

Setting a new agenda: Ian Hodder and his contribution to archaeological theory

Arkadiusz Marciniak^a

Ian Hodder's contribution to archaeological theory can be seen as a continuous process of reflexive interrogation and critical evaluation of concepts through which we understand the world. In the dynamic process of development of Hodder's thought, two phases can be distinguished: contextual and interpretative. Hodder's contextual archaeology is characterized by theoretical considerations that assumes the presence of an active individual situated in particular, historical frameworks. This individual has a role in the process of cultural change. Material culture is understood as active in symbolising, supporting and constructing social relations and is treated as a text to be read by archaeologists. Interpretative stance focuses its attention more on interpretation and methodological procedures. It comprises the two-step research procedure including guarded objectivity of the past and hermeneutic component in interpretation.

KEY-WORDS: Ian Hodder, theory of archaeology, material culture

INTRODUCTION

The reaction to the processual paradigm was a complex and diverse process in which Hodder played a crucial role. However, being formulated in opposition to the processual school, by various archaeologists, it was difficult to form a consensus on how to name this new approach. The most widely accepted stance assumed that archaeologists who have adopted positions which relate to the critical human sciences fall under the rubric "post-processual archaeology" (Hodder 1985). However, it was clear from the beginning that it would be inappropriate to hypothesize the existence of a post-processual "school". Paradoxically, even after a considerable and stormy period of development of the postprocessual agenda it is still unclear how it can be

^a Institute of Prehistory, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań, Poland

defined and comprehended (Hodder 1995a). Stressing that it derives from a critique of processual archaeology and focussing on the diversity and contextuality still seems to be the best way and very much recalls the definition formulated in the 1980s (see Hodder 1985, 1986a). It is still better to be “post” rather than to establish a new agenda. Contextual archaeology, among other programs formulated within the milieu of postprocessual archaeologies, was recognized as the main challenge and rival to processual archaeology (Trigger 1989:348). It has been also argued (Hodder 1991b) that postprocessual archaeology is less a movement and more a phase in the development of Anglo-American archaeology arguing explicitly for multivocality and diversity. There are now even more strands to the postprocessual debate than there were before. Recently, however, in many areas the term “postprocessualism” is becoming redundant as processual and behavioral archaeologists accommodate their views to take account of the criticisms, and also as postprocessual archaeologists soften their more extreme claims. The new consensus is, however, as yet far from being worked out.

Hodder’s program was created within the historical and intellectual framework of ideas of an older generation of British prehistorians: Gordon Childe, Grahame Clark, Glyn Daniel and Stuart Piggott. Within this tradition, archaeology was regarded mainly as a historical endeavour and discipline (Hodder 1982a). The formulation of the new program was a long-standing process, during which the various aspects were subject to change. At the beginning he followed Collingwood and Dilthey (see Hodder 1986a), later Ricoeur and Gadamer (see Hodder 1991a, 1992d). It was essentially a reaction against the philosophical basis of processual archaeology. At its inception it was directed against something, rather than being a coherent set of new procedures. As such, this new program was somehow eclectic, drawing on many traditions within contemporary humanities (see Preucel 1991:22), especially on traditional and textual hermeneutics.

The empirical foundations of the new agenda were formulated during the extensive and well-documented ethnoarchaeological research which Hodder conducted at the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s in eastern Africa. This project comprised Kenya, mainly in the Baringo district and among Dorobo and Samburu groups on the Leroghi plateau; Zambia (among the Lozi, a highly developed kingdom or “state”); and Sudan, mainly among the Nuba people (numerous loosely related “tribes” and tribal sections living in the Nuba Mountains – an isolated massif standing above the plains west of the White Nile). The material collected during these field projects was to illustrate and influence the ideas developed in his most important early work, *Symbols in action* (Hodder 1982c) and also in another book published in the same year *The present past* (Hodder 1982b). These books introduce a new approach. Their importance in the further development of archaeological theory is considerable. This stems from the fact they offer a new and interesting non-scientific and humanistic perspective, so different from the then dominant processual school (see Thomas 1995).

Hodder's main criticism of processual archaeology was based on the place of functionalism, along with its basic tenets, as an integral part of this paradigm (Hodder 1982a). Among the most severely criticized aspects of the functional approach was the definition of **stimuli of changes** and as a result the assumption that **culture, norms, form and design had only functional value**; also the notion that **material culture** was a reflection of man's activities and thus **passive: reflecting what people do** – which recalls the palaeontological model where a fossil record stands as an epiphenomenon of “real” life. The logical consequence of these criticisms was questioning the processual desire to formulate cross-cultural statements of high predictive value with their focus on identification of rules of behaviour and artifact deposition regardless of cultural context. Hodder asserted that the relationship between the individual and society too has not been properly situated. Further criticism focused on the processual notion of logical empiricism, and the concept of explanation (e.g., Hodder 1984a, 1985) because of its emphasis on positive scientific knowledge, neutrality and reliance on controlled observation (see Shanks and Hodder 1995a:4). The problems of testing theory against objective data was explicitly discussed later (Hodder 1992a:148). It is part of the more general issue of how to test theories about unobservable parts of past cultural systems.

