannot make any judgement about the rationality of the way you intend to proceed until you tell me what you are trying to accomplish' (Binford 2001: 669).

One way in which the opposition between the procedures of the humanities and those of the sciences referred to above might be overcome is to treat both as encompassing a diverse range of crafts. Craft concerns the creation and processes of making something. Increasingly the case has been made that fieldwork is as much a craft as a mere set of techniques (cf. Shanks and McGuire 1996). The skills associated with craft are defined by the competence with which procedures are designed that are relevant to the problems being investigated. In the first place, it must be decided if the problems selected by field teams and field directors for investigation are actually worth investigating. This task is more demanding than it might initially appear. The problems chosen will tell us something about the investigator's commitment to a particular view as to the way the world works, and the priorities this person has in understanding that world—a consideration that brings together assumptions about both historical and contemporary conditions. Unsurprisingly, this is unlikely to be a matter of consensus. Second, craft requires an assessment of whether the product obtained by its implementation is relevant

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to the task at hand. For example, we might wonder whether a written text, a museum display, or an enactment is the best product to bring forth an understanding of the historical problems under consideration; and we might ask who is doing the understanding, since understanding is not absolute but dependent upon the audience. Lastly, craft is about engagement with material conditions, in this case the complex organization of archaeological fieldwork, which raises the question of who can play a part in the various stages of such creativity (Berggren and Hodder 2003). All of this requires intellectual clarity in preparing, undertaking, and presenting fieldwork.

Theory cannot be caricatured as speculation about how the past might have been; instead it allows us to consider the design and practical consequences of the craft of investigation. Nor does theory come after the fact; it is not an optional extra, to be added to the recording of material as one means of its interpretation. Facts are pertinent to a way of seeing the world, and as such require the kind of evaluation that theory is designed to deliver (cf. Latour 2010). This ensures that we are not plunged into an incoherent relativism, but that we both recognize and assess that the facts that matter to us are the products of our choice to pursue a particular engagement with problems and materials.

Fieldwork discovers new *things* and new relationships (if it did not do so it would not be worth undertaking), but, as David Clarke noted in 1973, the developing methodologies that are currently 'detecting more, different and previously unknown data attributes' and extending 'our capacity for information recovery, manipulation and analysis' do not in themselves drive the rise of 'vigorous, productive and competitive new paradigms' (Clarke 1973: 7-11). The new and surprising finds have to be brought into view from one or more perspectives whence their significance/meaning can be assessed. This is a matter of considerable practical importance in commercial archaeology, where fixed-price contracts have the potential to render the unsuspected discovery a considerable financial risk (McGill 1995: 114). The perspectives from which the significance of such finds can be established therefore demand critical attention, and it follows that in the best of worlds these perspectives need to be available to all field practitioners.

Thus theory can be treated as a tool of enquiry that is situated *within* the toolbox of the craft of field archaeology. 'Theory' is not the 'container' of the tools, and claims to the pre-eminence of a single theoretical position are as barren as the claim to a single methodology. We need a plurality of approaches from which to choose. Today, any theory of fieldwork involves considerations of the role of the individual in the practical and interpretive procedures of fieldwork and of the social dynamics of the communities of archaeologists that undertake it (Edgeworth 1990). The craft of fieldwork involves people physically encountering and uncovering the material remains of the past in rural and urban landscapes. Excavation is often characterized as a process of destruction—features are excavated and destroyed and artefacts taken from their contexts, and the integrity of their associations disrupted by being physically regrouped by type, and placed in distant stores and museum displays. This potentially negative aspect of fieldwork has been

interestingly salvaged and theorized by Gavin Lucas as a process of construction and materialization, in which fieldwork builds an understanding of the past that, with each stage, has material outcomes, including the bagged and boxed material in museum stores, exhibitions, site reconstructions, digital databases, books, and papers (Lucas 2001). The following discussion incorporates these perspectives of fieldwork by understanding it to be a process of construction in which the cumulative acts *and* theoretically informed choices of each individual engaged in fieldwork are foremost in the productive materialization of the outcome.

