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## **EXCAVATING THE 1970s 10 YEARS AFTER**

The Soviet scholar Leo S. Klejn became a well known participant in the theoretical debate in archaeology during the 1970s. Re-reading some of his publications from this decade (1973a, 1973b, 1977, 1980a, 1980b), one specially notices his ability to bring together and discuss different analytical perspectives in a critical and fruitful manner, as well as an extraordinary capacity to synthesize an overwhelming amount of literature (enabled also by his command of different languages). Moreover, his varied philosophical background (including Marxism and Propp's structuralism/formalism) made Klejn an outstanding figure on a scene totally dominated by Anglo-American actors bred in a Hempelian tradition. When he was brutally removed from this scene, his importance was felt more than ever. It is therefore a great relief to see him back again, hopefully also as an active participant in the theoretical debate in archaeology during the 1990s.

I have been asked to comment on a paper Klejn wrote in 1980 on the development of theoretical archaeology in the late 1970s, a kind of follow-up of his widely acclaimed "Panorama" published in *Current Anthropology* in 1977. This is a most flattering task, although a difficult one. Reading my comments, one should keep in mind the elementary hermeneutics that any interpretation of the past takes place from the vantage point of the present. Interpreting the development of archaeology during the 1970s makes no exception from this. The present as conceived in 1980 is different from the present conceived in 1991. The decade which has passed since Klejn's paper was written has given new perspectives to the 1970s; they have become coloured by the "effective history" of the 1980s. It is impossible to ignore this intermediate layer of history and

my comments will be determined by the fact that I see the 1970s through the objectives of the 1990s.

During the 1980s the theoretical hegemony of the new archaeology in the West became fragmented. Various critiques, often lumped together under the heading "post-processual" (Hodder 1985), strongly challenged the positivistic foundation of the preceding "new" or "processual" archaeology. An important source of inspiration for this post-processual archaeology was, just as Klejn himself once predicted (1980a), structuralism. However, different versions of Marxism, critical theory, hermeneutics, and post-structuralism also propelled this fragmentation. Archaeologists now discovered that there was more than one philosophy in the world; that there were other epistemologies than the narrow logical empiricist conception of the natural sciences to which the new archaeologists linked their scientific aspirations. Western archaeologists discovered Continental philosophies, began to read the works of Weber, Gadamer, Habermas, Lucas, Althusser, Levi-Strauss, Foucault, etc. Archaeology lost its innocence in a much more radical way than suggested by Clark (1973). One might say that it faced a Kuhnian crisis – again.

By the late 1970s there were already some signs that the positivist and functionalist grip on theoretical archaeology was fragmenting. Perhaps the significance of these signs appear clearer when they are filtered through the developments of the 1980s. However, it surprised me that Klejn did not seem to have noticed these signs, especially since many of them signified the emergence of his predicted structuralism. He rightly stresses the year 1977 as a turning point (1990: 3), but for other reasons than I would emphasize. In that year, several publications (e.g. Deetz 1977, McGhee 1977, and several of the papers in Ferguson 1977, Spriggs 1977, cf. also Friedman and Rowlands 1978), reflected a

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search for theoretical grounds beyond the positivism and eco-functionalism of the new archaeology in Marxist and structuralist thinking. Between 1977 and 1982 this development accelerated. That a minor revolution (even if not in a Kuhnian sense) had taken place was clearly visible in 1982, when we witnessed the appearance of the work by Hodder (1982a, 1982b, 1982c) and Leone (1982, cf. also Kohl 1981). The hegemony of the new archaeology was clearly fading.

In this connection it also surprised me that Klejn did not pay more attention to the significant development which already had begun within historical archaeology in the USA. Apart from the circle around Ian Hodder in Cambridge, American historical archaeology was, in my opinion, the most important environment for introducing structuralist and critical Marxist thinking into archaeology. The works by Glassie (1975), Deetz (1977) and Leone (1977, cf. also other of the papers in Ferguson 1977) showed the potential of these ideas for the study of material culture, and are today cited as starting points for the new development towards a post-processual archaeology.

In studying an object, distance (in time or space) is not only an obstacle. It might help to clear the overall picture, to see the forest and not only the trees. It is perhaps due to chronological proximity then that Klejn in some parts of his paper makes distinctions which in my opinion are only superficial. In any case, I cannot find any validity for his distinction between "new" and "behavioral" archaeology (1990: 8-9). Behavioral archaeology is new or processual archaeology. Irrespective of whether they label themselves as "new", "behavioral" or "processual" archaeologists, most of them (if not all) share the naturalist idea that the objectives and logic of archaeology are more or less the same as those of the natural sciences. Their belief in universals and law-like generalization; the idea that methodological rigour can secure objectivity and value-freedom, and their common ignorance of the philosophical debate outside that of the logical empiricist conception of the natural sciences provide a common platform for Binford, Schiffer and their disciples.

Moreover, one of the main concerns of Binford's research in the late 1970s (an effort he continued during the 1980s) was the establishment of "Middle Range Theories", relating in a law-like manner the static archaeological material to the dynamic cultural processes that produced it (Binford 1977, 1982). This concern with a universal method, linking the static and the

dynamic in a predictable way, was essentially equivalent to Schiffer's behavioral archaeology (1976).

Klejn relates the emergence of new archaeology to the youth riots and the New Left movement of the 1960s in America and Western Europe. He also describes the new archaeology as a "sensitive barometer", reflecting the changes in the intellectual climate (1990: 7). I am sceptical of the reliability of this barometer. Indeed, there is a close connection between archaeological discourse and the socio-political environment in which it is practised. However, the connection seems to be more complex than described by Klejn.

During the 1960s and early 1970s, the (post-) positivist debate facing Western universities challenged many of the theoretical foundations of the human and social sciences. However, while the positivistic conception of historical and social causality, and the myth of value-free and objective knowledge were questioned and more or less rejected by most sociologists, social anthropologists and historians, archaeologists (in their "new" version) were more than ever attracted to the explanatory and scientific framework supplied by the natural sciences.

In the new archaeology, the term "philosophy" signified nothing but a rather narrow positivistic version of the philosophy of science, a mistake which still seems to be valid in much of the American debate on these issues. New Archaeology put forth a conception of society and knowledge which had very little to do with the critical thinking of the 1960s and 1970s. Rather, it seems to conform much more to certain elements of modern Western ideology: the scientist as a white-coated expert, producing objective knowledge in seclusion from society. Only that which can be empirically observed, tested, and predicted gains status as knowledge. The rest is mere speculation. (Thus, there is no other rationality than economic rationality.) Neither has Hill's proposition (1977) that no system can change itself from within any relation to the critical thinking of the 1968-generation (struggling for only such internal socio-political changes). Even if not intentional, such a statement could well be read as an ideological discourse operating to legitimize both internal social stability (systemic stability is normal, contradiction and change abnormal) as well as the right to use outside "stimuli" to promote "change" in foreign nations.

Admittedly, there are elements in the new archaeology, such as the emphasis on ecology

and demographic pressure, which can be seen as a response to the global political awareness of these issues during the 1960s and 1970s. However, from this the new archaeology produced a meta-historical narrative where culture became nothing but adaptive utility. Moreover, the attempts of making archaeology into a natural science, cast in a narrow logical positivist mould, was by any means a paradoxical response in a world crying out for critical social thinking.

I shall end my comments here. I have intentionally emphasized those of Klejn's points with which I mostly disagreed. His paper was very stimulating and provocative to read, and has clearly survived well the ravages of time. However, what we all are looking forward to now is Klejn's comments on the development that took place in archaeology during the 1980s.

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