Generally speaking Hodder's contribution to archaeology can be seen as a continuous process of reflexive interrogation and critical evaluation of concepts through which we understand the contemporary world and other cultures. Archaeological theory should focus our attention on concepts and assumptions used in the construction of the past – including past ethnicities (Hodder 1991d: ix-x). In the dynamic process of development of Hodder's thought it seems justifiable to distinguish two phases: contextual and interpretative. This is not to say, however, that the content of these two positions is mutually exclusive. On the contrary, they share many common interests while at the same time articulating and emphasizing different issues. This distinction is justified by Hodder himself when at the very beginning he argued for “**contextual**” archaeology “in which an emphasis is placed on the particular way in which general symbolic and structural principles are assembled into coherent sets and integrated into social and ecological strategies” (Hodder 1982c:217). Later he presents an interpretative position (Hodder 1991b: 38), and is also influenced by poststructuralist positions. Some commentators (e.g., Preucel 1991:22) identify the latter as a hermeneutic approach.

The aim of this article is to systematically present the dynamic development of the most important issues involved in both contextual and interpretative archaeologies. Limited space forbids me to discuss in more detail either the impact of Hodder's ideas on the development of archaeological theory over the last twenty years or to critically evaluate the basic points of his approach in the context of the current debate within the humanities.

CONTEXTUAL PHASE

In Hodder's early critique, the notion of function as a means of explaining variability in human behaviour was faulted because of its failure to deal with such basic anthropological issues as social action and intentionality (see Preucel 1991:22). Behind functioning and doing there is a structure and content which has partly to be understood in its own terms, with its own logic and coherence (Hodder 1982a). Archaeology is a historical discipline, and therefore the uniqueness of cultures and historical sequences must be recognized. According to Hodder, the processual framework rejected per se individual creativity and intentionality. To make archaeology more historical and social it was further proposed that the individual should be introduced to social theory. This does not imply, however, the intention of identifying individuals in past society.

After rejecting functional changes as the only source of variability in prehistoric societies, an alternative proposition was put forward in which social patterns shaped the character of material culture. In this respect, the most important step was to recognize the status of the human subject, and attention was focused on the "active individual" and his role in the process of cultural change (Hodder 1986a:6), as opposed to a view of the individual as a passive player in the larger system as defined by processual archaeology. Very little attention had been previously focused on the reasons given by people for their action.

Thus, it became obvious that an "acting" individual had to be situated in the particular, **historical** framework (e.g., see Hodder 1984a). Actions, and their conditions and consequences, have **social** results only through **human perception**. Particular societies organize schemes of causations which are meaningful to the individuals involved (Hodder 1987d:2). It means that the causes of social change cannot be comprehended any longer as simply a matter of cause an effect and are not exclusively determined from outside. The comprehension of these causes was one of the challenges of Hodder's works. In one of his first papers (1984a) he regards them as being only partially determined from inside a society by internal factors, external causality still playing an important role, a position changed later. At the same time, their complex nature was recognized covering their many economic, social and ideological aspects. Hodder's perspective, as compared to the processual agenda, enables him to observe how people react to external events and causes. At that point, he believed that it was possible to construct a **general theory of human action**, which very much recalls the processual position in which human culture is seen as a complex and coherent whole.

The notion of human agency became a crucial part of his contextual agenda. The background of human action is the **structure of the codes and rules** according to which observed systems of interrelationships are produced (Hodder 1982a). Material culture can be observed as a structured set of differences. This does not mean, however, that he is an advocate of a classic structuralist stance where the structure is understood as an ideal order in the mind. The lack of understanding and

comprehension of structures in action is regarded as one of the biggest failures of structuralism (these arguments based to a large extent on Bourdieu 1977). Because of that, it became unclear how the use of such arbitrary rules might lead to change and how an individual can be a competent social actor. In the classic structuralist approach, an individual is again subordinate to the totalising mechanisms of organisation, in this case of the unconscious, which strongly recalls the position of processual-functional archaeology. Thus, both structuralism and functionalism failed to explain particular historical contexts and the meaningful actions of individuals constructing social change within these contexts (see Hodder 1986a). Another weakness of structuralism is the lack of appropriate methods enabling us to falsify a hypothesis about the existence of hidden rules and structures.