A question of purpose

As an example of the conflicting approaches that would either remain hidden or emerge as confused terminologies in an archaeology that is defined merely in terms of its techniques, let us consider how we might define the object of archaeological study. To understand this issue, we must be clear as to the distinction between the question of ontology, or what actually exists, and the question of epistemology, which is concerned with the theory of knowledge. It follows, as we have already indicated, that epistemological procedures should be designed relative to ontological conditions, and we presume it is the latter that defines the object of archaeological study. The link is obviously complex: epistemologies are the practical acceptance of certain ontologies, which means that field methods cannot simply be accepted as unproblematic and self-evident, for the simple reason that they also deliver a *particular* conception of the reality that is being investigated. It is here, at the very heart of archaeological enquiry, that the conflict arises between treating the material remains themselves and/or the now extinct conditions of past human existence as the object of archaeological study, since these are not one and the same thing.

The need to ensure that material remains are unambiguously representative of past human behaviours, and to understand their associated site formation processes, remain key concerns. In the case of the study of material remains, the ontological issue for archaeology appears to be that of considering the patterned variability in the material remains to be a manifestation of the human intentions and actions that created it. This was addressed most clearly by Lewis Binford in the development of his 'Middle Range Theory' (Binford 1981). It was by experimentation and replication that Binford established a robust framework to enable the archaeological residues of hunter-gatherers to be used as tokens of particular activities. Stephen Shennan, from the rather different perspective of the dynamics of artefact distribution and the development of these over time, has called for 'programmes of empirical research' which 'provide a basis for explaining patterns of variation in the world' (Shennan 2012: 15). In these and other cases, the object of study is the variation in archaeological materials as indicative of historical processes, in which epistemological procedures are designed to reduce uncertainty about the significance of archaeological observations (cf. Renfrew 1984).

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If we now turn to the claim that it is the historical conditions of human existence that are the reality that concerns us and therefore the object of archaeological study, things look rather different (Hodder 1982). A full understanding of formation processes that have affected the archaeological record as recovered in the field (Schiffer's 1987 'natural' and 'cultural' transformations) are indisputably vital to an adequate epistemology; but the reality now sought extends beyond the reconstruction of physical processes of production and site formation to address the diverse ways different human communities in the past might have brought a practical and discursive understanding of the material milieu that they inhabited, and coped with, via chosen ways of living. This leads to much greater uncertainty in the process of interpretation, not simply because the task is more difficult, but because the same material conditions are likely to have been encountered from different perspectives—such as the ways symbols of authority might be seen either as markers of legitimate power or as the trappings of oppression (Miller and Tilley 1984; Harrison-Buck 2012). For example, such a duality is expressed by Michael in *The Archaeology of the Colonized* (2004), in which roads built in Anatolia during the early Roman empire are interpreted as being constant physical reminders of external power, and as routes of access and penetration by administrators and troops.

Theory, therefore, allows us to clarify the different views as to what field archaeology is about, and to explore the ways in which each view evaluates its own procedures. As researchers, we are likely to find one of these ways more conducive to our own interests in archaeology than the other, but we have to be able to understand why that is the case and to explore its consequences effectively; and those consequences extend to the practices of fieldwork itself. To treat field methodology as if it were innocent of our prejudices as to what archaeology might be designed to achieve is clearly nonsense, and is certainly not the basis upon which to claim that field methods are objective. Objectivity is something that has to be won—the product of self-reflexive enquiry and debate with others, rather than of the use of techniques simply because they exist in the textbooks and field manuals. Take the example of single-context stratigraphic recording (Harris 1979) which lies at the heart of modern British excavation procedures and which most UK archaeologists now take for granted. The only absolute relationships that can exist between deposits, surfaces, and cuts recorded according to standard procedures are sequential; most excavation procedures are designed to establish sequences of stratigraphic units in these terms, and to link such sequences to a chronological scale and to a sequence of formation processes. However, if we are interested in the historical conditions of human existence, and thus the material contexts within which human communities once operated, then we have to confront the fact that those conditions have always been multi-period. The remains of the fifth and sixth century CE in western Europe, for example, are always stratigraphically later than the deposits marking the final stages of Roman imperial rule, but many of those who lived in these later centuries did so amongst still-standing Roman architectural remnants. Certainly, memories of Roman rule and such remains will have shaped perceptions of their fifth-/sixth-century world. Martin Carver recognized some time ago that this required a significant modification of the way stratigraphic sequences should be depicted, for what is gained in

understanding an inhabited space by separating the floor of a room from its walls, simply because the floor was laid down after the walls were built? (Carver 1990: 97).

