

**Archaeology as science fiction.**  
A microarchaeology of the unknown

*Fredrik Fahlander*

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Box 200  
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Gotarc Serie C, No. 43  
ISBN 91 85952 53 2

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University of Gothenburg.

*English revision by*  
Jon van Leuven

*Printed and bound by*  
Kompendiet, Aida Trading AB  
Göteborg 2001, 150 ex.

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2001

## **Abstract**

This treatise discusses aspects of the constitution of social identity and social practice in prehistoric social formations. A number of epistemological perspectives of social theory and methodology are examined in order to develop operational strategies suitable for the particular possibilities and constraints of the archaeological record. It is suggested that social practice, i.e. structurative performance, is a suitable object of study as it mediates macro theory of social formations and micro theory of individual identity and motivation. The work departs from a social constructionist standpoint, pointing out the possible different constitution of prehistoric social formations as being temporally distant from contemporary formations. It is argued that the probable existence of 'extinct', unknown social practices implies that traditional anthropological and sociological theory and method are not sufficient for archaeological studies. Prehistoric social formations have to be considered on their own terms rather than interpreted through cross-cultural analogies with contemporary societies. Hence the operational strategies suggested here focus on, and seek to increase, the available social information that can be extracted from the archaeological record, including aspects of the local environment. It is proposed that a microarchaeology of locales, i.e. specific analysis of the structurative processes of a smaller time-space sector, is a promising approach to interpret structuring principles and properties of prehistoric social formations. The constitution of the social subject and initiation of social practices are also discussed from various perspectives, including corporeal and psychological aspects.

Key-words: social theory, social identity, social practice, materialities, corporealism, constructionism, landscape.



This text is a proof read version of the seminar edition presented on my licentiate seminar at the department of archaeology in Gothenburg the 7<sup>th</sup> of June, 2000. The text is very much a result from various discussions with colleagues and friends. I especially wish to thank those who have read and commented on various drafts of the text: Per Cornell and Kristian Kristiansen (supervisors); Tony Axelsson, Karin Berggren, Håkan Pettersson, Per Stenborg, at the department of archaeology, university of Gothenburg; Lena Eriksson (Cardiff school of social sciences, university of Cardiff), Cornelius Holtorf (Department of archaeology, university of Cambridge), Stephanie Koerner (Department of archaeology, university of Manchester) and Andreas Stiebe (Department of psychology, university of Gothenburg).

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# 1

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## Introduction

*"I write in the conviction that sometimes it is best to sabotage what is inexorably to hand, than to invent a tool that no one will test, while mouthing varieties of liberal pluralism"*  
- G. Spivak<sup>1</sup>

In recent decades we have witnessed an increasing interest in social theory among archaeologists. The resultant theoretical debate has certainly contributed numerous substantial developments. Nonetheless, archaeology still reveals some shortcomings in this area. For instance, most archaeologists would agree that the temporal depth of the discipline implies a special potential which is not yet explicitly utilised in other social sciences – that advantage has not yet been fully exploited. There are several plausible reasons for this state of affairs. One of them may be found in the traditionally close bond to social anthropology, lacking a recognition that anthropologists deal with largely different kinds of data. Although each discipline's main field is the interpretation of the 'culturally other', the two do not use the same sort of social information. Anthropology generally employs written records, behavioural studies and living informants, while archaeology primarily studies material culture as a result of social practice. Archaeological interpretations are also complex since, due to temporal depth, we must confront social formations of unknown organisation and structure. In a sense, archaeology might be reckoned as being liberated from literary sources and living informants, suggesting that archaeology rather should explore the possibilities of a

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<sup>1</sup> *A critique of postcolonial reason*, 1999:9.

sociology of material culture, a vital topic that just recently begun to be discussed in the social sciences. In view of the differences between archaeology and anthropology, I believe that it can be fruitful to turn to other branches of the social sciences for inspiration. My conviction is that archaeology belongs among the social sciences; it shares a common bulk of social theory, and possesses an equal potential to play an important scientific and political role in contemporary society.

However, to achieve the latter status, archaeology must paradoxically first become an independent discipline. The initial and principal aim is to thoroughly examine the ramifications of temporality instead of reflecting contemporary images of human society, i.e. to contribute information that is not retrievable elsewhere. This is unfortunately not the situation today; archaeological knowledge is rarely addressed by social theory in other than crude evolutionary and/or generalising terms. If successful, though, I think that such an archaeology might enhance sociology, anthropology and perhaps philosophy by providing the social sciences with 'independent' interpretations of past social formations, built on their material culture rather than on direct analogies with contemporary data.

### *A 'deep-sociological' approach to prehistoric social formations*

The present thesis will consider the implications of a deep-sociological perspective. This approach has much in common with the social archaeology of e.g. Shanks & Tilley (1987a) and Webster (1996), but differs in point of departure; deep sociology is more of an archaeological sociology. While social archaeology is inclined toward themes within social anthropology, deep sociology finds its inspiration in sociology. Sociology is a wide umbrella stretching across the social sciences, embracing both macro- and micro-issues as well as psychology and, to a certain extent, biology. As sociology mainly concerns modern industrial societies, it recognises social complexity and variability of social formations, rather than presuming simple relations and structures as favoured in social anthropology. The prefix 'deep' merely indicates that the studies are deployed with a deep temporal perspective, based on material culture rather than behavioural studies and demographic data. However, a paradox is involved here. Prehistoric social formations are equivalent to neither 'traditional' nor industrial contemporary societies. Contemporary structures and ideologies are the result of historical processes of practices and strategies and hence

temporally constituted. Their contents and meanings cannot be taken for granted in prehistory. Consequently, some 'hot' issues in today's sociological discourse (e.g. gender/sex, class, ethnicity etc.) are not necessarily always relevant issues in archaeology.

An initial influence that has formed the theoretical basis of the text is the social constructionist approach. The sociological variant of the diverse constructionist perspectives was outlined by e.g. Berger and Luckmann (1966) in the mid-1960s and has later developed into a range of strands within social theory.<sup>2</sup> In brief terms, social constructionism takes a critical stance towards accepted knowledge, essentialism and realism, as well as favouring reflexivity and stressing historical and cultural specificity. The focus is set on interaction and social practices, where meaning is not regarded as a matter of the individual's psyche, nor of social structures, but of the interactive processes that take place routinely between people and things (e.g. Burr 1995:3-8, 160-63; 1998; Holstein & Miller 1993:3-5). These arguments fit the proposed deep-temporal approach quite well. The first and most notable aspect is that very few human social practices can be regarded as truly universal over time. It calls for recognising contemporary norms, social groups and categories as contemporary social constructions. The inevitable result of such a standpoint is unfortunately that cross-cultural analogies have little relevance in interpretations of prehistoric social formations. The focus should perhaps be directed less presumptuously (i.e. as far as possible) on the material culture of sociocultural particularities – that is, studying the outcome of *performed* social practices at first hand, rather than interpretations of individual or collective *experience*. Questions of ontology, ideology or cosmology belong to a second level of interpretation.

The general approach outlined here may best be described as an archaeology of *social practice* or, as argued later on, archaeology as science fiction. This approach to prehistoric social formations is not simply a study of the culturally Other, but rather of the *unknown* – something that might, although not necessarily, be similar to contemporary social formations. The stress on cultural specificity and reflexivity is also true regarding the construction of

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<sup>2</sup> Social constructionism is not a programme with a defined methodology; on the contrary, it is more of a diffuse labelling of sociologists and psychologists drawing on Wittgenstein, Foucault and the phenomenology of Alfred Schütz. I differentiate, although somewhat uneasily, social constructionism from post-structural constructivist approaches as well as the extreme relativist perspective of radical constructivism (see Schwandt 1994). For recent criticisms of the social constructionist approach, see Parker (ed.) 1998, Järvinen & Bertilsson (eds.) 1998.

knowledge and theory. One example of related epistemological bias is found in the dualisms and dichotomies that still roam within social theory. Most such objects of knowledge are the products of interdiscursive strategies and formations of different schools of thought (whether individual or collective), and may not be the best way of conceptualising social interaction (cf. Bernstein 1983, Giddens 1984, Baumann 1993, Irigaray 1994:80f). The traditional totalities in social theory (e.g. cultural, social, religious, political, economic etc.) are more or less modern inventions that impede necessary progress in theory and method. The deep-temporal archaeology seeks to explore new concepts, or combinations thereof, which fit the deep temporal characteristics of archaeology. Consequently, I argue for alternative approaches departing from a 'thicker' perspective, that is, an extended version of the social, including 'softer', cultural aspects. Of course, the issues and problems mentioned here have been, debated within theoretical archaeology. Nonetheless, I believe that these issues are best grasped and formulated within a social constructionist framework.

The general framework of the text departs from – or, I should say, through – the work of Anthony Giddens. I find structuration theory inspiring and fruitful, especially Giddens' efforts to synthesise and dissolve old inherited schisms and totalities in social theory. It is perhaps needless to point out the obvious similarities between structuration theory and social constructionism. Not surprisingly, they do share a number of influences. Nonetheless, to read Giddens today is as contradictory as it is traditional. Traditional, in relation to the interest displayed by many postprocessual archaeologists during recent decades; yet contradictory because of the implicit neo-liberal tendencies in his later work (e.g. Giddens 1998). I do not read Giddens from a neo-liberal point of view, stressing equal capacities of individuals to change and manipulate their worlds. I believe that Giddens' emphasis on this issue is mostly due to rhetoric; on the contrary, structuration theory as outlined in *The constitution of society* (1984) favours the regulative aspects of social practice more than it emphasises individual autonomy.

The primary reason why Giddens is particularly interesting is that he provides a theoretical framework and terminology that account for a wide array of aspects and perspectives in social theory. For instance, structuration theory can equally be applied to studies of the global macroscale as well as to local analysis on the microlevel. Nevertheless, there are some inconsistencies in Giddens' framework, especially regarding the constitution of

individuals and their motivation. Moreover, in an archaeological perspective, Giddens' understanding of pre-industrial societies leaves a great deal to be desired. In this he is as negligent as many other sociologists. A further objection is that his theory only to a minor extent involves material culture. Consequently, I do not view structuration theory as a finished project. It provides no ready-made solutions or answers. Still, I find the theory of structuration "good to think with", although it needs to be modified in order to be applied in archaeological analysis.

### *Individuals, social practice and social formations*

The chief aim of this study is more specific than social theory in general. It concentrates on the content and boundaries of the social formation as an *analytical* framework for discussing social practices. While I suppose that the most 'true' account of social interaction is some kind of network theory, to encompass all kinds of singular, regular, temporal social encounters with their fluid bases (emotional, economic, coincidental, structural etc.) and their unpredictable outcomes is surely an impossible endeavour. The social formation is hence not an operative concept or an object of knowledge, but is necessary as any discussion of the complexity of social interaction requires a generalising concept.

The concept of the social individual is another problematic issue. As I will argue further on are the emic experiences of individuals hard to grasp from an archaeological perspective, but as objects of study are the individuals central.<sup>4</sup> The concept of social formations would be very empty if neglecting the social agents that (re)produce them. However, to discuss individuals is not necessarily the same thing as reconstructing emic experiences or ontologies of individual agents. My prime interest is in the structuring principles and properties that characterise spatiotemporally limited social formations.<sup>5</sup> I believe that a favourable approach is to discuss questions of, for instance, social identity and the constitution of social practice in order to interpret such principles and properties of particular social formations. It is assumed that sociocultural constructs and the arrangements/organisation of individuals in

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<sup>4</sup> See Harris (1990:48ff) and Gellner (1985:145) on the distinction between 'emic' (the perspective of the object) and 'etic' (the concepts, abstractions etc. of the researcher).

<sup>5</sup> Structural properties: 'Structured features of social systems, especially institutionalised features, stretching across time and space.' (Giddens 1984:377). The concept as it is used here also involves to a certain extent aspects of *structural principles*: 'Principles of organization of societal totalities; factors involved in the overall institutional alignment of a society or type of society' (Giddens 1984:376).

social categories are likely to leave traits (manifested or unintentional) in the properties and relations of material culture as well as in the structuration of the environment. Material culture is, to varying extent, the outcome of social practices, whose discursive basis makes them somewhat similar to fragmented texts. The methodological challenge is to find operative strategies of reconstructing social categories and their discriminatory attributes from the material record. The sociocultural categories known from the anthropological record may serve here as tentative models in the recreation of meaning for archaeological patterns, but in addition, we also need to invent more complex social models to account for the 'extinct' social practices.

Perhaps a brief retrospect on what is no longer present in this study will help to illustrate the approach. My interest in social archaeology began with a discussion of gender and ways to determine the biological sex of buried individuals. I tried to show that ideas of what is proper and suitable (natural) for the two main sexes might not be as universal as we sometimes want to believe. I was particularly interested in 'transcending individuals', that is, individuals who for some reason move beyond their 'normal' gender setting, using attributes of the other gender (and hence perhaps praxis). However, I soon found that the notion of gender was a bit too restricted for my purposes. What I really wanted to discuss were not only sex-related properties, but also social identities and social categories in general. As a matter of fact, in line with the constructionist perspective, I was hoping to show that biological sex is not necessarily a relevant social category in all prehistoric social formations. How do you discuss gender in such a context? A gender approach somehow presumes some sort of social ideas tied to biological sex.

Nevertheless, the turn of focus towards queer-theory and social identities in general led to an even greater disappointment with the limited scope of previous studies. Anthropological and archaeological research in this field has traditionally been focusing on kinship systems, households, family typologies in hierarchical or segmented societies. This emphasis on the social (i.e. politico-economic) dimension has created a very narrow and dull view of past societies – in fact, a quite colourless one. Contemporary social studies are far too obsessed with the holy quartet of ethnicity, gender/sex/sexuality, social class and kinship/family organisation. These may be core attributes of identity-building in (post)modern Western societies, which need not have any relevance to prehistoric social formations.

By discussing identities and socioculturally constituted groups from a 'thick' and contextual perspective, involving elements of both the cultural and social spheres, I believe that a more interesting picture of the past might emerge. It will not amount to a full picture but, at best, such an approach will reveal some structural principles and properties and hence contribute with more relevant social models.

### *The outline of the text*

As the social sciences today consist of various conflicting sub-disciplines there is by no means any consensus about even the most basic issues. It therefore seems necessary to start with a discussion of some central problems and controversies in social theory (Chapter 2). I examine the problematics involving level, perspective, and scope of analysis and their related implications. I also attend to some epistemological considerations regarding the linkage between theory and data. I propose a multi-methodological approach, suggesting that the batch of traditional interpretative strategies may be utilised flexibly according to level of study, as well as in series of combinations. As the amount of social information in archaeology is often limited, it seems appropriate to choose strategies that obtain as much information as possible in every separate case. In one respect, the chapters of this thesis generally concern each 'level' of the proposed approach, from general theory to middle-level models/theories. However, the final step, exploring operational strategies, requires empirical data (i.e. case studies) and, due to the limited scope of this text, will not be discussed further. The outlined theory and methodology are, however, intended to be employed in future case studies.

In the third chapter, I discuss the principal differences in interpreting prehistoric social formations from the anthropological, ethnological and sociological approaches to contemporary societies. I argue that these are incommensurable and, to include possibly extinct social forms, I stress a social constructionist approach, using contemporary data solely as inspiration. In view of the flexible constitution of social formations, I propose the concept of the *locale* as a more operative framework for archaeological analysis of structuring principles and properties. I close the chapter with a general discussion of the environmental setting of social formations, as well as the role of materialities as potentially social actants. Here I suggest an expansion of structuration theory to include actants, artefacts, non-human objects and environmental properties, as potentially active social components.

Following the methodological approach outlined in Chapter 2, a ramification of the general theory outlined in Chapter 3 is pursued in Chapter 4. I narrow the focus to the interrelations between individuals, discourse and the constitution of the social subject, exploring sociopsychological and embodied perspectives. My primary concerns are the constitution of the individual as social subject, the relations between individuals, and how interactions form and remould individual biographies as well as structuring principles of their social formation. I also discuss the constitution of social practice, the basis for individual motivation and creativity, and the slow-flowing aspects of collective social life, in order to account for both social change and stability. This psychosociological perspective on individual–group relations is an attempt to develop middle-level models of structuration theory, pointing at their importance in the reconstruction of structuring principles of prehistoric social formations.

In these chapters, I touch upon quite a number of sub-disciplines and social theories. Naturally, the work is bound to generalise in some respects. Nonetheless, the following pages should be read less as an attempt to rethink or redesign archaeological theory in general, than as a discussion of one among many ways to approach the material culture of past social formations. I believe that some aspects discussed here indicate interesting future areas for research including case studies of, for instance, burials and spatial studies of landscapes and settlements.