Hodder's **theory of human action** (1985) assumes that the acts of individuals are not determined by a cultural code and its internal and intrinsic relationships, because the culture is itself constructed in these acts. Instead, he claims that artifacts and social acts draw their meaning from the roles they play, their use, and their daily patterns of existence. Despite the fact that individual actors act differently, it is possible to specify communality of interests within a group and historical tradition. At this point, the complementary assumption is that material culture provides the environment within which individuals find their places and learn the places of others, their goals and expectations. **Material culture is thus seen as actively and meaningfully produced.**

Among the social causes of the individual's intentional action Hodder specifies the negotiation of social rules as well as power and dominance (e.g., by pottery decoration the actor can define boundaries, and produce social differences – Hodder 1985:10) by means of which the individuals are creating and transforming a social structure which is itself constructed by themselves. Hodder also belongs to a larger choral pinpointing the role of gender (see e.g., Hodder 1984a, 1991c). The introduction of gender in prehistory enables a re-evaluation of such issues as meaning, representation, power and general archaeological theory. From his new standpoint, he took on board the opinion put forward by Rosaldo (1980:400) that “women's place in human social life is not in any direct sense a product of the things she **does**, but of the **meaning** her activities acquire through concrete social interaction”.

Hodder (1982c:215), while opposing generalizations of the adaptive type, proposes two others in interpreting the past (also rejected later): (a) the general occurrence of symbolic and structural principles emphasized in different ways in different societies. To exemplify this point he presented in Nuba the structural oppositions clean/dirty, male/female and life/death. Additionally, he claimed that **these symbolic principles are found in most societies, and knowledge of them aids the analysis of a particular case;** (b) the formulation of models and analogies concerning the way man gives meaning to his actions. However, despite these generalizations, it is argued that the interpretation of each set of material culture data is unique (Hodder 1982c:216-7).

Another immanent aspect of the contextual approach is a reconceptualization of material culture. Hodder's first attempts to define material culture can be seen as a continuation of previous debate in continental European, American and British prehistory rather than a sharp break (see Hodder 1982c). The point of departure for his analysis is the processual assumption that material culture is a predictable reflection of human behaviour and material items of all kinds function to enhance adaptation to the physical and human environment. It recalls the proposition to be found e.g., in Schiffer's (1976) and Binford's (1962) works in which material culture is understood as being a "reflection" of or "correlation" to social behaviour, and therefore passive. However, this differs from processual archaeology (see Marciniak 1998).

Hodder's understanding of material culture was developed during his ethnoarchaeological field projects in eastern Africa. The explicit objective of these projects was to study the importance and use of material culture in these societies, to answer the following questions: When do ethnic units identify themselves in material culture? What is the spatial patterning that results? What happens socially and culturally at material culture boundaries? Does material culture "**reflect**" human behaviour in **adapting** to environments? And consequently, can we find material "correlates" for social variability? Is the functional, adaptive viewpoint sufficient or are cultural norms and beliefs perhaps also relevant? (Hodder 1982c:11)

Hodder's first attempt (1982a) was close to a structuralist approach. Patterns in material culture were seen as structural sets of oppositions and as specific embodiments of the underlying structure of principles within which society categorized its environment and ordered its social relationships. These principles were supposedly embodied in different areas of material culture such as houses, burials, etc. (e.g., Hodder 1984b). Consequently, each aspect of the data, whether burial, settlement pattern, wall design or refuse distribution, can be interpreted in terms of common underlying schemes. These structures of meaning permeate all aspects of archaeological evidence. Each material item has significance "in terms of its place in the whole" (Hodder 1982c:212).

Already in his early writings (1982c:215) Hodder introduces the concept of "meaningful constitution of material culture patterning". This is an announcement of the approach which is more particularistic and less concerned with overwhelming determinism. However, at the moment, he still stresses wholeness, a tenet of structuralist archaeology which he later rejected (see similarities between processual and structural archaeology – Hodder 1986a). The whole does not come from the parts but from "the underlying structures" (Hodder 1986a:213). The concept of wholeness from this structural point of view is even more absolute and more far-reaching than in systems theory.

Crucial to further considerations is the introduction of the concept of the **symbol** which "refers to an object or situation in which a direct, primary or literal meaning also designates another indirect, secondary and figurative meaning"

(Hodder 1982c:11). The term “symbolic meaning” indicates the secondary references evoked by the primary meanings. Being “in action” means a particular view of symbols, which do not “reflect” but play an **active** part in forming and giving meaning to social behaviour via the acting individual. The material culture is, therefore, not merely a reflection of underlying structures, sociopolitical organization and ecological adaptation, it “transforms, rather than reflects, social organizations according to the strategies of groups, their beliefs, concepts and ideologies” (Hodder 1982c:212; see also 1987c).