Fieldwork as a *chaîne opératoire*

Archaeology in the field cannot be treated as a discrete entity in the overall process of historical enquiry. Instead, one way of characterizing archaeological field practice is as a form of extended *chaîne opératoire*—an intertwined sequence of operational, personal, and social acts (Lemonnier 1986). The sequence might originate either in an academic research programme, in the demands of commercial and cultural resource management, or in local initiatives by various archaeological groups and interested communities. Each develops a different kind of relationship to current research, philosophical traditions, and socioeconomic contexts, and each has its potential conclusions in the various outputs of fieldwork, their impact on academia, and the contributions of field interventions to the historical awareness of society at large.

To develop the *chaîne opératoire* analogy, field practice can be conceived of as a craft in which you adjust your choice of actions until you become comfortable with what you achieve and at the same time sequentially gain a clearer understanding of where you are trying to get. In archaeology, it is a concept that has been applied to understanding the process of production for artefacts, such as flint tools or pottery (Van Der Leeuw 1993). If field archaeology is theorized in this way, it is indisputably a subject (person)-centred craft, where options and chains of consequences are continuously brought into consideration by the individuals involved in choosing what actions to carry out in the field and how to bring the material outcomes together to construct and present interpretations. A subject (person)-centred archaeology, as introduced here, is not subjective *per se* because it is subject-centred. It is not an entry into the chaotic world where anything goes (Feyerabend 1975) and where all actions and interpretations are equally valid. A subject-centred craft involves individuals weighing up all the range of options, actions, and possibilities—of how to walk a landscape, how to trowel or mattock a layer, how to section a deposit, how to sample or empty a feature, how to connect different parts of a site or landscape interpretively, and so on. Resources, finances, time, and project hierarchies allowing (and these are big remits), all field archaeologists have access to, or can choose to use, environmental data, standard ways of describing and recording finds and features, reflexive logs, digital technologies, sensory perspectives, and/or a variety of other techniques. Using a phenomenological approach, for instance, does not preclude using the available palynological information to inform interpretation, and it would be wrong to characterize it as doing so (Chapman and Gearey 2000). Similarly, Site Catchment Analysis mapping in the 1970s did not require that topography was (senselessly) ignored in characterizing site catchments, although in actuality it often was (Hamilton and Whitehouse 2006). The integrity of our line of argument lies in the recognition that fieldwork *is* a subject-centred practice; and therefore to rigidly situate field practice in any one framework of prevailing archaeological theory is a cop-out because it avoids dealing with the consequences of individual actions and decisions in the

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fieldwork process. Theory at the level of ‘isms’—‘processualism’, ‘post processualism’, ‘empiricism’, and so on—should not provide single overarching frameworks in which a fieldwork project takes place. Instead, theory should be seen as a key resource that field archaeologists have to hand. Just as a craftsman reaches for something that works at that moment, so too can those undertaking fieldwork potentially simultaneously draw upon a range of theoretical perspectives and practical methodologies.

We need to move to methods of fieldwork that are open to diverse inputs and theoretical perspectives in constructing an understanding of sites, places, and the people that lived in, and used them, rather than clinging to an academic perspective that is neurotic about mixing theoretical stances (Hamilton et al. 2008). Whether all approaches will receive the same amount of academic, commercial, or public attention is of course another matter. For example, the sequential, *chaîne opératoire* nature of the fieldwork procedures requires critical analysis of the ways in which it tends to structure archaeological career prospects. As long as field survey and excavation are treated as the unproblematic application of standard techniques to recover data sets that are only subsequently open to interpretation, a career distinction in terms of status, reward, and security will separate those who are deemed to do the technical work of recovery and those who are endowed with the intellectual tasks of interpretation.

It seems strange that those who are involved in crafting the recovery of the material conditions of the past are recurrently those who are granted the lowest status, poorest working conditions, and weakest job security (e.g. see Zeber 1997 for North American archaeology). At each point in the craft sequence of fieldwork there are indisputable power hierarchies—for example, relating to the uptake of the interpretive perspectives of the experienced and the inexperienced, and to organizational structures of on-site and off-site decision making. There have been specific experiments to make the tasks of fieldwork a democratic process, more rooted in the communities local to the excavation and involving volunteers (e.g. Faulkner 2000 for the UK). However, in parts of the world where hired local labour essentially contributes to fieldwork, this becomes a complex and highly politicized concept (e.g. Steele 2005: 50ff., discussing the intersection between politics, local communities, and archaeology in the Middle East).