## 2

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### Social theory and archaeology

*"Human societies are much messier  
than our theories of them."*  
- M. Mann<sup>1</sup>

The social sciences today are often said to be in a state of crisis. Since the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, sociological thought has been diverted into an increasing number of sub-disciplines: neo-Marxism, conflict theory, exchange theory, creative sociologies (phenomenology, ethnomethodology, existential sociology), systems theory, feminism, neo-functionalism, post-structuralism and post-colonial theory etc. As many of these theoretical formations are contradictory in a basic sense, we will have to acknowledge that there probably never again will be *a* social theory; instead, there are social theories. The unmistakably most frequently debated issue throughout the social sciences is the question of a proposed epistemological shift to postmodernity.<sup>2</sup> It is safe to say that the modernist–postmodernist debate has revealed major contradictions, which challenged the very essence of social theory. Wherever one may stand in that particular debate, it is difficult either to neglect the postmodern critique *or* to remain untroubled in keeping modernist ideals of a unified science.

However, while the differences between the extreme positions might seem abysmal, most social theory is not really that polarised. Camic & Gross have recently carried out an extensive survey of the general trends in theoretical sociology during the last two decades

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<sup>1</sup> *The Sources of Social Power*, 1986:2.

<sup>2</sup> For extended discussion regarding the modern–postmodern, see e.g. Mills 1963:236, Lyotard 1984, Jameson 1984, Hyussen 1990, Giddens 1990:46, Ritzer 1997, Habermas 1987, Callinicos 1989.

and identified eight main theoretical strands, or projects. These are: "(I) to construct general analytical tools for use in empirical social research; (II) to synthesize multiple theoretical approaches; (III) to refine existing theoretical research programs; (IV) to stimulate dialogue among different theoretical perspectives; (V) to enlarge and reconstruct current theoretical approaches conceptually, methodologically, socially, and politically; (VI) to analyze a range of past theoretical ideas; (VII) to offer a diagnosis of contemporary social conditions; and (VIII) to dissolve the enterprise of sociological theory" (Camic & Gross 1998). It is interesting to note that the most discussed issue in the social sciences, the modernist–postmodernist debate, touches upon only one or two of these eight projects (VII and VIII).<sup>3</sup> Leaving aside the particular question of eventual paradigmatic shifts for a while, we may find this theoretical and methodological diversity, and the controversies it brings to the fore, a very fruitful state of affairs. It does, however, raise some problematics: for instance, which of these sub-disciplinary issues are interesting to archaeology? Obviously a few of them are difficult to apply, as they rest upon a kind of data that we do not find in the archaeological record (e.g. we cannot perform interviews or monitor action under controlled conditions).

It is important to recognise that we are dealing with a range of different issues here. At a meta-level, there are philosophical theories of human action, which often are discussed separately from operative approaches or analytical concepts. On a lower level, we will find operative methods and social models, varying according to the shifting nature of data in different analyses. The relations between theory of different levels are often diffuse but there are ways to cope with them in a consistent manner. In this chapter, I start by pointing out some possibilities and pitfalls of contemporary social theory. I discuss some perspectives that I believe to be contributory and how they might be modified to suit the special properties of prehistoric studies. In the same spirit I criticise and refute other theoretical themes that I find more or less improper. In order to avoid eclecticism, I stress the *operationality* of the discussed concepts and ideas. We do not lack interesting methodologies and theoretical approaches in archaeology. The problem is rather to find applicable operative methods that link levels of theory to the archaeological record. In most postmodern-

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<sup>3</sup> An example of the first project is the apparatus of Bourdieu (1990), while the structuration theory of Anthony Giddens (1979, 1984) is ascribed to the second category. The refining of existing approaches, re-readings, deconstruction and reconstruction (III, V and VI) are broader strands cross-cutting most traditional sociological work, with Habermas' communicative theory as the most prominent example of the fourth strand.

inspired theories, there is often a lack of specificity that makes them extremely difficult to apply (after all, a pervasive aim in postmodern thinking is the deconstruction of generalising themes). Nevertheless, in order to avoid total value-relativism we need to find ways to overcome this problem. Hence, epistemological issues are of great importance for archaeology today. No matter how appetising some theories might appear on a meta-level, they are still useless if we cannot link them to archaeological data.

### ***Social theory in archaeology***

In *Approaches to social archaeology*, Renfrew warns us against direct incorporation of assumptions and procedures of social anthropologists, and stresses that "much more work is needed upon the philosophical assumptions that underlie both these disciplines before the interface between them can be crossed other than with caution and with keen self-awareness" (1984:4). Renfrew makes an important point here. It would not be helpful to eclectically pick suitable features of social theory or to use methods without a thorough examination of their specific postulates. We need to discuss and evaluate them from an archaeological perspective, i.e. recognising the differences between prehistoric and contemporary societies. However, in his book Renfrew presents a quite narrow definition of social archaeology. He is basically concerned with the political-economic dimension, discussing territorial aspects of societies, trade, social structure, and long-term change. In the case studies, Renfrew employs systems theory along with economic theory in a structure-functionalist framework. In this sense, Renfrew's approach is tied to modernist concepts of objectivity and generalising theories of human action. It is important, though, to note that Renfrew's basic interests are the macrostructures that make social formations persist or develop. This has traditionally been recognised (within positivism) as the area of human action that can be 'scientifically' studied. In contrast, "soft" questions of the microlevel and individual experiences have been regarded as less appropriate.

A somewhat different approach is found in Shanks and Tilley's *Social theory and archaeology* (1987a). In their quest to distance themselves from the theories and methods of processual archaeology, they present a range of philosophical and social theories which they find important to social archaeology. Shanks and Tilley refute any claims of objective or positivistic science, and stress a strange mix of hermeneutic's and post-structuralism as an alternative to functionalism and systems theory. They oppose to

extrasomatic explanatory models and the stereotyped image of adapting non-reflexive individuals. Instead, they favour the view of individuals as conscious and reflexive agents. In one sense their criticism is right, but they seem to overlook that the two perspectives (i.e. levels of study) do not necessarily exclude each other. Shanks & Tilley's book offers a good introduction to the variety of contemporary social theory, but unfortunately a bit uncritically presented (I suppose that this kind of approach is quite close to what Renfrew had in mind when pleading for caution). Another way of putting it is that not everything in (French) philosophy and the social sciences need be suitable for archaeological studies. Nevertheless, the variety of theories in Shanks and Tilley's critique is not due to a failure to present a general approach to the subject. They are fully aware of the futility of such attempts. Shanks and Tilley do, however, fail in the sense of leaving the work half-done. They do not provide the necessary operative instruments to make the theories applicable to archaeological case studies.

The different approaches of Renfrew and of Shanks and Tilley are typical for the two major strands in archaeological theory.<sup>4</sup> In recent decades we have seen a general shift in theoretical archaeology from the structure-functionalism of processual archaeology to more individual-oriented perspectives of experiencing and reflective agents. This change corresponds approximately to a general trend of the social sciences (and Western societies). I do not believe that the turn from *grand theories* and 'explanations' of human behaviour to more open concepts is just a passing postmodern trend (cf. Jenks 1993:10, Ritzer 1992, Skinner 1985). The growing awareness of the complexity of human action has made it virtually impossible to return to generalising, behavioural concepts. This general shift in theory transcends the disputes of processual and postprocessual archaeology. That particular debate seems less relevant and interdisciplinary in relation to the social sciences. Some prefer to speak of modern and postmodern archaeologies, but this would not add greater precision – only other words for the same conceptual dichotomy.

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<sup>4</sup> There are, of course, a much wider theoretical discussion in archaeology than these two examples embrace, but in this introductory discussion they ought to be fairly representative. It should, however, be noted that during the last decade they have shown a more open attitude to the processual/postprocessual controversy. Renfrew explores a *cognitive archaeology* (1994), while Hodder speaks of a postprocessual phase rather than a solid theoretical movement (1991) and suggests (together with Shanks & Tilley) the term *interpretative archaeology* as a label for their mixture of hermeneutics and post-structuralism (e.g. Tilley 1993).

Symptomatically, discussions in the social sciences during the last decade show a slightly more open-minded attitude to these matters. The question is not whether one of the extreme positions is more accurate than the other, but how to move beyond the schism towards consolidation (e.g. Ritzer 1997, Comaroff & Comaroff 1992). There are ways to refute the most radical relativism as well as to move beyond the most traditional stereotypes and dualistic modernist thinking (cf. Turner 1996:29, Miller 1995:18f). For instance, Erving Goffman's (1974) *frame-analytical* approach mediates between relativism and objectivism by pointing at levelled multiple realities of social life within *primary frames* (e.g. institutionalised norms and physical settings). Another example is Yehuda Elkana's (1981) notion of 'two-tier thinking', which indicates the possibility of being both realist and relativist in a consistent manner.<sup>5</sup>

Unfortunately, the archaeological debate is still polarised. Postmodern themes, notably post-structural attempts to e.g. read material culture as texts, are fluid in theoretical archaeology (e.g. Hodder 1987, Tilley 1991), but have gained little impact in mainstream archaeology. Most social analysis in archaeology is still dominated by traditional, modern analytical concepts (cf. Thomas 1995:343, 351). In recent decades, we have seen a growing gap between a group of theoretically interested archaeologists (mainly of postmodern domicile) on the one hand, and practising antiquarians on the other (see e.g. Thomas 1995:349f, Ucko 1995, Morris 1994).<sup>6</sup> The reasons for this unfortunate division are complex, but a few of them might be distinguished. First, there is an understandable resistance against the nihilistic tendencies and the relativist thinking that roam within the postmodern movement. Second, the adherents of postmodern archaeology often write in a provocative and complex manner (cf. Nordbladh 1989:25). In archaeology, the processual–postprocessual debate began strongly positioned with a harsh tone and it has routinely continued that way as a well-known mantra, repeated by both sides of the great divide (cf. Karlsson 1997:20). Such a stalemate only encourages dichotomising statements about human action and the social

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<sup>5</sup> A *frame* is a kind of situational sub-discourse, i.e. normative rules and regulations of any particular social situation (Goffman 1974:10f). A social situation is never restricted to a single frame, but rather involves different sets of frames. The concept of 'two-tier thinking' suggests that after we have chosen a frame of reference we tend to be realists within that particular frame (Elkana 1981:3f, 44f).

<sup>6</sup> Julian Thomas reports on an investigation of 200 practising archaeologists in England. One half regarded themselves as traditional; of the remaining half, 30 claimed to be theoretically interested in general. Of the 200 archaeologists, 40 acknowledged a processual standpoint while only 30 claimed to be postprocessualists (Thomas 1995:349f).

aspects of material culture. If the history of the discipline can tell us anything, it is evident that rhetorical, generalising opinions are bound to feed a counter-reaction from newer generations of archaeologists. Human action is too complex to be explained or interpreted through all-embracing schemes of passive adaptation or excessive symbolism (cf. Žižek 1989). In the last decade, we have seen a few attempts to bridge the gap. For instance, Bruce Trigger (1995) and Gary Webster (1996) have independently tried to evoke the concept of middle-range theory in a less positivistic manner. In a similar way, Zubrow discusses methods of relating to the 'real' and 'ideal' character of the archaeological record (Zubrow 1994). In Swedish archaeology, Ericsson and Runcis provide two different interpretations (a processual and a postprocessual) of a small Bronze Age grave field (Ericsson & Runcis 1995:28).

Such attempts are unfortunately still few and there is no explicit consolidation to be found on the archaeological agenda (cf. Preucel & Hodder 1996, Shanks & Hodder 1995:4). On the contrary, both Hodder and Tilley in their most recent books, twenty years after the initial postprocessual critique, devote several pages to maintaining the processual–postprocessual dichotomy (Hodder 1999, Tilley 1999). It seems that archaeological theory today is still occupied with fighting ideological wars between competing epistemological standpoints. The current situation is a constraining and non-progressive state and that archaeology would be better off merging the most promising efforts of both processual and postprocessual theories. (cf. Schiffer 1996:643, Schiffer & Skibo 1996:27, Preucel 1991). In other words, the archaeological debate would benefit by discussing good and bad archaeology in general, not by maintaining dualistic conceptions of processual–postprocessual, modern–postmodern, and theoretical–practical archaeology. Polarised knowledge and superfluous labelling are seldom, if ever, fruitful, other than for exclusive and formative strategies in building personal careers (cf. Featherstone 1994:25, Cornell & Fahlander 2000). Hence, the following discussion seeks to 'disarm' some of the opposing arguments and sort out the 'real' differences and incommensurabilities. As I will try to show next, these seemingly conflicting strands are not so polarised at all; it is more a question of differing aims, questions and levels of study.

### *Different levels of study: the individual and the society*

The question of different levels of analysis is fairly well known in social theory. Yet disputes and controversies regarding almost all key concepts mark the history of social science: subject–object,

macro–micro, materialism–idealism, agency–structure etc. At first glance these concepts seem to exclude each other, but they all deal with human interaction. It is rather the creation of such dichotomies that constitutes the problem, not the object of study. Perhaps dualisms are a traditional (modern) way of analytically separating spheres of research (cf. Thomas 1996:8), but they are nonetheless constructs. Some of these dualisms are the results of conflicting meta-theory, while others are more a result of divergent inter-discursive strategies with roots back in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

I argue that these dichotomies constrain social studies more than contributing to them. Too much effort is expended in defending one strand to the disadvantage of others. Generalising concepts seemingly have a tendency to become the object of study, rather than being *analytical concepts* and *constructed categories* (cf. Berger & Luckmann 1966:214, Tilley 1993:16). This type of discrepancy often increases with time as theoretical standpoints, building upon older constructions, gradually become new legitimate areas of research. A most important issue of deep-temporal archaeology is to abandon such constructed concepts and form theories and methods based on non-generalising empirical considerations. An illuminating example of how to integrate such dual perspectives is to discuss the question of the individual versus the collective. It concerns many of the controversies and visualises their philosophical postulates, as well as revealing the necessity of finding proper analytical methods to link general theory to the empirical data.

Whether to regard individuals as autonomous agents with free choice (a voluntarist view), or as mere actors under the governing force of social structure (a determinist view), is a tricky question. On the one hand, any agent within a society is aware of some structural force. It might consist of norms and values, rules that are not to be broken, or the power of social institutions such as family organisation or religious taboos. On the other hand, these notions may be contrasted with structural properties and practices recognised from an outside perspective, which may be more or less hidden to the members of the society. An example is demographic information that might produce categories and statistics such as life-length figures etc., possibly not 'experienced' or observed in the same manner by the agents of the society. The key issue here seems to be whether general structures are a fluctuating result of individual strategies in interaction with others, or whether praxis is constituted by pre-set structures. Is the whole more than its parts? These are classical sociological questions, traditionally contributed

to the social projects of Weber/Simmel and Durkheim/Mauss respectively. The analogy of the jigsaw puzzle is frequently used to illuminate this problem. It is argued that detailed analysis of one or a few pieces does not account for anything, but when put together in their proper places they form a complete image. However, this particular example, as well as the classic organism metaphor, are not very convincing. They build upon a static and simplified view of human agency. Individual agents are far more flexible and unpredictable; they change position in different respects while interacting with other flexible agents. Nonetheless, it is evident that there are regulative and slow-flowing aspects in human interaction, implying that agents cannot be regarded as totally autonomous and independent. Obviously, neither model provides a full account of the complexity of social formations. There are apparently both quantitative and temporal aspects inherent in this discussion besides the micro-macro distinction. Microsociology normally concerns analysis of small-scale activities and the interaction between agents, while macrosociology deals with institutional analysis of societies and world systems (Giddens 1984:139, Knorr-Cetina 1981:1f).<sup>7</sup> It is perhaps natural to focus on subject-side matters in face-to-face situations, and similarly on general trends while e.g. comparing societies. However, many sociologists and anthropologists (e.g. Malinowski 1939:962, Giddens 1984:139, Ritzer 1992:74, Callon & Latour 1981) reject this dualism as both artificial and misleading. There are, as Ritzer (1992:74) points out, no clear boundaries between macro and micro (or meso) levels.

Perhaps it is better to speak of bottom-up and top-down views: i.e. respectively to analyse society from the perspective of its members, or study the impact of the society on the individuals. Both views seem equally valid, as they are different approaches to the same phenomena (cf. Wallerstein 1990:65). The problem is that these two perspectives are hard to combine, and they often lead to contradictory results if independently applied. This paradox has traditionally been conceptualised in the form of dichotomies such as notions of 'objective' and 'subjective', or emic and etic perspectives, implying that one of the perspectives is more 'true' than the other. From a structural (objective) perspective, structures can be

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<sup>7</sup> The micro-macro distinction is originally a theme of neo-classic economic theory, somewhat differently adopted by social scientists (Hunt & Sherman 1972). In the original sense, microanalysis is not restricted to the individual level as it also deals with 'collective' agents such as multinational companies on a global scale. Ritzer notes that the micro-macro debate is mostly an issue within American sociology, while agency-structure is the subject on the European agenda (Ritzer 1992:74).

explained in terms of e.g. biological determinism or functional necessities. Hence individual strategies are only variations of the same collective process. If one rejects such general prime movers, the inside view (subjective) has to build on temporally and subjectively constituted sets of meaning. Thus every symbolic system (i.e. culture) is in some respect unique and not directly comparable to other sets of meaning. In order to compare different formations, one must translate and formalise these sets of meanings into commensurable properties, as in the well-known functionalist scheme. However, whichever perspective one prefers, there is an intricate play between constraints and possibilities within social formations, which neither an emic nor etic perspective can embrace. It rather seems that this particular problem is posed from an erroneous perspective, disparaging the multileveled complexity of social practices.