An attempt was made to deal with the concept of “active” material data within the structuralist paradigm. This is made apparent when Hodder later adds that the identifiable patterns are **transformations**, often contrasting, disrupting or commencing with **basic dichotomies** and tensions within the social system and within the distribution of power. However, Hodder seems always, while theorizing, to treat “power” as a given and not to discuss its basis. Material culture patterning is formed as “part of these meaningful actions and it helps to constitute changing frameworks of action and belief” (Hodder 1982c:212-3). Material culture was used to legitimize authority by a high-status group and to signal opposition among different groups within society such as elders, the young, women, or families, which is especially evident in burial customs. Here he needs to bridge the gap between the emphasis on variability and the emphasis on static, shared norms and templates. There is a need to go beyond the study of variability without examining the structures which bind that variability together.

Assuming an active role for artifacts forces Hodder to see them as playing an important part in symbolizing and supporting social relations. This becomes especially important when these relations are **under strain**, and social and economic tensions are closely linked (Hodder 1979). The tension between hierarchical, age and sex groups within societies may also be expressed in the structure of artifact associations. Already when conducting the field projects, Hodder realized that local specialization in artifact styles should not necessarily “be indicative of relative isolation among population” as postulated by Cohen (1977:82). He noticed that similarities between pottery style do not necessarily decrease as the distance between two groups becomes greater (Hodder 1979). He observed in Baringo that temporal variation in material culture patterning in addition to spatial variation could be related to changes in the **degree of conflict and competition over resources**. Material culture can be used to express and reinforce aspects of social relationships which are related to economic and practical strategies (Hodder 1979:447-8). Conflict can be horizontal in character (between sex, age and political groups) or vertical within the more complicated social structure. This example shows that tribal distinctions cannot necessarily be explained as the result of different economies or environmental adaptations. It does not mean, however, that ethnoarchaeology can contribute directly to the understanding of particular prehistoric cultures (Hodder 1987e:424).

He later argued that material symbols do not mean anything in the semiotic sense. “The meaning of material symbols is not abstract and semantic but immediate and practical” (Hodder 1985:14). The relationship between material culture and its meaning derives from its context and from subsequent contexts. Thus, the historical sequence of culture is stressed. As a consequence the same thing can have a completely different meaning for different people.

For the first time, Hodder introduces the possibility that **material culture can be used for the construction of social categories**. His concern is to examine the role of material culture in the ideological representation of social relations. The representational role of material culture has been further analysed in detail in the interpretative phase. Generally, we can distinguish two extreme positions in viewing representation: “naturalisation”, in which the arbitrary social system is reflected as occurring in the material world, and total representation where social rules are denied and eradicated in the artifacts and their organization. Any particular case must be situated somewhere between these two extreme points.

These general considerations and ethnoarchaeological observations needed exemplification in order to capture the interest of a wider audience. It was soon delivered (Hodder 1984b) in his analysis of megaliths in Western Europe. This was carried out to show how megaliths could be used to discern “meaningful social action and negotiation within specific historical contexts” (Hodder 1984b:51), from the domain of the ideological. Their symbolic associations and meanings have been developed in order to understand how they worked within social processes. Additionally, the particularity of historical context in which megaliths were found was evaluated, otherwise their analysis as symbolic and socially active would have failed. The analysis of megaliths was conducted in relation to earlier and contemporary houses in central and western Europe. Hodder concluded that the tombs signified houses, known from the previous period, thus historically contextualizing the analysis. To examine the significance of the symbolic association, Hodder argued, it is necessary to assess the symbolic and social context of long houses in central Europe. He identified primary social strategies revolving around male-female relationships (reminiscent of structuralism), which are themselves linked to competition between lineages for control of labour. It is clear at this point that, despite claiming an active role for material culture, when analyzing a given example, Hodder still believes that material culture reflects social roles rather than represents them. He incorporated the archaeological evidence of houses and pots directly into models of social change. Hodder interprets the European Neolithic sequence as representing the playing-out of a long-term structure which underlines architectural form, artefactual style and funerary rites. This structure, involving an opposition between the *domus* (the house and the domestic world) and the *agrios* (the wild) thus continues a set of rules or codes which underpins a “story which unfolds gradually across Europe” (Hodder 1990:42). This sequence is also

interpreted by Hodder (1989, 1990) as a shift from a world in which women and extra-lineage ties have a central importance (domestic context) one in which social control of productive resources is most important (devaluing the domestic context, the role of women as reproducers and the extra-lineage ties).

The formulation of any research design cannot be fulfilled without identification of the objectives which such a framework is supposed to provide. The crystallization of these objectives evolved as the crucial aspects of the program were being developed. In his first writings Hodder very generally formulated that this archaeology should be “less behaviourally and ecologically oriented” (Hodder 1982c:212), and should be first of all a historical discipline (Hodder 1985, 1987a). It was assumed that people in the past were able to recognize the causes of their behaviour and reasons for reactions to various factors. Therefore, they have been changing the world through informed actions constructed in a historical context whose recognition was postulated as possible (see Hodder 1985:8). Therefore, the objective of contextual archaeology is to **understand** the text of material culture rather than translate it (Hodder 1987d:8). As a result it “seeks to examine the interplay between the context of social meanings and action or situated behaviour” (Hodder 1987e:447). Another objective of archaeology is the definition of long-term structures of meaning that are defined from the specific historical trajectories of artifacts (Hodder 1987a, 1987b, 1987d).