Lock-ins (resistance to change)?

Field archaeology’s ever-widening contemporary interest in a mainstream compliance with the legal and administrative organizational structures of public policy and the commercial world (e.g. EAA 2000, and Gupta 2000 for such a need in India) could be argued to have had a catastrophic effect on the development of a theory of field archaeology (Webley et al. 2012). For example, it is striking just how long the methodologies and procedures of Anglo-American archaeological field practice have uniquely remained aligned to an overarching processual framework of enquiry that adjourns/postpones interpretation from the primary recognition of adaptive and interacting processes. This is in spite of more than three decades of post-processual

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critique of archaeological method, notably in the UK, the Netherlands, and Scandinavia (Shanks 2008: 134), and for British prehistory in particular, a large part of archaeological synthesis adopting an interpretative, post-processual approach. For UK field archaeology, and potentially more widely, this situation could be described as a 'lock-in' resulting from organizational self-reinforcing feedback. The emergence of post-processual archaeology in Britain was concurrent with full recognition in planning procedures of developer-led and funded archaeology. This is now where the bulk of field archaeology in Britain takes place; it has increasingly become a branch of commercial organization culture, and draws the rules, procedures, and standards of the building industry and planning departments into the pre-existing methodologies of its fieldwork. The use of 'scientific' method aligns easily with the need for success in competitive tendering that is reliant on compliance with standards set by professional bodies, rigid methodological statements, prescribed sampling strategies, and the production of formulaic reports (Hamilton 1996, 1999). In Britain, all of this is reinforced by the advisory direction and professional validation procedures of the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists and English Heritage (National Planning Policy Framework 2011). The contemporary organization and practice of development-led archaeology across the Low Countries, France, Germany, Denmark, and Ireland, in addition to Britain, varies considerably, but is often simplified as a dichotomy between being a public task of state (e.g. Inrap in France, Schlanger 2012) or local authorities as against funding supplied by competing commercial developers. Inevitably the situation is more complex than this (Kristiansen 2009; Demoule 2012; Webley et al. 2012), but the overall outcome either way has been increasing static frameworks of methods and documentation processes that are directed to satisfying *supra*-local/regional scales of validation. In the business world, formalized systems of work and reporting are recognized by organizations to have the advantage/disadvantage of encouraging a high level of stability over time. More generally, for academically based field research, it could be argued that the required standard formats and expectations of major grant applications for fieldwork to public bodies and higher research institutions equally creates a resistance to change and general lack of openness to debates and 'mixed methodologies'.

Community responsibility

The involvement of state or regional agencies, either as guardians of the archaeological heritage or as funding agencies, and the charitable sponsorship that exists are predicated upon the belief that the preservation and study of the material heritage is of public benefit. Most people therefore have a varying degree of investment in archaeology, be it willing or otherwise, as commercial funders, as taxpayers, and as those in whose name conservation and cultural resource management policies are implemented. It would therefore seem to be incumbent upon the archaeological discipline to ensure not only that the results of its inquiries are made available in terms that are understandable to these groups, but also that the procedures of archaeological research and the priorities that seek funding are similarly communicated and open to wider assessment. Indeed, such a move would seem to be essential if public support for investment in the discipline is to

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continue. Dawdy, for example, has advocated a move towards a 'futurist archaeology' that has 'simultaneously a pragmatic, ethical and intellectual appeal' and 'intersects with contemporary social problems', and notes that an early twenty-first-century climate of crisis pushes archaeology to be relevant and useful to the present (Dawdy 2009: 142). Several years down the line, this ethos continues to have a strong currency.