### **The archaeology of Foucault: mediating micro–macro perspectives**

An illuminating example of a strategy that goes beyond these particular problems is the work of Michel Foucault. Foucault's 'archaeological' approach aspires to distinguish temporal *discourses* and *epistemes* in European history.<sup>8</sup> By analysing the 'silent monuments', digging down through layers of statements and texts, Foucault claims to reveal regulative (exclusive) properties of discourses: sexuality, politics, the opposition between true and false, or the division of reason and madness (1969:138f; 1993:8ff). Foucault's scheme might be seen as a typical top-down perspective, viewing agents as merely passive spokesmen for an over-determining discourse. It is therefore no surprise that Foucault has been labelled a structuralist by some, and a post-structuralist by others. He has, however, opposed such labels, preferring to define himself as a 'happy positivist' (1989:xvi, 1993:46, 1969:164f). And as a matter of fact, the interesting part of Foucault's 'microanalysis of power' is the focus on individual statements and texts from a non-hermeneutic perspective. To Foucault it is irrelevant what any of his literary sources think or believe about themselves, their society,

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<sup>8</sup> A discourse, i.e. a group of 'interrelated' statements, in Foucaultian terms comprises a bit more variability than in the strict linguistic sense. It is used on a broad basis from small to large scale, including collectives of sub-discourses such as the 'medical discourse' (Foucault 1969:163ff). The *episteme* 'summarizes the general form of thinking and theorizing establishing ideas, sciences, and so on of the *longue durée*' (Ritzer 1997:43). Another central concept is that of *discursive formations*, i.e. regularities/irregularities among discursive "objects, types of statement, concepts, or thematic choices" (Foucault 1969:38, 107).

or the particular subject they discuss. He is only interested in inherent regularities embedded in texts, exposing the properties of the particular discourse (cf. Cornell 2000). Foucault's history of discursive formations is thus neither a summary of collective representations, nor of individual action, but rather a method of pinpointing the discursive frame of reference from individual acts. However, although Foucault is not interested in the biographies of the authors whose texts he analyses, this does not mean that they are irrelevant as self-reflecting agents in other respects. According to Foucault, agents are seldom aware of how their discourses are limited/regulated. It is also apparent that subjects acting within a discourse often have divergent apprehensions of why they do something in a particular manner.

Nonetheless, the implication is not necessarily that individual actors are 'discursive dopes', caught in webs of discursive rules and regulations. Foucault stresses the impossibility of standing aside from an episteme, signifying a general frame that restricts possible actions within a limited period of time, but he does not object to the possibility of being outside a discourse (e.g. 1969:164, 1977:113-38). As there are several discourses within an episteme (or discursive formation), the scope of possible individual agency is in fact rather wide. The discursive constraints may determine individuals on a general level, but still leave room for multiple choices in daily praxis. It is mainly a question of how discourses are formed. They might be the unintended outcome of praxis (a dualistic view), cynical constructions by elites (Marxist view), or universal 'hidden' structures (structural view). Foucault avoids this particular question as he does not wish to explain, or even speculate about, how discourses are formatted, maintained, and changed (1976:139f, 1969). Still, his 'archaeological' approach partly bridges the dichotomy between agency and structure. It also breaks up the micro-macro distinction since, as Ritzer noted, singular events have structural connections. The result is a theory that builds on micro-level data, ignoring questions of quality and quantity, but is still macro-oriented in scope.

### ***The duality of structure and agency: Bourdieu and Giddens***

The work of Foucault is an interesting and inspiring way to study social discourses, but there is clearly a need for more specific, operative schemes that provide some sort of theory of how discourses (or social structures) are constituted, reproduced or altered. Pierre Bourdieu has tried to move beyond this crux with the

notion of habitus. As the agent from his point of view is born into sets of values, s/he tends to act in accordance with the social rules that constitute a particular group or class. To Bourdieu, social structure is not as much of a determining force as are rules of practice, habits, institutions and habitus. Habitus might be viewed as a system of dispositions that agents appropriate by living in a certain social milieu. These dispositions allow the individual to generate thoughts and practice according to the conventions of different social fields (cf. Bourdieu 1991:230f).

The theory of practice as practice insists, contrary to positivist materialism, that the objects of knowledge are constructed, not passively recorded, and, contrary to intellectualist idealism, that the principle of this construction is the system of structured, structuring dispositions, the *habitus*, which is constituted in practice and is always oriented towards practical functions. (Bourdieu 1990:52)

As the habitus mainly works on an unconscious or tacit level, it both constrains the practices of a group or class and defines them as a social category (Bourdieu 1990:58-9). Bourdieu claims to have found a solution to the paradox of "objective meaning" without subjective intentions. Indeed, the concept of habitus is a flexible and, to a certain extent, an explanatory concept that unfolds regularities of human praxis without dogmatic structural or positivistic postulates. However, it is quite clear that Bourdieu is mainly occupied with identifying and distinguishing social categories, and less interested in individual motivation or experience.

According to Bourdieu is "Each individual system of dispositions is a structural variant of the others, expressing the singularity of its position within the class and its trajectory. 'Personal' style, ...whether practices or works, is never more than a deviation in relation to the style of a period or class..." (Bourdieu 1990:60). In this sense Bourdieu's theory has deterministic undertones, leaning towards a structural (top-down) perspective (cf. Friedman 1990:313). Similarly, the theory of Bourdieu carries rationalist undertones of an 'economic man' as he emphasises that 'practice is always oriented towards practical functions'. Another objection is that he is mainly concerned with matters of social class, not social groupings in general. His theory might be expanded to include a wider array of social groups and categories, more suitable for prehistoric questionnaires, but that would require a serious reconsideration of the whole apparatus. Nevertheless, the notion of *habitus* provides a basic, interesting theoretical background for any study of social identities and the (re)creation of social categories.

In a similar fashion, Anthony Giddens stresses the double nature of structure – that individuals both produce and reproduce social structures by their actions, constrained/enabled by structural properties (Giddens 1984:162). In this view, social structure is both the medium *and* the outcome of social action (Giddens 1979:5, 69, 218). Social structures in the Giddensian sense consist of recursively organised sets of *rules* (e.g. habits and routines) and *resources* (material and ideological), which are organised in social formations as *institutions* (Giddens 1984:28-34). He outlines his structuration theory as follows in *The constitution of society*:

The basic domain of study of the social sciences, according to the theory of structuration, is neither the experience of the individual actor, nor the existence of any form of societal totality, but social practices ordered across space and time. Human social activities, like some self-reproducing items in nature, are recursive. That is to say, they are not brought into being by social actors but continually recreated by them via the very means whereby they express themselves *as* actors. In and through their activities agents reproduce the conditions that make these activities possible (Giddens 1984:2).

Giddens' path to integrate the structure–action dualism is, in comparison to Bourdieu, more individual–oriented. He seeks to incorporate phenomenological aspects of motivation by emphasising the reflexive monitoring of the agents as a continuing process across time and space. Giddens' agents routinely reflect over the causalities of their own and others' actions. In this process, he stresses the knowledgeable and reflexivity of agents in opposition to e.g. behavioural schemes of intentions and responses. In fact, Giddens goes so far as to view individual agents as knowledgeable as any social scientist (Giddens 1993:20; cf. Berger 1963:64).<sup>10</sup> As Thompson (1984:148f) and others have noted, there are obvious similarities between the theories of Giddens and Bourdieu: notably 'capital' and 'resources', 'strategies' and 'rules', or 'fields' and 'institutions'.<sup>11</sup> There are, however, as I have pointed out, differences in level of study and in the degree of structural determinism. Bourdieu is more pessimistic about the actor's

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<sup>10</sup> It is important to note that Giddens is writing about contemporary societies (1984:xvii). He presupposes that agents are more or less educated and aware of their situation in a multicultural world. This is not directly comparable to agents in different phases of prehistory. Hence, we should expect that the knowledgeable and self-consciousness of agents might vary a lot according to their specific social context and cosmology (cf. Giddens 1994:7).

<sup>11</sup> Other examples that seek to bridge the individual–society dichotomy are e.g. Norbert Elias' (1998) figuration theory, Habermas' (1972) discussion on the colonisation of the life world, Sartre's (1960) concept of serial collectivity and Roy Bhaskar's (1979) transformational model of social activity.

abilities, while Giddens may over-rate individual knowledgeability. Bourdieu's agents are stuck in the web of social classes with small chances to break free from the structures in which they are caught. Giddens' actors are subjected to rules, routines and limited access to resources, bounded by unacknowledged conditions and unintended consequences of their action (Giddens 1984:5, 12f, 294; cf. Thompson 1984:151f, Thrift 1985:619). It seems quite clear that neither Giddens' nor Bourdieu's theories offer much room for individuals and non-institutional groups to radically transform their social system in a conscious manner. Notwithstanding the apparent similarities, I find Giddens' theory more elaborated, accounting for both individual and structural perspectives, which best suit the deep-sociological approach.

### **Operationalising dualities. Structuration theory in practice**

In archaeology, Hodder, Shanks and Tilley among others, in their criticisms of functionalist and processual archaeology, have stressed structuration theory and the apparatus of Bourdieu as alternative perspectives (Shanks & Tilley 1987a; Hodder 1987:208, 1992:85). Giddens' work has been of particular interest (e.g. Thomas 1989:101, Donley-Reid 1990, Kirk 1991; Barrett 1994, 1998). The attention is understandable, since structuration theory is persuasive and rhetorically tempting to appropriate but, unfortunately, not without complications. As it seeks to embrace most of social variability, it tends to be a bit too general in scope, which makes it less operative in archaeological analysis. This is not a remark restricted to the field of archaeology; it applies to social sciences as a whole. One problem is ironically in the abandonment of dualism and dichotomies. For instance, Arthur Stinchcombe has remarked that agents are often more 'rational' in some situations than in others (1986:5f). Similarly, Mouzelis (1989) has criticised Giddens' rejection of the subject/object dualism, emphasising that agents do act in relation to other structurally situated agents (all differentially empowered). There seem to be both dualism and duality. Margaret Archer (1982) shares this criticism, noting the obvious fact that there are social situations where structure is a greater determining force and, similarly, there are areas with less structural impact. This criticism stresses a weak point in Giddens' theory and may partly answer the question of why structuration theory is difficult to apply in practice; it leaves the field open for every unique analysis to determine the rate of structural determinism. Giddens' theory does

not provide any guidance on how to resolve this lack of specificity, although he is quite aware of the problematics (Giddens 1993:1-15):

..I should reaffirm that the duality of structures 'accounts for' nothing. It has explanatory value only when we consider real historical situations of some sort. The 'duality' of the duality of structure concerns the dependence of action and structure, taken as a logical assertion, but it certainly does not involve a merging of the situated actor with the collectivity. Much better here, indeed, to speak of a hierarchy than the sustaining of a dualism: there are many modes of interconnection between individuals and collectivities. (Giddens 1993:6-7)

Giddens thus acknowledges a notion of hierarchy in the dualist continuum, from less toward greater impact of structural properties. It is important to recognise the connection between scale of analysis and the continuum of voluntarism–determinism. It is difficult to overlook the increasing tendency toward structural perspectives in macrostudies, as there are more individual-oriented concepts involved regarding microstudies. But it may be preferable to speak of 'modes of interconnection' than of a hierarchy, as the latter implies some sort of stratification or order of levels. George Ritzer has tried to visualise the relationship between areas of research and the level of study in the following manner:

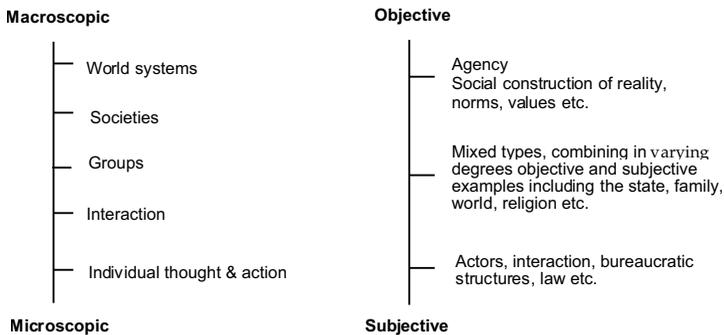


Fig. 1. The general relations between level of analysis and the subjective–objective scale (modified after Ritzer 1992:387f).

Ritzer stresses that social formations contain both determining (objective) structures (e.g. laws and bureaucracy) and subjective phenomena (norms and values). Nonetheless, he is aware that it is not really possible to separate objective structures from the subjective sphere. For instance, laws are often built on subjective norms and values; there is always a dialectic in any social power

relation. Ritzer is the first to admit that these areas are a tentative visualisation of the subjective and objective dimensions in separate levels of analysis (Ritzer 1992:386). He clarifies that:

... the social world is not really divided into levels. In fact, social reality is best viewed as an enormous variety of social phenomena that are involved in continuing interaction and change. Individuals, groups, families, bureaucracies, the polity, and numerous other highly diverse social phenomena represent the bewildering array of phenomena that make up the social world. (Ritzer 1992:382f)

Ritzer makes a very important point here; it is easy to confuse models, objects of knowledge, and totalities with the multitude of social 'reality'. I guess that any society or community is best seen as clusters of multidimensional networks (with extra-societal connections) between individuals, actants and properties of the environment. However, to analyse societies as such, we need to recognise whole series of spatiotemporally flexible, nested bonds of economic, social, cultural, emotional etc. character. Network analysis is complex already on the microlevel, as studies of modern companies, departments or institutions have demonstrated (cf. Berger 1963:47). To employ this approach in prehistoric social formations of longer *durée* than the episodic would be quite futile. Social analysis must work with some generalising models of the 'real'. Nonetheless, if we acknowledge Ritzer's scales as analytical, simplified categories, the complexity of the deterministic-voluntaristic dimension can be further connected by combining the scales into a cross (Fig. 2).

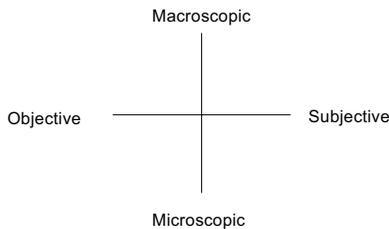


Fig. 2. The relations between level of analysis and the rate of objectivism/subjectivism in different areas of study (modified after Ritzer 1992:388).

In this manner, Ritzer distinguishes four main areas of study and their relation to degree of objectivity/subjectivity: Macro-subjective (e.g. culture, norms and values), Macro-objective (e.g. society, laws, bureaucracy, technology and language), Micro-subjective

(e.g. different areas of social reality constructions) and Micro-objective (e.g. action, interaction and behavioural patterns). Ritzer's categories hint at the expected amount of structural constraints in separate cases, but are a bit too rough to be of direct practical use. Furthermore, a main objection is that his scheme lacks a temporal dimension. As we have seen, the time-span is an important variable involved in micro-macro distinction of events from the patterns of *longue durée*. We must not forget that we are dealing with human agents with limited life-span. A complementary example is provided by Randall Collins (Fig. 3). Collins recognises only three macrovariables in social studies: time, space, and number of combinations of microsituations. All other variables are characteristics of microsituations (Collins 1981:98). In Collins' scheme, macrostructural patterns are the result of microsituations, implying that structural variables be derived from social practices performed within microsituations.

TIME SCALE						
SPACE SCALE	Seconds	Minutes–Hours	Days	Weeks–months	Years	Centuries
<b>One-Person</b> (1-3 sq. ft)	Cognitive, emotional processes	Meaningful events; work; repetitive and intermittent behaviour			Careers; life histories	Genealogies
<b>Small Group</b> (3-100 sq.ft)	Eye-contact studies, micro-conversational analyses	Rituals; group dynamics; exchanges; bargaining				
<b>Crowd–Organization</b> ( $10^3$ - $10^6$ sq.ft)		Crowd behaviour		Organisations: informal, formal	Organisational structures and histories	
<b>Community</b> ( $10^7$ - $10^{10}$ sq.ft)				Social movements	Communities	
<b>Territorial Society</b> ( $10^{11}$ - $10^{14}$ sq.ft)					Political, economic, demographic, stratification patterns, "cultures"	Long-term social changes

Fig. 3. Time, space and numbers as levels of social analysis (after Collins 1981, 1988:387). Note the correspondence with the macro-micro continuum (grey line).

Collins' scheme is in combination with Goffman's frame-analysis interesting as they both suggest that structuring principles and properties of a social formation are to varying extent are implicit in social practices of microsituations. This is perhaps neither a straight

answer to the criticism of duality-theories, nor a replacement of network analysis – but it implies a possibility to discuss general aspects of social formations from particular social practices. This is an interesting perspective that might prove to be of great importance to archaeology as it on an operative level often is limited to fragmented and small-scale frames.