Methodological aspects of contextual archaeology, however, have not been so successfully developed, as noted by numerous critics and commentators (e.g., Champion 1991). Hodder himself did not address these issues very often, and, if so, it was done without sufficient precision. One of his first proposals suggested the concept of **evocation** to recognize the patterning of material culture (Hodder 1985:14). The means of achieving these goals was to analyze the **context**. He opts for a very wide understanding of “context” from microcosms of artefactual traits to interregional groupings (see also Hodder 1986a). As it has been already mentioned, Hodder’s position is that the practical meaning of material culture varies according to the context in which it is used, and the evocative effect of material culture depends on it as well. This evocation is never pre-determined; it is an active process of the creation of meaning. To understand the character of this interpretative procedure he introduced the metaphor of **reading** material culture. Thus, the contextual analysis “attempts to read and interpret the evidence primarily in terms of its internal relations rather than in terms of outside knowledge”. In particular, an emphasis is placed on “internal symbolic relations rather than on externally derived concepts of rationality” (Hodder 1990:21). He also stresses that an archaeological knowledge of the past is based on meaning given to the archaeological record from within current cultural paradigms (Hodder 1985:12).

In Hodder’s writings, “context” refers to both the framework of concepts and to the articulation of that framework in social and ecological adaptation (later the ecological adaptation is rejected). Of great importance in this respect is the historical context – the framework within which actions and strategies are given meaning –

built over time, each new development of this framework being itself altered and transformed from within. This idea was extensively developed in Hodder's works later. It means that the structure at phase B cannot be understood without reference to the structures in phase A.

The content of Hodder's proposal also covers more general issues regarding archaeological research procedure. He rejects processual archaeology's basic assumption that archaeological hypotheses can be tested against independent, objective data. On the contrary, he argues (Hodder 1984a) that archaeological data are constructed and constituted by theory and paradigms and therefore they cannot independently verify the theory. The predictive statements drawn from archaeological theory cannot be tested by data because the data themselves are in fact part of the same arguments which characterize theory. As a response to the postprocessual critique, processual archaeologists accepted later that the data are **theory-laden**. Considerable confusion and contradictions resulted from later attempts to retain both positivism and hermeneutics at the same time (Hodder 1992a:148).

An important aspect of the contextual stance was the recognition that an archaeological endeavour is a social enterprise. The social role archaeology plays cannot be underestimated. Archaeology and the past could play an active role in contributing to change in the present. A view of science as neutral and non-political has deep roots within the western world. Science in high-technology capitalism is a basis of industrial success and therefore an important component of wealth, prestige, and social status (Hodder 1986b). The reconstruction of the past is also a social statement in the present and concepts in social theory relate to social interests within the modern West (Hodder 1985:18). Thus, it is important to see the social nature of archaeological inquiry: archaeology has to be situated within the particular social, economic and political circumstances of a given country (Hodder 1991a:19-20). Hodder strongly recommended also to take into account the reflexive consideration of the production of archaeological knowledge (Hodder 1991a:10). He stressed (among others, as e.g., Shanks and Tilley 1987a, 1987b) that there is a strong ethnocentric bias in archaeology (Hodder 1982a, 1986a). Later, Hodder (1991d) adds that all theory is to some degree socially embedded and pragmatic. However, this aspect of archaeological theory has never played a dominant role in his writings.

In order to understand the active role of material culture in social reality he advocated more ethnoarchaeological studies showing the role of material culture patterning in reproducing conceptual frameworks, and the ideological manipulation of material items in social as well as ecological strategies (social, being the main domain later). He advocated broader perspective by integrating theories and ideas from a range of studies concerned with structure, meaning and social action. As a means of achieving these goals Hodder argued for the relevance of structuralism and its various critiques, post-structuralism, structural-Marxist and contemporary social theory in which concepts such as ideology, legitimation, power, symbol and social structure are

key. This should lead to a broader archaeology, more fully integrated into the social sciences (Hodder 1982c:229). The development of archaeological theory fifteen years after the proposal was put forward shows that his prediction was accurate.

INTERPRETATIVE PHASE

The content of contextual archaeology has been welcomed with great interest and has been widely discussed. At the same time, some aspects of this approach have been extensively criticized both by processual archaeologists (see *e.g.*, Binford 1987) and also by some more radical postprocessual archaeologists (Bapty and Yates 1990; Tilley 1990). It became clear that “scientific”, processual archaeology as described by Hodder (among others) was a caricature, presenting an old-fashioned positivist mode that many new archaeologists had moved beyond. By the same token, some processualists misunderstood the challenge of post-processual archaeology and perceived it as being in a opposition to science and a necessary commitment to relativism (*e.g.*, Hodder 1986a).