The past is always contentious: historical narratives are open to a number of different perspectives that may be culturally, ethnically, and politically charged. However, our concern continues to be with the disciplinary procedures of archaeology, as they are broadly defined by current intellectual assumptions and methodologies. The wider community's involvement in these archaeological processes requires much more than the distillation of results in widely disseminated formats. There needs to be the possibility of a general level of engagement with the archaeological procedures by which an understanding of the human past is achieved. Given that archaeology is characterized by methodological and intellectual diversity, we are not suggesting that by responding to the need for a wider community of involvement, we offer a false image of disciplinary unity; it is after all debate and disagreement that drive research and foster interest and commitment. Nor are we suggesting that the complexity of the issues which archaeology addresses should be masked by an oversimplification or a 'dumbing-down' of the discipline's demanding intellectual programme. What we seek instead is the development of a currency that expresses some of the basic intellectual and analytical procedures of archaeology, provides the means of converting complex intellectual priorities into widely understood conservation and research priorities, and provides the medium through which conflicting claims about the practice of archaeology may be assessed. In other words, this is a currency that is required for dialogue and the exchange of ideas between different communities of interest right from the point of commencement of fieldwork.

Given that methodological procedures are currently treated as a system of recovery that is distinct from what are assumed to be the subsequent processes of historical interpretation, three important consequences arise from this separation of observation from interpretation. First, it disrupts the theoretically designed bridge that should span ontological claims and empirical investigation. As a result, fieldwork procedures tend to float free from the wider programme of enquiry. Oddly, as we have already noted, this is often welcomed as an indication of the 'objectivity' of fieldwork, as if objectivity were a quality secured by not knowing why you might be recording what you are recording. Second, by marginalizing fieldwork from the process of historical enquiry, those undertaking excavation and field recording are themselves similarly marginalized in the processes of writing history despite their hands-on engagement with primary data (cf. Andrews et al. 2000; Berggren and Hodder 2003). They are also, incidentally, relieved from the responsibility of evaluating the intellectual and empirical competence of the research programme (a position that can hardly be described as 'objective'). The problems accompanying the marginalization of fieldwork from the main task of historical enquiry are compounded by the expectations of the wider community—including those paying for commercially funded excavations, who are likely to be most interested in the discovery procedures employed by archaeology, but might expect those procedures to

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involve discovering something about the past rather than simply discovering what is in the ground.

Third, deferring historical interpretation to the period after data recovery, rather than developing interpretation in the actual process of recovery, accrues certain dangers. Either the interpretation never happens (as witnessed by the unpublished literature of reportage accumulating in numerous archives and commercial impact reports), or it focuses upon highly specialist analysis of particular data sets, lacking the development of a holistic view to illuminate actual historical conditions. It also supports the misplaced view that interpretation is of secondary importance to data recording, the latter (falsely) regarded as timelessly secure and the former, interpretation, treated as transitory and in some way 'subjective'. This last claim would also, on the face of it, seem to refute the possibility that our knowledge of the past is cumulatively improving over time. However, we surely do understand more fully today than we did previously the complex nature of the past and the quality of the intellectual and practical demands that attend upon its study. If it were indeed the case that archaeology were making no progress in better understanding the object of its study but simply accumulating more stuff, then it would be difficult to justify its continued funding.

An integrated archaeology

In conclusion, we will now offer one strategy for an integrated approach to the evidence available in field archaeology that is necessarily based upon a particular ontology—a claim about the nature of historical realities. The archaeological record comprises the remains of the various material conditions that different human communities once occupied, modified, and from which they extracted the means for life. In any one period we might characterize the built environment, the technical facilities contained within that environment, the relics of earlier activity, the wider topography of landscape, and the existing resources of nature as providing an 'architecture of life'. We here employ this concept of 'architecture' generically to characterize the materialities within which people lived and so found a place for themselves. Human history is made from the living-out of routines, the execution of strategic decisions, and the playing-out of conflicts over the control of resources, as well as from the long-term trajectories in which, for example, resources are accumulated or eroded, populations ebb and flow, and climates change. Past forms of life, human identities, their values and demands, and the authorities to which they responded were all made with reference to the available material realities that were afforded by the existence of other people, the buildings and natural surroundings that were inhabited, and the technologies that were available. Accordingly, archaeology might now be defined as the empirical investigation of how, given the material conditions that defined places and facilities—the 'architectures of life' that were available at any time—certain forms of humanity became possible. It should seek to explore the consequences that arose from the ways in which such particular forms of humanity might once have operated.