### Towards a multi-methodological approach

There is always an obvious risk in discussions of social theory at a meta-level, as they often tend to be unusable in practice. It is, of course, possible to develop a methodology solely from a meta-theoretical point of departure and later try to verify it through empirical data. In sociology, Talcott Parsons' 'grand theory' of the social system might illustrate, but also warn against, such attempts. The contrary approach is perhaps more successful, i.e. to depart from a specific chosen set of data and by a series of operative methods modify and elaborate theories of higher level. I deliberately use the word 'modify' for the simple reason that there is no such thing as no meta-theory, whether it is pronounced or not. Hence, I believe that it is often better to extensively explore and evaluate general theory in an early stage of analysis. Such an approach might minimise confusion by incommensurable theories in later stages, a common source of error when working close to empirical data. In *Re-constructing archaeology*, Shanks and Tilley (1987b:111-12) present a model identifying three stages in theoretical appropriation: theoretical objects, conceptual links and structuring principles (Fig. 4).

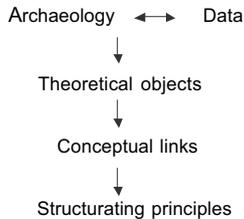


Fig. 4. Stages in theoretical appropriation. (From Shanks & Tilley 1987b:112.)

These stages are the outcome of a process of relationship between the archaeologist and the data. "The entire process of analysis and explanation of the real moves in a dialectical process in which

theoretical analysis results in the formulation or understanding of structuring principles of social life which are then referred back in order to explain data via conceptual links.” (Shanks & Tilley 1987b:112.) The principles, according to Shanks and Tilley, are formed by the nature of the data, but also of the archaeologist’s knowledge and political standpoints. Shanks and Tilley’s scheme grasps the general ingredients of an interpretative process, but it has some shortcomings in the character of the relations between the different stages. It seems more fruitful if data and meta-theory possess equal status and are allowed to coincide in the construction of methodology. A complementary model may look like Figure 5.

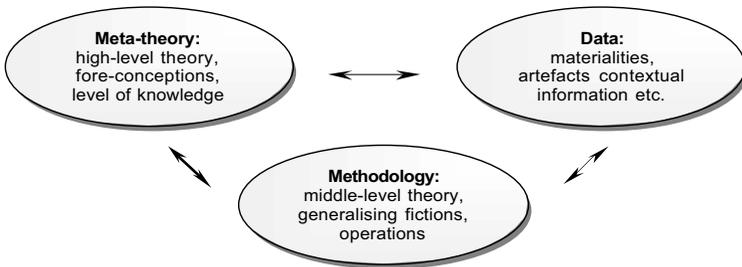


Fig 5. The relations between meta-theory, methodology and the empirical data. (These relationships should not be read as a closed system; all included parts are naturally connected and affected by the norms and discourses of the 'outside' world.)

The scheme should be interpreted as follows. Meta-theory and data are equally valuable active parts that simultaneously allow for the development of operative methods, but are also influenced by each other in a dialectic interrelationship. In other words, we have three non-ranked interacting agents in a space-time continuum of changing norms and discourses of society. However, in order to actually link general theory to empirical data, this simple scheme has to be further elaborated. In archaeology and social theory, there are at present a number of methodological approaches (e.g. functionalism, structuralism, and general interpretative approaches etc.) that might be useful in social studies. Although some of them may be inconsistent or deterministic as general theories, they might come in handy as *analytical concepts*. For instance, to apply a strict structural approach with a general theory similar to that of Levi-Strauss (1963) might seem naive, but structuralism as an analytical concept need not include postulates of

a savage mind or human universals. On the contrary, it might be interesting to use binary-opposition techniques in order to make sense of scattered data, in combination with hermeneutic or phenomenological interpretations.<sup>12</sup> Likewise, functional concepts or systems theory might be useful to find interesting aspects of more macro-oriented orientation, which can be contrasted or related to micro-level studies of the same data. The point is to differentiate general theory from analytical concepts and keep in mind that the concepts are interpretative tools that *produce* etic categories. The results might have very little to do with any emic reality, but perhaps serve as a basis for further, more elaborate interpretations. In the following scheme (Fig. 6), I try to visualise the links between high-level theory and empirical data:

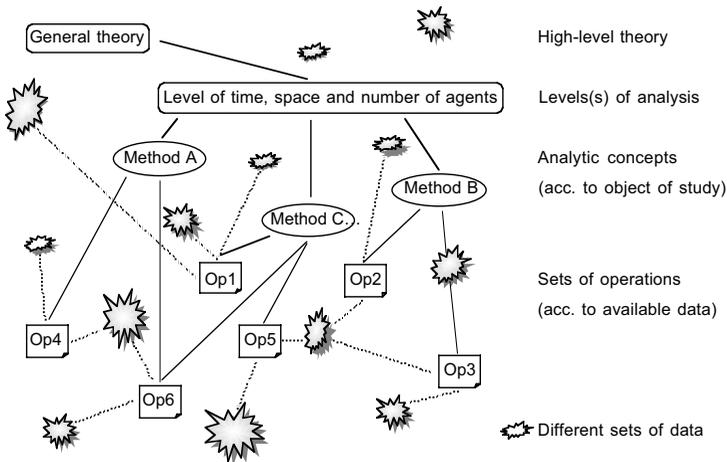


Fig. 6. A schematic visualisation of the relations between some analytical concepts and data within a frame of a general high-level theory.

This kind of schemes are of course simplistic, but it hopefully gives a hint of how high-level theories can be operative and linked to the archaeological record. From any general theory, there is a range of analytical concepts that might link theory to data. However, as operative methods often are tied to specific analytical concepts and

<sup>12</sup>Christopher Tilley offers an interesting archaeological example in *Re-constructing archaeology* (1987b:105-71). Tilley organised a waste amount of TRB pottery in order of the patterning properties (open and closed). This structural analysis provided him with a conceptual platform to discuss ideological change in the 'TRB culture'.

sets of data, it is important that their internal relations are examined thoroughly. Bearing this constraint in mind, I see no further restrictions in combining different operative methods under the auspices of one or two analytical concepts. For instance, one can choose between a number of concepts and apply them according to the nature of data or level of study – or apply more than one concept in order to combine them or evaluate them respectively in separate cases. It should also be noted that different analytical concepts have, or can have, a range of different operative methods that use different combinations of data. It might seem appropriate, while not necessary, to use those that make most use of the available data in every individual case. Interesting results can possibly be obtained from a series of carefully designed *operative strategies*, i.e. a battery of operations on a bulk of data, which may be combined and contrasted in order to utilise as much information as possible.<sup>14</sup> For instance, divergent data such as landscape properties can be linked with settlement structure and style analyses of ceramics. In such an approach, micro-level analysis can be combined with macro-data or vice versa, as any data often contain a bit of both. I will not dwell further on this subject at present. To discuss operative strategies in detail, one needs to do so in relation to empirical data. Still, it seems evident that there ought to be a certain methodological flexibility in each particular case. Any question put to the data is tied to level of analysis on the macro–micro continuum, which thus limits the number of appropriate methods and kinds of data. This will also be the case in the validation and choice of methods that are applied.

This general scheme is one way to valuing the different approaches within archaeology and the social sciences. There are intricate interrelations between the main properties involved: ideology, general theory, objects of study, methods, and data. By recognising the connections between these main properties, we might on the one hand overcome some of the controversies of competing theoretical strands, and on the other hand increase the amount of information by applying multiple methods to the archaeological record. However, in order to do this, we need a thorough investigation of the epistemological issues in order to make sense of the connections between general theories and

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<sup>14</sup> The concept of middle-level is used here in a quite different sense than the concept of middle-range theory put forward by Robert Merton (1949:5) or Binford (1968). By middle-range levels I simply refer to meso-methodological theories linking data to general high-level theories (cf. Shott 1998).

methodologies, and to find ways of making them operative on empirical data.

**Summary: Theory, operations and data**

Much ink has been spilled in social theory to debate competing theories and approaches. Indeed, some theories are incommensurable, and some concepts and methodologies are inevitably tied to general postulates or ideologies. Nevertheless, I suggest that a multi-methodological approach can prove to be most useful for archaeological analysis. By differentiating analytical methodology from high-level theory, I believe that one can use, for instance, Giddens' structuration theory as a general concept of understanding human action, but employing different analytical generalisations that involve separate sets of operative methods in accordance with the properties and level of study. For instance, structural concepts may very well be applied as analytical tools, i.e. a constructed and generalised way for the social analyst to work with macro-oriented analysis. In the multi-methodological approach, neither functionalism or systems theory, nor more individual-oriented perspectives are necessarily false on the analytical level, while they might be both simplistic and naive as meta-theories of human agency. A multi-methodological approach offers many interesting ways of dealing with the archaeological record.

The main purpose of this chapter has been to introduce the general epistemological background for the following discussion. I have criticised the theoretical debate in archaeology for being too conflict-related and polarised. I stress that this divide is mostly about levels of study and philosophical standpoints, not so much about incommensurable theory and method. Instead, I have tried to emphasise the chief aspects behind social analysis: the philosophical element, the distinction of different levels of study, and how high-level theory, methods, and data can be consistently connected by selected operative strategies. This, I believe, is a most fruitful approach in elaborating social theory from a prehistoric perspective. The forthcoming chapters will basically follow the conceptual scheme of fig. 6. I have already introduced the essential aspects of structuration theory, proposing its potential as a *general theory* of social practice. I have also discussed the problematic concerning the different levels of analysis. The links between general, discursive aspects of the macroscale and the social practices of microsituations as discussed by Foucault, Goffman and Collins is further developed. In the following chapter I discuss the

social formation as an *analytical concept* in relation to the general theory of structuration. The aim is to explore the potential of a *microarchaeology* of locales. Microarchaeology is, contrary to the concept of social formations (or social system, society, culture etc) an *operative* approach that seeks to analyse structuring principles and properties from performed social practices carried out within a smaller *locale*.

# 3

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## Social practice and social formations The need for 'exotic' ontologies

*"I've never met John Gill, but I've studied earth's history from the texts that he prepared. What impressed me most was his treatment of earth's history as causes and motivation, rather than dates and events."*

- Mr. Spock<sup>1</sup>

The introductory quotation of this chapter, from the old television series *Star Trek*, might seem misplaced in a thesis on archaeological theory. It is, however, not randomly chosen. The obvious point here is to illuminate the scientific ideals of the 1960s from the eyes of the always objective and non-empathic Vulcan Mr. Spock (the Vulcans are hominoids that have suppressed all feelings in favour of strict logic). I do not say that the scientists of the 1960s were non-empathic, but that there are interesting connections between science fiction and archaeology. They both mirror to some extent trends and ideals of contemporary society and it is amusing to note that our images of the future are often very similar to our images of the past. As an example, another science-fiction series of the 1990s, *Earth Two*, can be contrasted to the old *Star Trek* series. *Earth Two* is about a group of humans trying to survive on a distant planet. The original inhabitants of the planet, the 'Terrians', are human-like entities who bear unmistakable resemblance to 'traditional' cultures such as the Australian Aborigines. The Terrians are characterised as some kind of high-tech hunter-gatherers, living partly underground in close relation with nature, both in cosmology

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<sup>1</sup> *Star Trek* episode XXXV, *Patterns of force* (original series).

and practice, communicating through dreams. The general differences between the two TV series are striking. When Commander Kirk in *Star Trek* ruthlessly tried to charge alien civilisation with American ideals of right and wrong (like the USA on earth), the humans of *Earth Two* are self-reflective, environmentally conscious and emphatically understanding towards the planet's indigenous inhabitants (although they nevertheless emphasise American neo-liberal ideals). This shift in perspective is very similar to contemporary trends within archaeology. During recent years we have seen a renewed interest in cultic and religious ideas in burial archaeology (e.g. Kaliff 1992, Lagerlöf 1991; see also Larsson 1997). In a similar way, a mythical dimension of the environment is often presupposed, and commonly considered important, in landscape archaeology (e.g. Tilley 1994, Bender 1998, Bradley 1993). The image of the prehistoric Being is once again glorified in a Rousseauian spirit. For instance, in *Ethnography of the Neolithic*, Tilley (1996a:68f) describes the late Mesolithic societies of Scandinavia as proto-communist with equality also between the sexes. Anders Carlsson (1998) is another recent example who exalts the "quality" life of the Stone Age. Somehow it seems that the inhabitants of prehistoric societies have been transformed from the rationally adapting 'Mr. Spocks' to environmentally conscious, emotional and self-reflective 'Terrians'.

This discussion is an attempt to stress the different levels of hermeneutics involved in the study of prehistory. In sociology, Giddens argued that social studies always have to deal with *double hermeneutics* – i.e. that the meta-language of social sciences in itself requires a hermeneutic task except for the obvious one of interpreting human behaviour (Giddens 1984:284f, 374; cf. Obeyesekere 1990:219). In archaeology, Shanks and Tilley have further argued that anthropological studies of the Other involve an additional third level of hermeneutics: the influence and bias of the anthropologist's own 'pre-interpreted universe' (Shanks & Tilley 1987b:108).<sup>2</sup> This treble hermeneutic simply implies that one usually puts questions which seem relevant to one's own reality, but which may be irrelevant in cultures with a different cosmology. Shanks and Tilley also add a fourth level of hermeneutics in the specific study of the past stressing the distance in time. It is perhaps a bit silly to stress that remoteness of time and space require additional levels of hermeneutics, but there are nevertheless differences in

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<sup>2</sup> Shanks & Hodder 1991:10. See also Tambiah's (1990:111) notion of double subjectivity, and Harris (1990:48ff) and Gellner (1985:145) on the distinction between 'emic' (the perspective of the object) and 'etic' (the concepts, abstractions etc. of the anthropologist).

interpreting a prehistoric society as opposed to any contemporary one.<sup>3</sup> It is this dimension that I am now trying to grasp in the discussion of science fiction and archaeology. Besides the similarities there are differences between the imaginativeness of science fiction and that of archaeology. In our images of the past we often apply an evolutionary perspective of 'us' at a pre-industrialised stage – the study of 'us' as the Other. In science fiction, alien races are often different in some typical anti-human way to distinguish them as the Other (they may have four arms, green skin or extrasensory powers).

However, most importantly, when humans are to confront alien civilisations, they are often put in a situation that requires understanding and interpretation of the features of something *unknown*. They find themselves in a situation where 'natural' human aspects might be absent (such as feelings or 'rationality') or facing social formations built upon radically different ideas of social co-existence. Castoriadis (1995:107) has suggested that social studies would benefit from inventing radically 'exotic' ontologies. He does not argue for unlimited speculation, but stresses that *any* ontology must be related to observable sociohistorical phenomena. In a similar sense, might archaeologists draw inspiration from science fiction or any other creative thinking when constructing their social models based on relevant 'sociohistorical phenomena' (i.e. material culture). We should perhaps try to approach the material culture of the past not as if it stemmed from an alien civilisation, but as more of an *unknown* than the Other.

### *Interpreting burials without tricorder?*

An example from the latest sequel of Star Trek, *Voyager*, might clarify the argument. In the episode *Emanations*, Commander Chakotay, Harry Kim and B'elanna Torres are investigating a desert asteroid in search of special crystals when they discover a cave full of dead humanoids. The crew wants to perform a scientific investigation of the bodies but Commander Chakotay insists that they should only perform an ocular inspection in order not to disturb the peace of the dead.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> This notion of a third and fourth level of hermeneutics has later been disregarded and reconsidered by Shanks and included in the double hermeneutics of Giddens. On comparing historical and ethnographical interpretations, cf. Levi-Strauss 1963:17.

<sup>4</sup> Such a procedure would not have been proper in the original 1960s version, but is somewhat typical for the most recent sequel; the same ethical questions are being discussed in contemporary archaeology. Commander Chakotay is of Romulan origin, and is characterised as a kind of alien counterpart to the stereotype image of a Native American Indian.

B'elanna: Well, I think I've found out about all I can with my eyes.

Chakotay: Really? What have you learned about their culture so far?

B'elanna: They like to bury their dead on asteroids – that's about all I can tell without a tricorder. No artefacts, no inscriptions, just some naked dead people.

Chakotay: You're looking, but you're not seeing. The fact that they are naked says a lot. It means that this race doesn't believe in dressing the deceased. And the lack of artefacts can indicate that they don't believe that worldly goods can be taken into the afterlife.

Harry: What makes you think that they believe in an afterlife at all?

Chakotay: Look at the positions of the arms and hands. The bodies have been arranged in poses of serenity and they appear to have been wrapped in the same biopolymer residue that we found out in the passageway. It all indicates that this culture has a great deal of rituals associated with the disposal of the dead. That normally indicates some belief in the afterlife.

