

Thick jargon is a particularly nasty mixture of -emics, -ologies, -ions, -ists and -ariables which has more than a touch of Winston Churchill's 'terminological inexactitude': it too is couched in big words which attempt to hide what is being said. But whereas Churchill wished to hide his meaning because of its poignance, thick jargonists (if I may start to indulge in their predilection for inventing tags and -ist nouns) invariably have little to hide since they have so little to say. How many times has one toiled through line after line of systemic-this, entropic-that, societal variables, variances, and goodness knows what else to come to the conclusion that it could all have been said so simply if it were not so banal and utterly self-evident? In truth there is nothing better designed to make one throw up one's hands in despair and to commence retraining as a Chartered Accountant than to fight with a paper for a good half hour only to find that it is all summed up in an inconspicuous sentence on page 20: 'In conclusion it may be seen from this substantive example that systemic inter-variability must be expected in ceramic modes of production' (people make pots differently according to where and when they live and who they are).

We have had bad archaeology with us since the beginning and perhaps the thick jargonists are simply a space-age version of the cataloguers and 'butterfly collectors' of yesteryear; but it is surely time that we started to dig

our heels in and to expose this fraudulent use, or abuse, of language. In the first place we could all start by asking ourselves 'Do I really need this term?' before adding another piece of obscure terminology to our papers. Still more important, all archaeological students should be encouraged to justify their choice of language: too many tutors and supervisors quietly accept the screens of jargon-loaded paper which students turn in as essays. Admittedly, it would be quite unethical to dictate the language which must be used to express an idea. On the other hand, language is a maze in which it is all too easy to lose oneself; and not to discuss the choice of language is to encourage the mindless copying of superficially popular styles (such as exemplified by Clarke's Analytical Archaeology and a loose and uncritical attitude).

Things have not yet reached the state in which we find American archaeological literature but we should not deceive ourselves into believing that British archaeology will avoid falling into similar errors through pure inertia. These are hard times for the profession and especially for the younger members of its ranks, and there are increasing pressures upon young academics to publish quickly and extensively. Unless we are all very careful, thick jargon could become as commonplace in Britain as it is in America. It is, unfortunately, already with us.

James McVicar.

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European Culture and Identity.

It is generally accepted, and to a certain degree fashionable, to acknowledge that archaeology has political implications. This (obvious ?) dimension of our subject is currently being demonstrated by

increased attention towards the position of archaeology in the third world, as well as by studies of its earlier history in our own area. (For example reflected in the different T.A.G. sessions in Durham 1982).

This knowledge, however, seems to have become just another basis for intellectual discourse, and one might therefore rightfully question whether this awareness actually results in increased understanding of our own context, or whether it remains a purely academic exercise. The acceptance of our own subjectivity might have given us some insight (and control) over the most blatant personal biases -- but I cannot see that we have come any further in understanding our wider context. It is not sufficient to relate to the different 'isms' of the academic world if the political manipulation exercised by the contemporary society and its changing configuration is ignored; history happens around us and ideologies are being created. We are participants in this society and grants and funding are given according to certain priorities.

Maybe we should encourage more

'contemporary historiography' as a basis for understanding the factors determining the growth of a discipline. As an opening line and an example, I think, attention towards the impact of the EEC on the present 'cultural make-up' of Europe would be most interesting for understanding cultural bias in research projects. I would like to share with you the following quotation from a 1982 resolution by the European Parliament. It was resolved to be:

"aware of the importance of the architectural and archaeological heritage for our European culture and history and awareness of our European identity, in conformity with the declaration ... concerning 'European identity'" (Official Journal of the European Communities. 11.10.82 NoC267/25, emphasis mine).

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