The reading of material culture as postulated by Hodder’s contextual approach (1986a) has focused attention on material culture not as an absolute passive reflection of the past but as a text to be actively read by the archaeologist. He soon realized that the meaning of such text lies less in its production and intention, and more in its interpretation from different points of view. Around possibilities of “reading material culture” arose many controversies. The most extreme is the post-structuralist stance, in which it is argued that we cannot arrive at any original meaning in the past (Hodder 1992c:161; see various opinions expressed in Bapty and Yates eds 1990). For post-structuralists the past is nothing more than “arbitrary points in the free flow of signifiers” (Hodder 1992c:163). In works of Tilley and Shanks (*e.g.*, 1987a, 1987b), material remains play a minimal role – they are merely networks of resistance to our theories. The attention is focused rather on writing the past than reading material culture. Writing has been studied as being part of a discourse of power-knowledge-truth (Hodder 1992c:164). Such a position leads to the dangerous claim that the past is only constructed in the present. While accepting the importance of a critical tradition (of which strong advocates are Shanks and Tilley), Hodder does not agree that archaeology should be only value-committed, its only importance being seen in the relationships between power, knowledge and truth. Additionally, it seems unjustifiable to him to argue that the only grounds for discriminating between different archaeologies should be political or social.

The criticism coming from these two directions forced Hodder to clarify, reformulate and supplement his original propositions. First of all, he assumed that it is not justified to reject the achievements of processual archaeology *per se*. While still opposing many objectives of this program, he claims that “we do not need, as

archaeologists, to feel that the only alternative to positivist processual archaeology, is a hopeless slide towards relativity and chaos” (Hodder 1991e:21-2). Additionally, he realized that contextual archaeology gave little attention to interpretation. By substituting one universal determining factor for another, it appeared as an attempt to formulate a universal, theoretical discourse by concentrating on the power, dominance, negotiation, or ideology imposed by past actors.

In this new program more attention is focused on the interpretative and methodological procedures rather than the theoretical which was characteristic of contextual archaeology. Still accepted is the active role of material culture, interestingly elaborated and supplemented by Hayden White’s (e.g., 1973) ideas (see Hodder 1993, 1995b). The role of the individual was also developed. The new methodological procedure comprises the two-step interpretative procedure including “objective” and hermeneutic framework and the reformulating of the objectives of archaeology.

The result of these reactions to and reformulations of the contextual agenda was the emergence of the idea of interpretative archaeology. Three components constitute this approach (Hodder 1991a): (1) the hermeneutic component in interpretation – to move away from global theory and get on with interpreting data; (2) a guarded objectivity of the past – data dialectically produced between material and interpretation; (3) a reflexive consideration of the production of archaeological knowledge. More specifically, this approach concentrated on: interpretation as a dialogue or conversation and then translation; the multivocal, plural and ongoing interpretation concerned less with causal explanation but rather with **understanding and making sense** of things which previously have been thought to be sure or certain; the lack of a final and definitive account of the past; the response to the interests, needs and desires of different constituencies, and therefore the importance of the active role of the interpreter (Shanks and Hodder 1995a:5-6; see also 1995b).

Hodder’s hermeneutic procedure was based mainly on the Gadamer’s (1993) approach. He calls his position “a critical hermeneutic approach” that is, an approach which is historical (both past and present) and hermeneutic at the same time (Hodder 1991c:15, 1991b). Such a position enables understanding of the world as an object of human thought and action (Hodder 1991b:33) by comprehending detail in terms of the whole and the whole in terms of the detail. The integral part of the interpretative strategy is a “dialectic between past and present, object and subject”, and a “dialectical relation between part and whole – the hermeneutic circle” (Hodder 1991a:9-10). An archaeologist has to deal with a double hermeneutics – the framework of meaning in the past and the framework of meaning within which archaeologists reconstruct the past. The role of interpreter is to play back and forth in order to achieve coherence and correspondence. No interpretation, however, is possible until interpretation has begun.

Despite clear similarities with Gadamer’s hermeneutics, Hodder questions some of its objectives. He claims that it is hardly possible to link the two

hermeneutic circles – past and present within contextual boundaries, closed horizons as postulated by Gadamer. Therefore, the successful fusion of horizons is not possible (Hodder 1991b:34-5). As a result, however, Hodder states, we do not arrive at a position of complete relativism, that is, that the past is constructed largely in the present (Hodder 1991b:35). Thus, his position is clearly opposed to more radical representatives of the postprocessual movement (see e.g., Bapty and Yates eds 1990; Tilley 1990). At the same time, he rejects as too idealistic, Collingwood's position, which he had previously accepted, arguing instead for a hermeneutic procedure that is critically and materially grounded (Hodder 1991b:37).