As the episode continues we learn that, when these particular aliens were about to die, they did in fact wrap themselves up in cloth, which was reused by their families from generation to generation. The people on this planet did not die a 'natural' death; a machine killed them during a family ceremony led by a priest. The machine transported the dead to the asteroid while the next of kin believed that they were transferred to a 'higher state' – a place where all previously deceased people were thought to reunite. The issue here is not whether Commander Chakotay was right in his interpretation. The interesting point is that he based his interpretation on the available data without using direct analogies with other people. Chakotay could not do that as he was confronted with the *unknown*, a formation of structural properties and sets of meaning (or frame-sets) free of any interference from any known contemporary cultures. The single common reference is the biological nature of humanoid characteristics.

The situation of archaeology today is not very different from this fictitious example. Perhaps the neat narratives of archaeologists and the ethnographic present as portrayed by ethnologists and anthropologists have led us astray. We find themes in material culture that seem to fit well with ethnographic examples. But what of all the anomalies, the unintelligibilities, the pieces that do not fit? Naturally, ethnographic parallels play an important part in the process of presenting archaeology to the public and, so to speak, 'put the flesh back on the bones'. Moreover, there should be no doubt about the importance of a wide range of anthropological experience to archaeological theory-building. After all, hypotheses and ideas do not come from above like windfalls into the archaeologist's head; they are fictions constructed on the basis

of preconceptions and knowledge in relation to data (cf. Castoriadis (1995:107). Nonetheless, the most important support for a science-fictional approach is found in the skewed image of small-scale societies as presented in the social sciences. The following discussion on the constitution of that knowledge suggests that archaeology is better off with a social-constructionist perspective of an unknown rather than of the contemporary Other.

### *Finding the past in the present? Tradition and colonial inference*

In any attempt to incorporate social theory from other disciplines into archaeology, we must fully acknowledge the differences in the nature of data, the different agendas, and the aims of anthropology and sociology. Theories and methodologies often are developed for specific questions and all social theories are not relevant to prehistoric studies. There are also important questions within archaeology that are not normally discussed in other fields of social theory. A first step is to acknowledge that social theory in general is occupied with contemporary matters. The objects of study are mainly contemporary living societies, and only to a lesser extent historical societies. It is striking how little social scientists address archaeological perspectives. If they are addressed, the temporal depth is at best restricted to the last one or two thousand years of history, in which most of the modern structural principles probably were already established. The long time-span of prehistory is often referred to as primitive, pre-capitalist, pre-industrial society or perhaps 'traditional culture', whatever that label means in terms of presupposed concepts of something 'original' or 'natural'. This is a main reason why we cannot directly transfer social theory into the archaeological discourse. Very few theories and concepts of the social sciences can be regarded as universal since they stem from only a few hundred years of biased observations.

In archaeology, there has been a tendency to view anthropological theory of low-tech societies as more relevant than studies of industrial societies. This is understandable, as the former's material culture is similar to what is found in the archaeological record. It is, however, essential to observe that, whether the object is a low-tech marginalised survival group at the edge of the world or any modern Western society, they differ from the study of prehistoric objects, as the temporally constructed concepts and structural properties of contemporary societies cannot be taken for granted in prehistory. Despite similarities in subsistence, level of technology and so on, 'traditional' societies of today cannot be considered as unaffected by the last couple of

millennia of globalisation and marginalisation in the shadow of other expanding societies (cf. O'Brien 1986:905).

The colonial influence and its 'contaminating' effect on politics and cultural boundaries are nowadays quite well recognised (e.g. Gellner 1995, Stahl 1993:247-9, Billington et al. 1991:68-73, Ardener 1989, Vansina 1989:244, Asad et al. 1973). Leach, when discussing the impact of outside influence, states that "traditional culture is simply not available and has never been" (Leach 1989:39; see also Service 1962:8, Wolf 1982). Leach stresses that 'outside influence' has been neglected in the history of anthropology and hence created a distorted picture of 'traditional' cultures. For instance, Malinowski 'overlooked' that before he arrived at the Trobriand Islands in 1916, there had been Christian missionaries and traders present at least twenty years before his arrival (Gosden 1999:41). Radcliffe-Brown's study of 130 aboriginal 'tribes' gathered most of his genealogical data from a remote hospital for venereal diseases (Layton 1997:69).<sup>5</sup> Similarly, Evans-Pritchard seems to have failed to notice that there were cars and Catholic cathedrals in Dinkaland when he studied the area. His photographs reveal no modern influence and portrayed the Nuers naked, a strange phenomenon as earlier photos show Nuers fully dressed! (Leach 1989:40.)

Levi-Strauss provides another example. Van den Steinen interpreted the Bororo in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century as 'true primitives', lacking knowledge of agriculture (Van den Steinen 1897:581). However, what Van den Steinen 'overlooked' was that the Bororo had been marginalised for over 50 years and that they seemed to prefer looting the fields of the Brazilian soldiers instead of taking up farming (Levi-Strauss 1963:104f). Later archaeological studies also confirm that the economy of the Bororo was partly based on elementary agriculture (e.g. Lathrap 1970) and that this changed when they were driven away from their original territory.<sup>6</sup>

An additional interesting example concerns the grouping of the South American Indian tribes in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Cornell, among others, has shown how the early colonial contacts changed the power structures of the native South Americans. Cornell also discusses the impact of the Swedish ethnologist Erland Nordenskiöld's categorisation of native tribes, 'the ethnographic present', made in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Nordenskiöld 1915). His

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<sup>5</sup> Robert Hughes presents a dramatic illustration of the ruthless marginalisation of the original inhabitants of Australia from the late 17<sup>th</sup> century onward (Hughes 1988; cf. Friedman 1994:4).

<sup>6</sup> Observations a few years later by Cook, Radin and Fric all independently report cultivated fields in the Bororo district, which implies that they in fact were originally an agricultural society. The Bororo disintegrated completely between 1880 and 1910 (Levi-Strauss 1963:105).

scheme of tribes and their territories was in some areas arbitrary and quite dubiously established. However, Nordenskiöld's 'map of tribes' had implications for anthropology and modern politics, as it has more or less created borders and ethnic groups that certainly are not traditional or representative for any prehistoric societies (Cornell 1996; see also Kuper 1988 for similar examples). A similar situation is found in Africa, where many groupings of tribes were constructions of the colonial regimes (Vansina 1989:244).

These examples might seem sufficient to illustrate my point here, but it is important to stress that we also have to acknowledge the impact of other previous contaminations than those by the European colonial regimes: e.g. medieval Muslim societies, the Chinese Empire and many others. Friedman emphasises a few such cases. In West Timor, the Chinese – and later European – sandalwood trade fragmented and changed the political structures in Timor already in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Another interesting example concerns the classic Ainu hunter-gatherers, who upon closer inspection reveal both division of labour, engagement in trade and a hierarchic organisation. This was probably a result of their increasing marginalisation due to the expansion of Japan (Friedman 1994:10f, 1990:319). The Ainu are only one of several instances of 'retained' hunter-gatherers, who for centuries have been involved in relations with the outside world (see also Keesing 1975:122). Finally, the Congo pygmies of Africa have frequently been cited as a prominent example of a so-called isolated society (e.g. Turnbull 1965, Godelier 1973).<sup>7</sup> Godelier argued that the economy of the pygmies was determined by an ecological mode of production, neglecting that they were officially hunters in the realm of the Congo kingdom. Their assumed autonomy as it appears today, according to Friedman, is due to the collapse of the Bantu system around 1000 AD (Friedman 1994:11). The Bantu system seems to have played a major role in the formation of the ethnographic present in Africa over a period of four thousand years.

### *The relevance of time and space: prehistoric world-systems?*

These examples suggest that there are no isolated 'natural' or 'original' cultures left to study (cf. Gould 1980:32, Freeman 1968:262, Dalton 1981; Lévi-Strauss 1963:108, 114). There is thus no such thing as cultural continuity or a contemporary Stone Age

<sup>7</sup> According to Friedman (1994:11), Turnbull wrote most of his doctoral thesis in an isolated hotel in the company of other upper-class Europeans. He seldom left the vicinity and got most of his material from the hotel owner, Mr Putnam.

society (or mentality) to use as a cultural reference (cf. Clarke 1968:280, Wolf 1982). On the contrary, it rather seems that most contemporary societies are more or less involved or becoming marginalised (active or passive) in a global world system (see e.g. Wallerstein 1974-89, Friedman 1994, Ekholm 1981).

The world-systems theory as it is put forward by Wallerstein, Friedman and Rowlands stresses the effects of structural forces (preferably of capitalistic kinds), but one might on the same basis argue that the process is about producing and reproducing a common *set of references* or, in Giddens' terms, structuring properties and principles. It seems obvious that social structures in many of the commonly cited 'traditional' societies have been, to varying extent, transformed/influenced by 'outside' interference. It is important to note that these processes imply ideological and cosmological transformations as well: a kind of ideological acculturation and colonisation (cf. Larsson 1997:24). Ideological/cultural properties are intimately embedded in any economic/political influence. Just as the world today is becoming devoted (adapted) to market capitalism, structuring properties (such as gender ideologies, the concept of the family etc.) seem to have been smeared out into a globally recognised set of references with only minor discrepancies or variations. For instance, Rosamund Billington, arguing from a feminist perspective, notes how the colonial regimes exclusively turned to the males of the indigenous groups on matters of payment, teaching and the introduction of new agricultural techniques, leaving (neglecting) the subsidiary activities to the women (Billington et al. 1991:68). Such practices have probably either strengthened the tendencies towards the gender roles and sexual division of labour typical in contemporary Western societies.

This intersocietal perspective is not to be confused with traditional Childean diffusionism (1925:166-77) or mixed with world-systems theory as it is put forward by Wallerstein (1974-89) or Friedman & Rowlands (1978). In opposition to diffusionism, it does not claim to have any explanatory value for certain past events or inventions. It postulates no general structural formula (Marxist or otherwise) or systems theory. The proposed homogenisation of certain powerful structural principles is rather due to an accelerating regional and hence global interaction of material culture and social contacts. The generative forces behind these increasing networks may be linked to environmental effects, capitalist market forces, ideological effects, or simply due to increasing population. It seems plausible that many cross-cultural

sociocultural similarities are better understood in such a perspective than in terms of evolutionary or biological causes.

Apparently, it is hard to neglect the obviously increasing significance of regional and global networks during recent centuries, but the proposed process of 'homogenisation of culture' is certainly not a unique theme of the latest 400 years of Western colonisation. It is rather the extreme result of an escalating process since early human history (see Boas 1973:91, Ekholm 1981:241 for similar interpretations).<sup>8</sup> Neither can the process be regarded as temporally linear in any sense; it is best seen as a temporally and spatially fluctuating process. It is naturally more difficult to find indications of such processes in prehistory, but a few examples might support the argument. In the proto-history of the Mediterranean area, we have several instances of how ideologies, values, and norms can be spread rapidly in different ways. The Greek colonisation period in 750–550 BC is a classic example of the spread of Greek culture by a series of migrations. Another is the rapid formation of a Hellenistic *koine* in the eastern Mediterranean, traditionally recognised as a result of the warfare of Alexander the Great in the third century BC. Lately, we have witnessed an increased interest in symbolic, economic, and ideological exchange between the Mediterranean and northern 'Europe' during the Bronze Age (Kristiansen 1998, Barrett 1998, Larsson 1997). In recent decades, molecular analyses have established a long-term (2000–500 BC) presence of 'Caucasians' in the Taklamakan desert of the Chinese province of Xinjiang (e.g. Hadingham 1994, Chao 1996). There are also other examples of material evidence indicating shared beliefs, such as the waste distribution and chamber tombs in Western Europe, or instances of a rapid spread of technology.

These are all interesting examples, indicating the impact of prehistoric regional or global networks. Of course, such homogenisation processes are, so far, nothing but theoretical constructs. Solid support for long-term global homogenisation processes is extremely difficult to establish. Any resemblance between cultural properties of today's societies may be equally well seen from other perspectives. Anti-diffusionists stress that the same kind of inventions or traditions can very probably be discovered independently in time or space (especially under similar

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<sup>8</sup> Friedman traces the origins of world systems approximately 5000 years back in time (Friedman 1994:18, 24). Wallerstein estimates that multiple social formations co-existed in the period between 8000 BC and 1500 AD. After that period they began to consolidate within a capitalistic framework and resulted in a single world system by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (Wallerstein 1987:317f, 1974-89).

environmental or demographic conditions). Others, leaning on biological determinism, or simply on metaphysical ideas of human nature, might see e.g. division of labour between the sexes as a natural 'development'.

### *Comparing apples and oranges?*

Notwithstanding the difficulties, the constructionist, intersocietal perspective that has been suggested here has radical consequences for both anthropology and archaeology. The constructionist perspective implies that classical anthropological themes such as kinship structures and family typologies may not be as relevant to archaeology at all. Regardless of any objections to the scenario put forward here, there is nothing indicating universality in kinship ties, marriage regulations, incest taboos, or the concept of the nuclear family. Such structuring properties/set of references may only be a few thousand years old and hence have no, or minor, relevance to e.g. hunter-gatherer studies.

Following the argument, there is little value in comparing, say, burial patterns of 'separate groups' (i.e. cultures) as in the well-known case of Binford's analysis of mortuary practices (1971). By compiling ethnographic data of forty non-state societies, Binford concluded that there are strong relations between the deceased's social identities (i.e. sex and status) and the complexity of the 'cultural unit'. He also showed that social identity is likely to be displayed in corresponding discrepancies in burial practices.

Variations among cultural units in frequencies of various forms of mortuary treatment vary in response to (a) the frequency of the character symbolised by the mortuary form in the relevant population and (b) the number and distribution of different characteristics symbolised in mortuary treatment as a function of the complexity and degree of differentiation characteristic of the relevant society (1971:25).

Binford implies that these patterns are universal human ones, and suggests that we might expect to find the same pattern in past societies. However, what Binford actually achieved in his study was to establish that in *our time* sex and status are prominent categories in many low-tech marginalised societies. Regarding traditions of past societies, the information is initially meaningless; we cannot assume a continuous tradition of these properties. We might, however, regard Binford's results as a *hypothesis* and investigate whether archaeological data from a specific time and place support it. We should not, however, be surprised if the data do not fit. Each time and place is likely to have its own structuring properties or

set of references; the longer we stretch back in time, the more diverse and localised they ought to be. All social formations are constituted by processes over time and space with their own histories of intersocial connections and structural principles. This continuing process cannot be reversed; it is not feasible to simply strip off a colonial impact, like peeling the layers of an onion, to recover an original core (Leach 1989:43).

It is no exaggeration to claim that archaeology has built up much of its 'knowledge' of prehistory on cross-cultural analogies. The bulk of data regarding different societies has created a varied but still consistent idea of what social formations are and their most common (necessary) parts. The obvious problem is that extinct social practices and cosmologies are bound to have existed (cf. Freeman 1968:266, Andr n 1997:161), which are not represented in contemporary social formations. It is very probable that some of these extinct properties are to be found in the archaeological record. Indeed, various scholars have refuted issues such as the concepts of the self, sex, and nature even in the history of the preceding millennium (e.g. Foucault 1966, Laqueur 1990, Merchant 1980, McGrane 1989). It hence seems preferable that we better build social models and fictions upon interpretations of material culture, rather than from contemporary data. I do not propose that we should neglect anthropological information and experiences. It is important to stress that there are not endless ways of organising a community. The physical environment is approximately the same, apart from fluctuations in temperature and an increasing use of resources. Neither is there any evidence for major differences in human biology that would imply a radically different way of thinking or acting. So far, we have to presume that the biological pre-sets of humanity are constant factors. There seem to be tendencies towards regional temporal discourse throughout (pre)history, but that is not a matter of evolution of culture, multi-linear or single. Such formations are probably better explained as effects of alterations in social networks. What we are dealing with are mainly variations of social formations and practices, but they still have to be attended to in their own terms. We ought to be careful about how we apply and use cross-cultural analogies as well as the objects of knowledge that are derived from contemporary studies. The anthropological record is better used as inspiration and food for thought in our interpretations of the past, not as a database of possible variations.

## Towards a general concept of prehistoric social formations

In the previous chapter, I suggested that social studies are better off discussing the 'field of tension' between individuals on the one hand, and the institutionalised effects of social practice (e.g. structural properties and principles) on the other. Such analyses mediate top-down and bottom-up perspectives focusing on collective social practice, that is what actually has been performed. However, social studies need to employ some analytical frames that circumscribe the complex networks of social interaction. To make such concepts meaningful, the focus should perhaps be on 'context of actions and results of actions' rather than on the concept itself (Barth 1992:31). This is especially important in the study of prehistoric, 'dead' societies. What constitute their material record are the remains of what actually was done – the ideas and thoughts behind them are only implicitly present.