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The base currency for an archaeology and a field archaeology that can be widely comprehended could therefore be cast as the investigation of ‘inhabited architectures’. Thus, for example, stratigraphic analysis is obviously an essential part of the excavation procedure, but only as a preliminary towards building the more holistic view of a period’s ‘architecture’. Reconstituting the spaces once inhabited and the resources once exploited requires that excavation procedures allow for the synthesis of the stratigraphic analysis into a history of spatially ordered environments, rather than being a form of analysis that disaggregates those environments into a sequence of individual, stratigraphically ordered units. Since the late twentieth century, creating such spatial architectures has been rendered commonly accessible through the use of machine-based mapping, digital reconstruction and GIS. When this mapping data is presented in atlas format, it can be rendered understandable by deploying sequential interpretive narratives of the human presence. Although a viable possibility, an issue is how much of this interpretation and scale of visualization is actually realised ‘on site’ when fieldwork strategies can respond to unfolding patterns, rather than after fieldwork. It is an understanding of this spatial architecture that can ensure that the historical significance of the material is explored, and can secure research priorities in relation to a coherently described material resource. The style of presentation needs to be strongly visual, concern itself with the constraints, options, and perspectives that informed the performance and labours of the inhabitants, and benefit from written commentaries in the active voice of engagement rather than the passive voice of description (e.g. Framework Archaeology’s timetravel links for Heathrow Terminal 5: <http://www.framearch.co.uk/t5/2006/08/23/8500-4000-bc-deep-forest-and-a-river/>). This would further extend what we have described above as a ‘subject (person-)centred archaeology’, and would provide a visual and textual medium within which the significance of archaeological fieldwork could be discussed. Given that archaeology and, in the context of the above discussion, field archaeology needs to establish the value of its own work in competing for limited funding and has a commitment to ensure the widest possible public understanding of its aims and achievements, this currency we suggest offers a means of achieving those ends. Indeed, if they were written and illustrated in such terms, people might actually start reading archaeological fieldwork reports, and this cannot be possible without the pre-theorization outlined above.

Further reading

There are numerous textbooks on field archaeology, with one of the best being M. Carver (2009), *Archaeological Investigation*. The major example of a reflexive approach to field archaeology remains that of Çatal Höyük, whose updated website is at <http://www.catalhoyuk.com/>; but see also **B. Bender, S. Hamilton, and C. Tilley (2007)**, *Stone Worlds: Narrative and Reflexivity in Landscape Archaeology*. Various attempts have been made to restructure archaeological reportage, including J. C. Barrett, P. W. M. Freeman, and A. Woodward (2000), *Cadbury Castle Somerset: The Later Prehistoric and Early Historic Archaeology*; Framework Archaeology (2006), *Landscape Evolution in the Middle Thames Valley: Heathrow Terminal 5 Excavations*, vol. 1; and C. Evans (2009),

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Fengate Revisited: Further Fen-Edge Excavations, Bronze Age Fieldsystems and Settlement and the Wyman Abbott/Leeds Archives. For the discursive practices of archaeology, see R. A. Joyce (2002), *The Languages of Archaeology*. A wide-ranging review of the status of women in archaeological practice and interpretation is given by S. Hamilton, R. D. Whitehouse, and K. L. Wright (2007), *Archaeology and Women: Ancient and Modern Issues*. N. Schlanger and K. Aitchison (eds, 2010), *Archaeology and the Global Economic Crisis: Multiple Impacts, Possible Solutions* provide overviews on the development of commercial archaeology in numerous European countries including Poland, Hungary, and Russia as well as the United States. Other broad overviews of commercial archaeology in Europe include **K. Kristiansen (2009)**, 'Contract archaeology in Europe: an experiment in diversity'. Y. Nakanishi (2014) usefully summarizes field archaeology in Japan in C. Lewis (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Global Archaeology*. M. Carver, B. Gaydarska, and S. Montón-Sublas (2014), *Field Archaeology from Around the World: Ideas and Approaches* provides insights into the theory and contextual backgrounds of the world's varied archaeological fieldwork traditions (see e.g. c. 9, L. Zhang, 'China'). H. Cobb, O. Harris, C. Jones, and P. Richardson (eds, 2012), *Reconsidering Fieldwork: Exploring Onsite Relationships between Theory and Practice* provides a wide ranging look at the ongoing tensions between fieldwork and theory.

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