Contrary to the representatives of the post-structuralist movement, Hodder's approach remains focused on the reading the material culture rather than on writing the past. He argues that "there is real patterning in the material remains", negating the notion of free flow or play of signifiers because, "subjective readings of the world are translated into objective material actions, written into the material remains" (Hodder 1992c:162). If we do not try to read a relatively autonomous material past and try to understand it in its own terms we will be doing no more than simply reproducing ourselves in a mirror of self-interest. Hodder contends that political misuse of the past, the result of such a position, needs to be open to evaluation in relation to data from past objects, which assumes the existence of **a partly autonomous past** (Hodder 1992c:164-5).

Thus, the past and the present are constructed in relation to each other. The past is not entirely objective or subjective. It is both at the same time (Hodder 1992d:178). We have rather to integrate the importance of the present context with a commitment to past contexts (his understanding of pluralism and multivocality) (Hodder 1992c:165). This differs considerably from his previous position (e.g., Hodder 1987e) when he questioned whether any objective understanding of the past were possible. Yet, at the same time, this position does not mean either that the archaeological past can be objectively described. By advocating a contextual stance Hodder does not want to postulate a deconstructionist approach and the open play of meaning (Hodder 1992c:167). Archaeological records are and should be read differently, but this does not mean that one reading is as good as any other, even when we accept "the death of the author", as postulated by Foucault or Derrida. Put another way, Hodder (follows Bhaskar 1979) opts for **epistemic** relativism, which holds that knowledge is rooted in a particular time and culture, as opposed to **judgemental** relativism, which additionally claims that all forms of knowledge are equally valid (see Shanks and Hodder 1995a:19).

Hodder's earlier concept of active material culture is supplemented in his more recent works by a stress on their materiality. He proposes to deal with this issue through four separate units of practice necessary to the development of a coherent archaeological theory; (i) Particular meanings are usually built from universal characteristics of materials and practices. Therefore, the materiality of material culture allows a link to be made between past and present contexts through material

universals, enabling a “guardedly” objective approach (Hodder 1992d:166-71; see also 1991a); (ii) Certain aspects of processual and postprocessual archaeology are complementary rather than opposed, as the processual contribution to scientific method, sampling design, or environmental reconstruction can coexist with the higher level interpretation engendered by postprocessual archaeology. He now postulates the relative independence of theory and observation, claiming that data collected within a theoretical framework, as long as it is understood, can be reused within other frameworks. Because of this and because of the materiality of the archaeological record, “interpretation does not simply form data into its own image” (Hodder 1992d:172-3); (iii) Data not only confront the archaeologist, but they also contribute to the archaeologist’s understanding of the world and therefore the practice of archaeology has potential to contribute to the constitution of society; and (iv) There is a necessity to combine the relationship between long-term structure (historical perspective) and local meanings.

The interpretative approach further elaborates an understanding of the concept of material culture. Hodder’s key contribution was his realization that things are not usually what they seem. He (e.g., 1991c) draws a very clear distinction between **representation** (representational systems) and **the actual roles of actors** (of various kinds, e.g., the roles of women and men). Thus, he argues, we have to be wary of reading material culture as direct evidence of the actual role of actors. Having this in mind, the crucial methodological problem arises of how to establish, e.g., whether women really had power during the Neolithic or whether they have only been represented as such by Neolithic people. Additionally, Hodder notes that representation itself can be a form of power. The problem of filling **the representation-reality gap** (Hodder 1991c:13) is itself extremely difficult and has only been identified but is far from successful resolution.

Thus, Hodder’s point of interest is how past social practice may be translated into material culture patterning. A logical consequence of viewing material culture as active was the recognition that as such it forms narratives through which past agents constructed their lives (Hodder 1993:270-1, 1995b:164-5). Hodder believes that it is possible to reconstruct these forms of narration. Material culture itself can be involved in telling stories or recounting myths. For example, he claims that the Corded Ware Culture/Bell Beaker phenomenon told a story of the foreign, imposed, violent nature of power. Material culture **was made to seem as if** a movement of people had occurred, regardless of how many people had actually moved (see also Hodder 1990:175). He believes that it is possible to compare rhetoric in spoken and written narrative with rhetoric in the material culture. In the former, one can distinguish the following forms: metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche and irony, referring to Hayden White’s (1973) concepts (see Hodder 1993:270-1). The importance of the proposal for archaeology lies in the fact that it provides a vocabulary for identifying rhetorical strategies used in material culture patterning. Thus, it becomes

clear that material culture can change not only as a result of changes in social or economic structures, but also as a result of changes in form or rhetoric. However, Hodder (1995b:167) criticizes White for not exploring the relationships between narrative history (with its tropes) and the real world of action.