In this text I have somewhat reluctantly used the term *social formation*, as a conceptual frame for social practices carried out within a limited time-space. The term *social* is not to be confused with the narrow sense of e.g. social anthropology. I use the term *social* in its widest definition, including the 'soft', 'female', subjective, immaterial, and ideological 'cultural' aspects of human interaction (cf. Gellner 1985:135f, Malinowski 1944, Wallace 1983, Hays 1994:58). Neither should the second component, 'formation', be confused with the static and closed form found in structure-functionalism or systems theory. Social formations are not confined within temporal and spatially borders; institutions and cosmologies may be intersocietal – that is, shared with other formations – or may survive or transform in succeeding formations. Of course, social formations differ greatly in systemic character. It is only natural (although not necessary) that a society on a high institutional level, with written laws and bureaucracy, is more well-defined than a hunter-gatherer group.

The very term 'social formation' is perhaps a bit awkward label for 'social gatherings', communities or whatever one tries to define as the collective object of study.<sup>9</sup> Some prefer the term *society*, and archaeologists have traditionally spoken of cultures or 'cultural units'. The concept of 'culture' is dubious, and so variously (ab)used that it has lost any meaning other than in general terms (cf. Jenks 1993, Hodder 1992, Obeyesekere 1990:242, Friedman 1994:67-78). 'Society', social system or 'polity' might seem better choices, but they carry connotations of an institutionalised society including

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<sup>9</sup> For different definitions of society and social systems see e.g. Malinowski 1939, Parsons 1951:5-6, Giddens 1979:66, Luhmann 1995, Linton 1936:253.

general law and bureaucracy, i.e. similar to the modern nation-state (Wallerstein 1987:315; cf. Giddens 1984:xxvi, Rowlands 1982:163f). Such a conception does not fit very well with prehistoric low-tech 'traditional' cultures or archaeological material cultures.

However, the main problem with either of these terms is the conceptualisation of them as homogenised entities. In archaeology and anthropology, there has been a long continuous discussion regarding these matters, especially on the concept of culture areas. It is however important to acknowledge that the lion's share of that critique is also valid for the concept of society. For instance, Fredrik Barth has recently discussed the most common misconceptions of society (Barth 1992:18ff). He dismisses the idea of societies as 'aggregations of social relations', mainly because such a perspective cannot cope with the complexity of most contemporary societies. He also refutes the proposal of societies being 'aggregates of institutions' as too normative, neglecting other, 'non-social', important properties.

The classic conceptualising schemes of parts and wholes and territorial definitions are not valid either, as social agents constantly prove to hold relations and institutionalised values despite non-official membership or spatial remoteness from a specific society. In many senses, Barth subscribes to other critical voices of anthropology suggesting that the concept of the local society is mainly a mirage, maintained by anthropologists for its usefulness as a frame for local ethnographic studies. In fact, the comparative aspect of anthropology would be meaningless without such a totalising concept (Barth 1992:29, Descola 1992:124). To Barth, traditional 'societies' are seldom, or never, homogeneous structured entities, but rather disordered by conflicting ideas, multiple voices, and interpretations (Barth 1992:19).

Giddens uses the terms social system and society, but points at the flexibility of their time-space borders. He views social totalities "...within the context of intersocietal systems distributed along time-space edges. All societies are both social systems, and at the same time, constituted by the intersection of multiple social systems." (Giddens 1984:164). The notions of 'intersocietal systems', 'locale' and 'time-space edges' imply that ideological and political structures are not confined by a single social formation, but are shared and interconnected with other formations in regional or global networks.<sup>10</sup> Societies are then, according to Giddens, social

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<sup>10</sup> Time-space edges "refer to interconnections and differentials of power found between different societal types comprising intersocietal systems." (Giddens 1984:164, 244ff; cf. Bhabha's (1994) concept of 'third space'.)

formations that "... stand out in bas-relief from a background of a range of other systemic relationships in which they are embedded. They stand out because definite structural principles serve to produce a specifiable overall 'clustering of institutions' across time and space." (Giddens 1984:164.)

Despite the difficulties of definition, social formations do in a sense exist. There is something 'out there', apprehended as social entities, although not necessarily self-sustained and confined within strict time-space boundaries. Still, any theory of a social formation, however it is labelled or defined, is bound to be a simplification of the multiplicity of emic and etic apprehensions (cf. Shanks & Tilley 1987a:58, 134). The crucial point is to ensure that analytical abstractions which enhance social analysis are not too complex, yet comprehensive enough to embrace the most important variables and properties. But how do we analyse such a diffuse concept as the social formation? The term is only applicable on a theoretical level and we need an operative concept suitable for archaeological analysis. In view of the intersocietal properties of social institutions and structuring principles, it does not seem feasible to delimit such entities by social parameters. A better suggestion for archaeological studies is probably to return to spatial concepts, departing from the relational concept of *locales*.

### **Framing social formations: Boundaries and levels of study**

It seems that the main problem in analysing social formations as entities lies in the constitution of the analytical concept. Let us not forget that social formations (or cultures, societies etc.) are constructed generalisations with fuzzy content and diffuse boundaries. It is a bit of an irony that such concepts in a sense produce more problems than they actually help to solve. However, the move from a theoretical concept to the actual thing is always tricky. This particular problematic is far more explicit in archaeology than in most social disciplines, as archaeology deals with temporal and situational context-bounded data. If we fail in finding operative schemes or concepts that account for both the contradictions of interacting agents and the assemblage of material culture in certain time-space areas, I assume that we have to seek other possibilities. Since cultures, societies or ethnic groups are flexible and diffuse, it might be more interesting to explore the possibilities of analysing *locales* as representative 'time-space slices' of one or more social formations.

### *Spatial aspects of social practice*

As previously argued, I believe that in prehistoric matters the most promising approach is to analyse social practices, i.e. what actually was performed, including the results of unintended actions as well as the outcome of structuring principles/discourse. What can be a better kind of data for such analysis than material culture and other traces of practice? In this area, the behavioural approach of Rathje's 'garbage archaeology' has generated substantial results, investigating consumption patterns by comparing household refusal in relation to interviews (Rathje 1974, 1981). Other interesting results have emerged from material culture studies within historical archaeology (e.g. Deetz 1977; cf. Olsen 1997:211). Such empirical studies illuminate the discrepancies between what people do and what people think or want to do.

In formulating a concept of social interaction within an operative scope, it seems most fruitful to delimit the area of investigation by time-space edges (Giddens 1984:xxvii, 164ff) – in other words, to analyse what has been going on within a specific locale during a chosen span of time. Naturally, all actions within a time-space 'sector' are constrained, enhanced, influenced, or biased by social and ecological effects within and outside such a locality. However, the point is that it is not necessary to bother about how social practice becomes structured in the way that the material culture suggests. Such an approach will of course be specific, particular and quite useless for traditional general 'grand narratives' of archaeological time-periods. But that is not necessarily a drawback; it is the logical extension towards a deep temporally oriented archaeology. Indeed, it might be possible to use several analysed/described locales to sketch a broader picture of causes and origins of a certain structural principle. In fact, departing from such local studies might prove to enhance comparative analysis, as they do not concern and rely on other general themes in the interpretation of the local activities.

### *Towards an archaeology of locales*

In his critique of the sociological concepts of social formations such as society, Baumann (1992) argues that the focus should be set on the '*habitat* in which agency operates' rather than politico-economical totalities.

As it offers the agency the sum of total of resources for all possible action as well as the field inside which the action-orienting and action-oriented relevancies may be plotted, the *habitat* is the territory inside which both freedom and

dependency of the agency can be constituted (and, indeed, perceived as such). Unlike the system-like totalities of modern social theory, habitat neither determines the conduct of the agents nor defines its meaning; it is no more (but no less either) than the setting in which both action and meaning assignment are *possible*. Its own identity is as under-determined and motile, as emergent and transitory, as those of the actions and their meanings that form it.

Baumann's notion of the relations between habitat and social practice performed therein is interesting. It fits well with the proposed concept of locales. It ought to be feasible, according to the suggestions of Elkana and Goffman, to interpret social practices and performances within chosen analytical frames: in this case, time-space delimited locales. Such local and particular perspectives can prove to be contributive to archaeology. Of course, no group or community can be regarded as an isolated social island; the anthropological literature is full of examples of far-flung chains of information flow as well as direct economic or social interaction (e.g. Helms 1988). However, if we leave the questions of ethnicity, the origin of 'cultural traits' and strict economic necessities behind, and instead focus on actual performance and social practices within a spatial frame, we may be able to discuss structuring principles, social organisation, institutions and social constructions within such locales.

The obvious problem is to find suitable time-space references for a locale. It is certainly not sufficient to settle for contemporary political boundaries such as a county or province. These have very little to do with any prehistoric situation. Neither is the archaeology of places, single sites or activity areas appropriate. The more interesting aspects are those of the environment, valleys, river basins, high plateaus etc. In contemporary industrialised societies with advanced communication systems like the radio, telephone or Internet, spatial properties have lost a great deal of their social significance (Giddens 1984:111ff). Obviously, the social significance of spatiality is related to technology and knowledge, which are also relevant to low-scale societies of prehistory. The use of enhancing techniques such as boats, wagons and animals for transport certainly affects the time-space boundaries of a locale. In a similar way, environmental properties constrain or enhance movements. There is much left to discuss regarding the relation between social practices and their environmental setting. However, to make progress it is necessary to hold an extensive discussion regarding the social implications of the environment and of material culture.

## **The environment, objects and social practice**

A traditional distinction is often made between nature and culture, distinguishing the wild and barbaric from the domesticated and civilised. This issue may seem remote and perhaps too philosophical for social studies, but the concepts of nature in relation to culture are important for two main reasons. The first is inherent in the contested discussion of the environmental context of social formations. The other is present in the following discussion on the individual and social categories, ranging from the structuralism of Lévi-Strauss to the genetic determinism of sociobiology. In the traditional, rational sense, culture is often imagined as the 'complex whole', the artificial world, constructed by man, while nature refers to pure origins and, essentially, everything else. A perhaps less dualistic view regards humanity as an integrated, non-separate part of nature, although with the increasing capability to arrange and reconstruct one's world (cf. Watson & Watson 1969:17-21). In its extreme form, this perspective implies that any human creations and modifications are, in a basic sense, natural. Air pollution and nuclear fission can be viewed as natural aspects since, in a sense, they are outcomes of special natural processes including human social 'evolution' (cf. Macnaghten & Urry 1998:21).

In recent years the concepts of nature and society have been thoroughly discussed within ecology and human geography, leading to interesting implications for archaeology (see Macnaghten & Urry 1998:6 for references). Marilyn Strathern puts the argument quite clearly:

The point to extract is simple: there is no such thing as nature or culture. Each is a highly relativized concept whose ultimate signification must be derived from its place within a specific metaphysics. No single meaning can in fact be given to nature or culture in Western thought; there is no consistent dichotomy, only a matrix of contrasts (1980:177).

According to Strathern and others, the concept(s) of nature is culturally constructed and does not possess any essential, positive properties (cf. Giddens 1994:206, Beck 1995, Dove 1992:246, Ellen 1996:27). Strathern refers to anthropological reports of contemporary social formations that apparently lack a sense of difference between the concepts (e.g. the Hagen people of Papua New Guinea; see Barth 1975:194-5). This relativist perspective is, of course, analytical; after all, there is something 'out there' that differs from social creations/modifications. The question is rather how we appropriate it. Some strands of theory, such as deep ecology (e.g. Naess 1982), stress a growing alienation from an

'original' and 'natural' way of living, a theme also apparent in archaeology. 'Primitive' peoples, such as hunter-gatherers and horticulturalists, are believed to live a more 'true' life in contrast to modern societies (cf. Giddens 1994:199ff). There are also arguments that the closeness to nature of these peoples makes their relations to the environment deeper and more of a metaphysical kind than the modern rationalist perspective.<sup>11</sup> What is this kind of reasoning other than a return to the concepts of animism and totemism of 19<sup>th</sup>-century anthropology? Gooding (1992) has argued that an English village is no more natural than Los Angeles. The argument can be paraphrased by claiming that a prehistoric hunter-gatherer camp is no more natural than an English village. The relation between social formations and their environment always depends on a series of constructions and interpretations. There is, and has been, no true nature to discover, "but rather a concept, norm, memory, utopia, counter-image" (Giddens 1994:206, Shweder 1990:2).<sup>12</sup>

Leaving the relativist arguments aside, I stress that the separation of culture from nature puts unnecessary constraints on archaeological analysis. We discard vital social information embedded in the social structuration of the environment. In the following discussion, I am not as interested in any essence of nature as in that of the ecological and physical factors which interact in the process of the (re)production of social formations. The question is rather how social formations relate to their environments, and the impact of the physical environment, the landscape setting (including ecology, geology, topography and biotope), on social practice and hence social formations. Unfortunately, neglect of the environment is typical of much social theory, which traditionally is occupied with human interaction detached from objects and ecological features. This state of affairs can be traced back to the formation of the social as an independent and legitimate science (Horigan 1988:4-30, Macnaghten & Urry 1998:5, Featherstone et al. 1991:8). Ecological and environmental issues have traditionally been discussed within the geographical sciences. But as Giddens noted, 'there are no logical or methodological differences between human geography and sociology.' (Giddens 1984:368; cf. Gregory 1984:123-32.) In archaeology and anthropology, the environment has traditionally possessed an important position in sociocultural studies. During

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. Rappaport's (1968) discussion on the 'operational' models of ecological science, purportedly describing nature as it really is, and the 'cognized' models of native people.

<sup>12</sup> Tilley *et al.* (<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/leskernick/articles/>) argues for the view of the nature-culture dichotomy as a continuum, from 'a binary to an analogic (or metaphoric) logic' (cf. Tilley 1999), stressing that a total abolition of the dualism constitutes more problems than it solves.

recent years, we have also seen a growing interest in the social aspects of the landscape, which require further discussion.

### **Sociocultural aspects of the environment**

There have been many ideas of how the environment may determine behaviour according to various habitats. Montesquieu's 'climatology' is a well-known early example. He claimed that the climate in India explained the inhabitants' lack of courage(!). In fact, he argued that European children born in India showed the same lack of courage as the original inhabitants (1757:131). Similar arguments have been raised by Semple (1911), building on Ratzel, arguing that different areas of the world encouraged different temperamental characteristics. Another example is Franz Boas who measured the skulls of new-born children of immigrants in America, claiming to have found empirical evidence of rapid change due to their new habitat. Although Boas emphasised the cultural impact, he claimed that: 'The mental make-up of a certain type of man may be considerably influenced by his social and geographical environment' (Boas 1912, quoted from Kuper 1988:128f). These examples might seem extreme, and one would like to believe that they are no longer of any interest in contemporary theory. Nonetheless, there are a number of later followers on the fringe of anthropology.<sup>13</sup>

### ***Different approaches to archaeological environments***

Apart from these extreme determinist examples, sociocultural studies of the environment belong mainly to two categories. One stresses the physical properties, the morphology, and important resources of the environment as objective 'natural facts'. The other strand is represented by the phenomenological, 'subjective' approach of human geography, focusing on relational and metaphysical aspects of the environment (cf. Sack 1980) and stressing non-relational and relational concepts of space. The terminology is not unimportant here. The first category operates chiefly with an abstract concept of space, while the second prefers the relational concepts of *place* or *locale*. Environment is itself a very general term that includes flora and fauna, geological

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<sup>13</sup> One example is George Quimby whose "ultimate aim is to be able to predict culture from habitat within certain limits to be stated subsequently" (Quimby 1960:380). Another example is John Whiting who discusses environmental determinants of the tradition of genital mutilations(!). As the distribution of such practices is restricted to Africa and the insular Pacific, he suggests that the tropical climate, which these regions have in common, might be a part of the explanation (Whiting 1969:416f).

formations, climate, different soils and waters etc. It is therefore no surprise to find several different approaches dealing with this issue. For instance, socio-environmental studies may be spatial, environmental, geological/ecological, astronomical, or landscape-oriented. Spatial studies are simply concerned with the distribution of objects, populations/settlements on regional or local levels. Environmental studies focus on the relation between the biotope and subsistence strategies (land use) of small-scale societies. This is perhaps most common in the neo-evolutionist anthropology of the 1950s and 1960s, advocated by anthropologists such as Julian Steward (1955), who integrated the concept of culture with the ecological system. (Olsen 1997:135). This approach, stressing adaptation to regional resources, is, needless to say, quite deterministic. The geological and ecological approach is not really social as the focus is set on formation processes such as deforestation, coastal variations, or cultural transformations of the environment. The geological approach is often combined with environmental studies in regional approaches such as archaeological full-scale surveys (e.g. Butzer 1982).

A fringe sphere of research, with a quite bad reputation, is the astronomical approach which tries to link locality and construction of monuments with celestial features, sometimes in combination with environmental features such as rock outcrops (e.g. Hawkins 1965, Krupp 1984). Archaeoastrological issues have suffered greatly from speculative amateur interpretations involving UFOs etc. (e.g. von Däniken 1970). But serious efforts have also been neglected, often due to the false assumption that astronomy is too complex for prehistoric inhabitants. The fourth approach, landscape archaeology, or the "phenomenology of space" of human geography, claims a holistic relational perspective on the natural and cultural environment, including the above-mentioned properties, as well as attached metaphysical and ideological aspects of the environment. In this sense, landscape is not just another word for environment, space, or nature. The meaning of the concept is differently perceived, but stands in general for an integrated perspective on social action and the non-human context. Daniel Cosgrove argues: "Landscape is a uniquely valuable concept for a human geography. Unlike *place*, it reminds us of our position in the scheme of nature. Unlike *environment* or *space* it reminds us that only through human consciousness and reason is that scheme known to us, and only through technique can we participate as humans in it." (Cosgrove 1989:122.) However, while Cosgrove maintains a dichotomised view of humanity and the landscape,

others, like Meinig, stress a more symbiotic relationship (Meinig 1979:2, Buttimer 1971:44-54). All these versions of environmental studies are apparent in contemporary archaeology, sometimes overlapping each other, and not necessarily following the crude categories outlined above. Spatial studies discuss distribution of artefacts (local), settlements, or graves (regional) without much concern for the morphology of the environment (e.g. Renfrew 1978, Schiffer 1976). The ecological perspective of neo-evolutional anthropology was important in the formation of the New Archaeology in the 1960s. By stressing the concepts of evolution and adaptation, the processual archaeologists claimed that the properties of culture are mainly an outcome of specific environmental conditions. The environment is seen as an abstract space, partly as provider of the necessities for survival and partly, to varying extent, constraining human action. The tendency of processual archaeology to stress adaptation as a general one-way directed law, of course, denies any dialectical relations between the social and the environment (e.g. Renfrew 1972:456, Clarke 1968:123-28).

The functional element in processual theory further emphasised the impact of the environment by reducing cultural activities to 'latent functions' created to secure survival in a sensitive biotope (e.g. Rappaport 1968:5, Firth 1967:37). Needless to say, this argument is often used as a basis for cross-cultural comparisons between contemporary and prehistoric societies, arguing that similar environmental conditions produce similar cultures. However, these simplified perspectives are hard to maintain if we bear in mind the variability among different social systems living under similar conditions, as well as noting the similarities between societies living in different environments. Not surprisingly, the functional environmental approaches have been under heavy criticism by geographers, anthropologists, and archaeologists (e.g. Shanks & Tilley 1987a, Bargatzky 1984, Macnaghten & Urry 1998:2).

### *The phenomenological approach: experiencing landscapes*

In recent years, we have witnessed an increasing interest in subject-oriented and metaphysical apprehensions of the environment. Johnston, following Norton (1989:72), distinguishes six principles of the phenomenological approach: "(1) humans are an integral part of the environment rather than objects in it; (2) all physical environments are inescapably linked to social systems; (3) the environment often operates below the level of awareness; (4) there

are many significant differences between the 'observed' and real environments; (5) environments can be cognitized as a set of mental images; and (6) environments have symbolic value." (Johnston 1998:58.) In archaeology, the phenomenological landscape approach, initiated by Tilley (1994), is based on phenomenological strands in geography and anthropology (e.g. Tuan 1974, Relph 1976, Buttimer and Seamon 1980; Ingold 1986a & b, 1993).

Tilley describes his phenomenological approach as "the process of interpreting the significance of place through the body: the hill in its physical reality, in my memory and in myths, the histories as stories told of it, the way in which I approach it, and from where." (Tilley 1999:180.) Tilley has in several case studies analysed ritual and ideological aspects of the environment by using a quite different perspective on time and space than the one of positivist archaeology. He rejects the rationalist view of space, stressing a relativity of space (locales) between the environment and its inhabitants (Tilley 1999:178). In contrast to the environmental approach, Tilley perceives the landscape as holistic, embedded sets of space-time relations: "In learning about the landscape, it acts as a primary medium of socialisation, and from this follows the landscape's importance in the creation and reproduction of power" (Tilley 1996a:161f). The creation and reproduction of meaning between the properties of landscapes and the social (monuments, constructions etc.) are referred to as dialectical (Tilley 1999:183), but Tilley nevertheless emphasise the effect of the *qualities* of the landscape on its inhabitants rather than vice versa. In *A phenomenology of landscape*, Tilley writes:

Landscape is a signifying system through which the social is reproduced and transformed, explored and structured - process organized. Landscape, above all, represents a means of conceptual ordering that stresses relations. The concept emphasizes a conventional means of doing so, the stress is on similarity to control the undermining nature of difference, of multivocal code, found in the concepts of place or locale. A concept of place privileges difference and singularity; a concept of landscape is more holistic, acting so as to encompass rather than exclude (Tilley 1994:34).

Whether or not there is any dialectic in Tilley's phenomenological approach is debatable, he nevertheless represents a more open apprehension of the relations between the landscape and social practice. Tilley and his many followers have unquestionably widened the scope of landscape studies as a provider of social information. The focus of such studies is, however, still mostly ocular, stressing sight-lines and visibility between monuments and their relation to environmental features such as rock outcrops and

other morphological features.<sup>14</sup> The focus on "the bones of the land", i.e. the morphological properties of the environment, is understandable as the topography seldom, or only marginally, changes over time. But these geological formations are only *assumed* to have had special interest in prehistoric social formations.

The phenomenological archaeologists seem to presume that metaphysical ideas of nature are important in the (re)production of cosmologies and power strategies. Monuments and tombs are suggested to emphasise symbolic properties of the landscape that presumably were of importance to the prehistoric constructors (e.g. Tilley 1994:200-4). These are interesting ideas that in combination with other information can support hypotheses, or broaden our archaeological 'knowledge'. Nonetheless, Tilley, among others, bases such assumptions on quite dubious cross-cultural analogies which may have little relevance to the prehistoric situation in the British Isles or elsewhere (e.g. Tilley 1994: Chapter 2; Tilley 1999:182f). This emphasis on the experience of landscapes seems a bit exaggerated and tends to neglect other less symbolic and metaphysical aspects of the environment. Tilley claims not to reject the importance of 'economic rationalities', but such aspects are seldom combined with the phenomenological experience. In this sense, the phenomenological landscape approach is somewhat contrary to the environmental approach of the functionalist archaeologists. There are tendencies in these new phenomenological studies towards an idyllic view of the landscape, not very far from the romantic conceptualisation of nature in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. As discussed earlier, views of the natural world are culturally and temporally constituted, with or without any distinctions between them (cf. Cosgrove 1997). The focus is on individual *experiences* of landscapes, rather than of people working and living in a certain milieu. This perspective might be argued to be inherent in the epistemology of phenomenology, but such is not necessarily always the case.

Notwithstanding these critical remarks, the phenomenological, cognitive approach is an interesting advance in socio-ecological studies. It somewhat bridges the gap between studies of social formations and environment. Nevertheless, the landscape is still seen as the provider of resources (although both allocative and

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<sup>14</sup> There is a growing interest in other ambient aspects of the landscape such as 'smellscapes', 'seascapes', or 'soundscapes' (Tilley 1999:180, Porteous 1985:369, Lefebvre 1991:197, Ellen 1996:6-12), but so far there has been very little substantial research outside the visual dimension.

authoritative). It is also far from clear what emic and subjective *experiences* of landscapes can tell us about the performed social practices in a particular locale.

### *The social landscape*

There are some strands of geography and anthropology that stress a somewhat interactive relation to the environment. One example is Ingold's concept of the 'taskscape'. The taskscape is based on the Heidegger-inspired concept of *dwelling*, a kind of Being in relation to the environment. "The landscape is the world as it is known to those who dwell therein, who inhabit its places and journey along the paths connecting them." (Ingold 1993:156.) A taskscape consists of different forms of activities performed in a reciprocal manner: "Just as the landscape is an array of related features, so – by analogy – the taskscape is an array of related activities." (Ingold 1993:158.) Ingold's taskscape is, as far as I understand it, a quite dim concept, stressing the phenomenological, subjective perception of the individual more than collective social practice. It should also be noted that Ingold's primary interest is in the cosmologies of contemporary hunter-gatherers, although he sometimes claims a general validity of his concept. The main point is that the environment is not passively appropriated by its inhabitants, but rather through active and social engagement (cf. Ellen 1996:8). Richard Bradley's archaeo-ecology is another example of the cognitive aspects of socio-environmental relations. In *Altering the earth*, he stresses the strong influence of landscapes on social strategies, but in a more dialectical sense than e.g. Tilley. Bradley suggests that the building of monuments changed the experience of time and place in the Neolithic as an unintended consequence of the changes of the landscape (Bradley 1993:21). Peter Wilson presents similar ideas of a 'domesticated human'. He suggests that the concept of the house and the establishment of permanent settlements were major formative aspects of the Neolithic, far more important than e.g. the practice of agriculture. Wilson argues that the experiences of an enclosing concept such as the house (and tomb) initiated new social strategies (Wilson 1988; see also Ellen 1996:22).

### *The structuration of locales: expanding structuration theory*

A less subject-oriented approach to these matters is to expand Giddens' notion of the duality of structure beyond the social sphere. From an archaeological point of view, it makes sense to include all

properties involved in the (re)production of the social world as reciprocal relations. In such a perspective, environmental properties, as well as culturally altered or manufactured objects, all possess a potential to play active roles in the structuration process. Humans are in this sense both domesticators of, and subjugated to, their environment and material culture (whether modified or not) in a continuing process of re-production. This integrated perspective dissolves the traditional concept of culture, but leaves the field open for more flexible concepts, integrating the temporal and spatial dimensions. Here I have in mind a modified version of Giddens' social system, defined by its 'relief-character' and limited by time-space edges. This approach seeks to combine the economic and topographical aspects of the 'natural' and built environment (i.e. accessibility/friction/visibility) with an expanded socio-environmental strategy. The idea of agents enhancing prominent natural properties through the placing of monuments can be accepted, but many of the prominent aspects of the environment are probably not signified in any materially persistent way. However, if we assume a dialectical structuration process between the social and the 'natural', the overall placing of settlements, sanctuaries, and graves might provide more information on the particular structuring properties and principles of a locale. Leaving the functional and economic aspects aside, the choice of place for settlements can be important. The positions of burial grounds and sanctuaries are even more interesting, as they are of basically ideological constitution. The physical environment contains areas which may seem purely economic, but nevertheless have been charged with metaphysical or ideological beliefs. I am referring to different kinds of waters (streams, bogs, lakes), local bio-milieus (faunal or animal), and some aspects of the astronomical dimension (cf. Ingold 1996:140, Nelson 1983:242, Richards 1996).

It seems plausible that such environmental properties in diverse ways enter into both practice and cosmology, sometimes consciously, to establish/maintain social indifferences and power relations, sometimes teleologically, to explain the world, and sometimes to represent mythical/religious ideas of the landscape. A simple example of such structural principles might be the tendency in some areas in Iron Age Greece where the burials during some periods often are separated from the settlement by water (cf. Richards 1996). We can speculate about the reasons for this behaviour, which might be a mixture of ideology, symbolism, or 'superstition', but it could be just as important to recognise the structuring principles involved.

It is not always necessary to understand the ideological background of these patterns in order to utilise them; no matter how complex they are, they still ought to leave traces in the overall structuration of a locale. The more variables we add to such a crude model will help to enhance its applicability. Additional variables might be practical/economic ones such as using less fertile soils or hill-slopes, or more ideologically related factors as (in)visibility or the level over ground. Further variables may be inspired by e.g. ethnographical observations or simply fictions. It is important to stress that such socio-environmental relations are by no means static or cross-culturally valid in any sense. Most of them are likely to change in accordance with shifts in general cosmology, with localisation between different groups, or with increasing technology to master the elements of nature.

### ***Operative strategies: embodied maps***

There is certainly much to gather from an integrated socio-environmental perspective. For instance, known archaeological places such as sites and graves within a locale can be contrasted in a number of environmental respects to reveal 'hidden' structuring information in the landscape. Conversely, the same information and its interrelations can be helpful in identifying sites. The structuration of burial places in relation to environmental attributes may help to predict the location of settlements or vice versa. A methodological strategy to explore these relationships is to extend the embodied perspective in combination with traditional maps. It is admittedly a bit strange to use the bird's-eye perspective of regional maps, since prehistoric agents seldom had the ability to act and think through such a perspective. Embodied maps can be generated with GIS software in various ways. Interesting complements may be actual visibility maps or accessibility maps, rectified according to topographical features. Such mobility maps are based on degrees of positive and negative 'friction' of waters, hills, marshy areas etc. Positive friction (constraint) might be a steep slope, dense vegetation etc, while negative friction (enabling) is more closely tied to levels of technology. Different kinds of waters (lakes and rivers) might expand the time-space ratio if one can presume some sort of boat or canoe. This morphological approach is enhanced if combined with identifiable areas of ideological/metaphysical importance. I have in mind areas that are not utilised or crossed due to ideological/cosmological considerations. Examples could be burial grounds, shrines, or just places endowed with certain meanings (cf. Tilley 1999:182f).

The resulting embodied maps may be helpful in interpreting the spatial distribution of monuments/constructions on a regional basis, or in improving our knowledge of the relations between the human and non-human in particular locales. Such pragmatic socio-phenomenological approaches to locales seem more fruitful than the subject-oriented concepts of institutionalised metaphysics. Hopefully, the preoccupation with individual experience that flourishes in phenomenological landscape archaeology will gradually disappear, providing room for integrated social perspectives. Landscapes are probably only in lesser sense that existentially apprehended, but inhabited landscapes are by necessity socially structured.

### **Objects, material culture and social practice**

I have already touched upon the importance of monuments, houses, graves etc. in the process of (re)production of structured practices. Similar socialness as well be attributed to material culture in general. Clear and definite distinctions between a 'natural' and a 'cultural' environment, or between 'natural' objects and cultural modifications (i.e. artefacts), are not very easy to sustain. Fortunately, neither distinction is really necessary, as the parameters involved are subjective and temporally flexible. What is a projectile for some may be a plain stone to others. A megalithic tomb was a human creation to its constructors, while possibly regarded as natural or supra-natural to later generations/outsideers etc. I do not believe that it is essential to penetrate this issues to any great extent, but the general role of material objects in social systems demands a short discussion.

### ***Archaeological approaches: style, function and symbolism***

In archaeology, there has been a natural focus on material culture as it is the main source of information, yet there is no consensus about its specific role in the structuration of social formations. There seems to be agreement that it plays an important part, but not whether it should be regarded as an active component or merely a passive reflection of action. Childe's apprehension belongs to the latter kind. He considered material culture as reflecting the shared and internalised norms of separate peoples, which were materialised in weapons, tools and so on (Childe 1925, Thomas 1996:9). Binford, representing the processual standpoint, differed slightly from Childe by regarding material culture more as a reflection of the *functioning* of culture (Thomas 1996:10). He

proposed a categorisation of material culture into groups following the three primary subgroups of the functional system: technomic, sociotechnic, and ideotechnic. The artefacts are categorised as mainly functional or stylistic (Binford 1962, 1965). In this perspective, the former reflect practical adaptation to the environment, while the latter reflect ideology. This dual distinction is however a bit too crude, as an artefact may both be practical and carry symbolic connotations, not to mention the subjectivity and temporality of such notions.

Sackett (1977:30, 1982) takes Binford's argument a bit further by distinguishing between an artefact's active and passive voices, of which the first is equivalent to style. Sackett argues that some aspects can be attributed to the nature of the material of the artefact and others to its practical purpose. However, as many morphological and stylistic traits lack practical or physical 'explanation', there are many equally functional forms of different types of artefacts (isochrestic variations). Wobst (1977) claims that material culture, besides symbolism, also carries social information, a kind of indirect communication. Nonetheless, the question still remains what these traits mean and how they are constituted. Weissner (1983, 1985, 1989) stresses an awkward division between 'emblemic' and 'assertive' style. The first category concerns standardised traits or symbols of ethnicity, while the latter represents more obscure individual aspects of identity (cf. Olsen 1997:186f). However, as Sackett argues, it is not obvious what came first, the emblemic traits or the actual ethnic group. He prefers a perspective where isochrestic variations are formed in a reproductive learning process and, hence, only indirectly do some of them become signifiers of ethnic/social identity (Sackett 1985). In these perspectives, elaborated material culture is semi-active. It is involved in social communication, indicating (or masking) status, ethnicity, and identity.

Since the intense debate regarding style during the late 1970s and early 1980s, archaeologists in later decades have simply postulated material culture to play an explicitly active part in social systems (e.g. Shanks & Tilley 1987a:85, Hodder 1982:75, 1987:6ff, 1992:15). To Hodder, material culture is unquestionably active, always meaningfully constituted: "... I understand this to mean that there are ideas and concepts embedded in social life which influence the way material culture is used, embellished and discarded." (Hodder 1992:12.) However, Hodder's conclusion, that material culture is active, is based on the presumption that material culture is equivalent to symbolism. It may very well be true that symbols

potentially can be active in the (re)production of social structures, but do all forms of material culture really carry symbolism? And is it always active? It might be a question of definition of the two concepts, but if we regard material culture as the physical outcome of social practice, some objects are bound to contain more symbolism than others. A simple example might be a piece of flint refuse in comparison to a decorated pot. This way of discussing the impact of material culture is as naive as the functional determinism of Binford. Hodder simply takes for granted a high level of conscious symbolism in any non-industrial society. It rather seems that material culture possesses differentiated symbolic values, not only according to temporal and subjective norms (in Hodder's terms: symbolic schemes), but also due to intention and physical properties of the individual artefacts.