The objectives of the interpretative approach differ also from those of the contextual stance. Here, it is stressed that our knowledge is always incomplete, and therefore there will be no final point at which we have achieved a definitive understanding of the past (Hodder 1991b:37). However, according to him, this does not necessarily mean that “anything goes” and that all interpretations are equally justifiable, which he believes to be a misuse of the contextual program. One interpretation of the postprocessual program by some radical archaeologists led to the conclusion that if we assume that the past is at least partially constructed in the present, we have to accept as equally credible interpretations presented by fringe archaeologists, creationists, amateurs, *etc.*, and those by scientists. Despite the fact that archaeology and the past are parts of a social process he does not claim that archaeology and the past are entirely constructed in the present but that there is a dialectic between past and present (Hodder 1991b:30-1).

At the same time, he strongly postulates a **guarded objectivity** of the past which needs to be retained. Material culture is organized not only meaningfully but also pragmatically (Hodder 1991a:12). The interpretative stance needs to retain from processual archaeology a guard “objectivity” of the material. This partial “objectivity” is based on the reintroduction of the scientific component to the methodology of archaeological inquiry which was so successfully developed in processual archaeology (see also Hodder 1991b:40). It is necessary to integrate such scientific concerns within a nonpositivist archaeology. In doing this, empiricism (where data are self-evident) and positivism (where theories can be tested against objective data using independent instruments of measurement) should be rejected. At the same time, however, it is necessary to reject extreme relativism as well. He emphasized that we are dealing with objects which had practical effects in a noncultural world – an ecological world organized by exchanges of matter and energy.

By developing this “objective” platform, it becomes possible to differentiate the claims of archaeologists from those of amateurs or fringe, untrained archaeologists. Incorporating these “objective” considerations to research procedure (the first phase of interpretative approach) becomes the prerequisite for further interpretation. Whilst fulfilling these requirements, not only hitherto male-dominated archaeological interpretations are justified but also the voices of ethnic minorities, women and non-western peoples. Thus, interpretative archeology, more than processual and postprocessual, is able to articulate these voices because **interpretation is translation** (Hodder 1991a:15).

The awareness of discourse was also made clear with the attention drawn to style, technique, and the way in which archaeology designs and produces its past, which

Shanks and Hodder (1995a:25) have called **archaeological poetics**. It became clear that archaeology, like other disciplines, constructs its object past through discourse, possessing a form of rhetoric. In this process many patterns of authority are involved: admitting and excluding, accrediting and legitimising, establishing hierarchies, *etc.* He suggests critical reflection. Fitting theory to data usually means to enclosing the data entirely within our own prejudices. We can only understand the past in its own terms if we understand our own place in the dialectic between past and present.

Hodder continued to argue that an obvious positive aspect of postprocessual archaeology is to focus attention on the social construction of the past in the present (Hodder 1992c:163). This knowledge is constructed contextually in relationship to particular problems and social networks (Hodder 1995a:235) while analyzing the importance of particular theoretical traditions in world archaeology. Archaeological paradigms, especially those which offer some kind of global, holistic generalization can be used to exert supreme control over another's past. He has noticed that US-derived processual interpretations, with their emphases on environmental and ecological explanation (*e.g.*, homeostatic adaptive systems), may well have contributed to "imperialist" interpretations of the pasts of Africa, Canada or Indonesia -pasts interpreted as material evidence of peoples with little innovative capacity (Hodder 1991b:12).

FINAL REMARKS

Hodder's interpretative position suggests the necessity for moving from situating ourselves in different intellectual "camps" in favour of a more open debate, self-reflection and concentrating on the issues we share as an archaeological community. Similar attempts have been formulated recently by representatives of other schools of thought, such as behavioural archaeology (*e.g.*, Skibo, Walker and Nielsen eds 1995). Hodder himself (1991b:36) postulates critical self-examination of the foundations and objectives of postprocessual archaeology and urges processualists to do the same to achieve progress in archaeology. His numerous writings in the 1990s exemplify this well. As the year 2000 approaches, processual and postprocessual archaeologies have more in common than ever in theory and practice (Hodder 1995a:238). Hodder goes even further (1991b:40), advocating that archaeology should leave labels aside and simply contribute to a wide range of issues. Following on from this debate, a more mature discipline may emerge, able to countenance both science and multivocality. In fact it mirrors similar tendencies, in for example, anthropology as well as in historiography (see *e.g.*, Aunger 1995; Topolski 1994). More attention should be focused on detailed data analysis, to show how meanings apply at the local scale (see also Shanks and Hodder 1995a). Focusing attention on the character and scope of interpretation should result in the overcoming of an unjustified polarization between science and relativism.

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