### *Reading material culture?*

A somewhat different approach is to de-emphasise the question of symbolism and understand material culture within a discursive context. In some post-structural theory, literal texts are 'liberated' from their original authors, claiming that texts are mosaics of quotations or fragments of temporal and cultural discourse (e.g. Barthes 1996:146). Moore (1990:113) illustrates the conceptual leap from text to material culture by the example of a decorated pot. She compares individual motives to words (first level), order of design elements to sentences (second level), and the whole pot to a text (third level). Such a linguistic/semiotic perspective, applied to material culture, also captures the outcome of some routine and unconscious actions. A piece of flint refuse from the production of an axe hardly carries much active symbolism, but as a 'discursive quotation' from a larger text, it can be said to carry a small amount of embedded meaning/information.

I hasten to add that I do not subscribe to the assumption that material culture (or action) is fully equivalent to literary texts. In a general sense, post-structural linguistic theory may be applicable to social praxis, but this does not necessarily imply that material culture can be 'read' in a similar fashion. For instance, things also have physical properties and possible practical functions, while texts differ in their dependence on linear reading (Olsen 1997:114, 180). The main difference between texts and things is found in the degree and quality of information (or symbolism). Literary texts contain much more information than non-verbal material culture, due to the extraordinary complexity of languages. To make such a conceptual frog-leap as equal material outcome of praxis and

literary texts, one has to ignore the different production processes as well as the physical properties of the material. As far as I understand the problematic, it is mainly through phenomenological, social-constructionist and different structuration perspectives of theory that material culture can potentially be active in a social sense. In such perspectives, objects, and material culture in particular, do intervene in human action. In combination with the monitoring of other subjects' action, they are involved in the constitutional process of the conscious. There may be passive, semi-active, crude communication, but to neglect their social role in the structuring of social formations is anthropocentric. The active properties of some objects can be said to work on conscious and unconscious (or both mixed) levels. They might, for instance, be 'good to think through' as Lévi-Strauss claimed (1966).

Modified objects may also change their embedded (intentional) meanings and dialectically work back on the agents. One example is Peter Wilson's theory of 'counter-domestication', in which the concept of the house is proposed to have changed ontology and hence social structures during the Neolithic. In a socio-psychological sense, material culture may have an almost determining effect on people. One can be constrained or triggered by objects, consciously or unconsciously. Others point to less obvious effects of material culture. I may produce or appropriate an object with some specific intention, but may very well be influencing future actions in an unpredictable way.

### ***Social approaches to material culture***

It is quite safe to say that material culture has never been a major issue in sociology. Most scholars have rather neglected it. For instance, Marx stressed the economic and ideological aspects of material resources, but only in a general sense. Durkheim regards material objects as integrated but passive elements in society (Durkheim 1895:12). He writes: "Things do affect quite much of the social development, whose speed and, as a matter of fact, direction varies according to their properties, but they lack prerequisites to actually make things happen. They are the physical materials that the vital forces of society utilise, but they do not release that power by themselves. The only remaining active factor is hence found in the human milieu" (Durkheim 1895:93). Durkheim's account on this matter is clear and precise. A similar, but somewhat differently expressed, conception is found in the work of Parsons:

It is convenient in action terms to classify the object world as composed of the three classes of 'social', 'physical' and 'cultural' objects. A social object is an actor, which may in turn be any given other individual actor (alter), the actor who is taken as a point of reference himself (ego), or a collectivity, which is treated as a unit for purposes of the analysis of orientation. Physical objects are empirical entities, which do not 'interact' with, or 'respond', to ego. They are means and conditions of his action. Cultural objects are symbolic elements of the cultural tradition, ideas or beliefs, expressive symbols or value patterns so far as they are treated as situational objects by ego and are not 'internalized' as constitutive elements of the structure of his personality (Parsons 1951:4).

To Parsons, cultural objects are parts of the individual's personality, but nevertheless secondary – they are only 'indirectly relevant' (Parsons 1951:89). In the phenomenological tradition, there is a closer connection between the material and the social than in traditional sociology. For instance, Husserl stresses that the process of consciousness is formed in a relationship between the actor and the objects of the world (Ritzer 1997:28, Husserl 1970). A similar 'reflective' relationship is also present in some strains of psychology (e.g. Vygotsky 1981) or the object-relations school (e.g. Winnicott 1971). It is perhaps no surprise that we find a more integrated view of material culture and social praxis in non-functional sociology. For instance, Bourdieu apprehends material culture as a 'silent discourse' (cf. Olsen 1997:217). According to Bourdieu, objects signify status and group/class in a non-verbal process or organised set of references. In a similar fashion as the arbitrary relation between the signifier and the signified in literary theory, the relation between the object and its symbolic value is, although not necessarily arbitrary, in a constant process of reconstitution (Bourdieu 1990).

In Giddens' theory of structuration, material objects are, as in the case of the environment, seldom directly addressed. Giddens refers to Hägerstrand's simple distinction between divisible and non-divisible objects, but both natural objects and material culture seem to play anonymous roles within the concepts of authoritative and allocative resources (1984, 1987: 1994:115). Artefacts in general 'involve a process of interpretation', but unlike 'cultural objects' (e.g. texts, electronic communication etc.) they are not regarded as social in any significant sense (1987:216). However, Giddens does recognise some implicit social effects of materialities. For example, he regards the modern city as a forceful social 'power container', although he emphasises the co-presents of agents and the aggregation of administrative resources before the actual physical constructions and other material aspects that constitute the city (Giddens 1984:195f).

In a similar 'between the lines' reading, there is an evident material dimension in the work of Foucault. The 'things' and mute monuments in Foucault's archaeology are mainly texts, but he does discuss material culture, especially buildings such as hospitals, prisons, factories and schools. For instance, in *The birth of the clinic* (1963), he implies that the very existence of leprosariums in early 16th-century Europe played a part in the process of discerning the mad as a social category. After the leprosariums became obsolete they perhaps stimulated, if not evoking, that process by their very presence. Again, in *Discipline and punish* (1975), Foucault addresses the structure of prisons, schools and factories as a material manifestation of the modern discourse of increasing surveillance and disciplination of bodies. Nonetheless, it is also likely that the obsolete leprosariums only became handy in an already ongoing process, and likewise the structuration of official buildings might be just a non-dialectical material manifestation of an already established discourse.

To find an explicit discussion of material culture and social practice we need to turn to the work of Bruno Latour (e.g. 1991, 1999).<sup>15</sup> He has criticised the social sciences for neglecting the objects (actants) in social interaction studies. "...I argue that in order to understand domination [power relations] we have to turn away from an exclusive concern with social relations and weave them into a fabric that includes non-human actants, actants that offer the possibility of holding society together as a durable whole." (Latour 1991;103.) Latour rejects the distinctions between material infrastructure and social superstructure as well as sociologism and technologism. On the contrary, he stresses that social relations are made up from chain links between humans and non-human actants. One of many examples that Latour uses to illustrate these intricate links is the heavy lump of metal attached to keys in European hotels. The obvious purpose of these clumsy dead weights is to force the customer to leave the key at the reception when exiting the hotel. A plea to leave the key is often expressed in information brochures, on signs at the reception and on the key itself. However, Latour notes, it is not the verbal request that actually makes people leave their keys – it is the uncomfortable weight attached to these. In a sense, the printed pleas only serve to explain why the key is so heavy; they do not necessarily play any significant part in the process. Latour's example may seem simplistic, but it nevertheless indicates that material culture, more often than we like to believe, interacts in social situations, not only through symbolism or semiotic messages,

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<sup>15</sup> See also e.g. Riggins (*ed.*) 1994, Pickering 1997, Komter 1998, Preda 1999, Dobres 2000.

but also as plain material objects. It seems likely that physical objects (natural and cultural) are in different respects integrated with social practice in the structuration of social formations. As with the matter of the physical environment, I stress that structuration theory would benefit if it incorporated the potentially active character of material culture and 'natural' objects. I do not believe that it is fruitful to distinguish one category from the other; cultural objects are not necessarily more socially significant than non-modified objects. In another sense, material culture is not necessarily intentionally and consciously modified or constructed. Material culture is better seen both as an outcome of social practices and as diversely influencing, triggering and conserving action. To analyse a society or an aspect thereof (e.g. the city) without discussing the impact of material culture would be not only negligent, but also inconsistent.

However, the embedded information in material culture should not be exaggerated. To analyse form and stylistic traits as mainly personal expressions, aesthetics or symbolic communication is probably relevant only in very special cases. We cannot simply expect to find emblematic or assertive aspects by default; to interpret them as such, we need correlation with other information, suggesting a social discourse in which such aspects are relevant. Emblematic expressions may be important in times of social stress, as in the formation process of new ethnic groups or in times of dissolution. The incorporation of material culture is one of the most promising prospects of social theory today, and archaeology is perhaps the most suitable discipline for developing such perspectives. This need not, of course, be confined to material studies of prehistoric societies.

### **Summary: Materialities and social practice**

The concept of social formations (as well as traditional totalities such as social system, society and culture) is wide and often differently apprehended. The internal inconsistencies and contradictions within such 'entities', their flexible relation to time and space, as well as complex relations to other formations makes one wonder about their relevance. But, although social formations are open conglomerates of materiality and ideology, they still appear as entities to both external, 'etic' analysts and the variety of 'emic', internal perspectives of their members. Hence a general concept seems necessary in order to discuss the wide array of aspects involving social practices. A social formations in such sense is not an object to study, but a general, non-operative concept.

In archaeology, we need to be more specific and question how to deal with matters of time and space as well as social coherence, material culture and environmental factors. It seems that the relative concept of *locale* is promising for archaeological studies. The social practices performed at a locale are certainly partly structured by general structuring properties and principles with far larger spatial extension, but as previously argued, such general structures may be traceable from microsituations. It is necessary to discuss locales in their specific environmental niches to be able to integrate environmental properties and material objects. A simple circle on a map cannot define the concept of locales; to make sense it has to be delimited from an embodied perspective and adjusted for technological enhancements and social conditions (external and internal). Considering the social structuration of landscapes by social practices, it also seems more fruitful to depart from a social and co-operative perspective, rather than from the contemplative experience of dwelling.

One might argue that the constructionist perspective put forward here is exaggerated. It could be that anthropologists are correct in their image of small local communities occupied with exchange of goods and women, fighting wars, expanding or becoming marginalised according to intersocietal conjunctures or ecological variations. However, what has archaeology to offer if we are satisfied with putting the values and concepts of the anthropological present back into prehistory? If we already know how the past looked, what then is the purpose of its study? A guardianship of collective memory providing ontological trusts by confirming the eternity of 'traditional' values? On the contrary, I argue that prehistory is probably more of a vast field of social variations, not necessarily progressing from simpler towards more advanced forms. If we acknowledge the temporality of social constructions, we are faced with the interesting task of trying to analyse extinct social practices and perhaps speculating on 'exotic ontologies'. Such an archaeology might contribute to the social sciences by providing a broader picture and history of human interaction. By taking this basic step we can expand archaeological theory into something much more important than questions of seriation, typology, and pedantry. Archaeology can at last be a member of the social sciences – if this is at all desirable.

Having discussed aspects of social formations in general, it is time to narrow the scope towards the individuals that actually live (produce and maintain) such formations. A general theory of social formations only provides a frame, indicating significant aspects and

properties involved in such processes. It does not account for societal change, or explain why, despite their fussiness, they nevertheless stand out as homogeneous entities. Neither does it hint how social practices are initiated or constituted. To understand those processes, we must analyse individual agency and social practices from other perspectives than the traditional social one. In the next chapter I discuss psychological and corporeal aspects of the constitution of individuals as social actants in order to discuss what initiates and constitutes social practices.



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## The social individual and the Other(s)

*"There is no such thing as a society,  
there are only individual men and  
women and their families."*  
- M. Thatcher<sup>1</sup>

In Chapter 2, I discussed levels of theory and proposed the necessity of a general theory of human interaction that can be 'transposed' or ramified via middle-level theories and operative methods down to the actual material data. Following that scheme, I discussed the concept of *social formations* on a general level in the previous chapter. In this chapter, I narrow the scope and focus on the social relations between individuals that make up such social networks. Clearly, it is not sufficient to simply state that they are defined solely by their actions (as Giddens does); one must find adequate theories of how social practice is initiated and constituted. To succeed in such a quest, it is necessary to thoroughly discuss different aspects regarding the constitution of the social subject and its relations to the *Other* (in the sense of both symbolic order *and* other subjects/actants). These concepts involve both individual motivation and the sociopsychological issues of social co-practice. My prime concerns are the psychosocial mechanisms of social interaction and societal (re)production. What constitutes the social subject, and what constitutes and initiates social practice/discourse? In which ways may the social subject of archaeology resemble or diverge from the social present? These are central issues;

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<sup>1</sup> Interview in the magazine *Women's Own*, October 31, 1987.

archaeological social theory certainly needs a deeper understanding of the relations and mechanisms of individuals in groups, sub-groups, and the social formations. To identify both basic mechanisms as well as particular ones, it is necessary to diverge from the traditional exclusive practice of social theory, and to include psychological and biological/corporeal aspects as well. Although such aspects tend to be metaphysical and abstract, I believe that it is important to put them in the spotlight for a while as they are embedded in most theories of the individual and social interaction. Needless to say, there are also certain important aspects of these areas that have great value in models of prehistoric social formations.

### Who is the social agent?

Individuals appear in many forms in social analysis. Perhaps the most common form is the anonymous subject, tacitly comprehended as a grown mature male, whose properties and potential vary according to temporal and cultural specific values of 'normality'. The scale varies from primitive, instinct-governed savages, through Spencer's 'economic man' to the concepts of the (post)modern, self-reflexive or embodied and biological individual. To be sure, prehistoric individuals, as well as non-Western pre-industrial indigenous ones, are often situated somewhere at the beginning of that scale. These are of course prejudices, with little or no support in theory or practice.

In the contemporary debate regarding the subjective, bottom-up perspectives versus structural, top-down perspectives, the latter have for the moment been gaining ground due to the post-structural impact on social theory, whereas the ideological trend in the Western world rather leans towards neo-liberal views of individuality and personal experience. Both perspectives are present in archaeology. At least since the formation of the post-processual movement, there has been a tendency to stress emphatic perspectives towards the individuals of prehistory (e.g. Meskell 1999, Hodder 1999), which corresponds with the general liberal tendencies. Other archaeologists, inspired by post-structural or post-colonial theory (e.g. Foucault 1966, Lacan 1977, Spivak 1999, Bhabha 1994; Butler 1990, 1997), have objected to such subject-oriented perspectives, pointing at inconsistencies in viewing social subjects as homogeneous, equivalent and socially *able* (e.g. Berggren 2000, Fowler 2000).

The different approaches in the social sciences have produced a varying and sometimes confusing nomenclature of the individual. Frequently used terms are e.g. actor, member, agent, person, subject, etc. These labels carry different connotations, deliberately or arbitrarily, of what a subject is and its capabilities in relation to social structures or discourse. The term *actor* implies a dramatic perspective, focusing on the individual as playing roles on a 'stage', directed by pre-written cultural scripts (i.e. social structures/norms). A *member*, designated mainly in ethno-methodology, connotes a corporate individual tied to norms and values in close relation to the group to which s/he belongs. In recent sociology a commonly used term is *agent*, which implies reflexive, intentional individuals who only to a minor extent are subjected to social structures or discourse.<sup>2</sup> The term *subject*, often employed in philosophy and psychology, is perhaps the most complex of all, filled with diverse connotations and meanings. A subject might simply be equal to an individual as a thing (a body with human characteristics) or signify the socially constituted mind of individuals. A somewhat different signification of the term is as subject in reference to something (subjected/subjectivated), i.e. a despot or social structure/power (cf. Butler 1997:10ff, Foucault 1980). Finally, there are the more popular, but ambiguous, concepts of *person* or *self*, implying a continuous, unique personality of each individual.

It may seem arbitrary which terminology to choose, but in some discourses the connotations are important and the terminology is carefully chosen. In this chapter, I mainly use the term *individual* for the physically embodied agent of flesh and blood, but also *subject* to denote the social constitution of such individuals. The use of terminology is intended neither to objectify, nor to suggest an subjectivist perspective. The physical individuals are the 'social machines' that actually make things happen. However, this is not to say that they are autonomous or possess unique, self-initiated personalities. The social individual is constituted in relation to its physical milieu, actants, symbolic schemes, and other socially constituted and situated individuals. The social subject, like the physical body, is also temporal, but not necessarily in a linear order of stages like childhood and maturity. The social subject is temporal in the sense that its constitution is flexible according to the relative significance of the elements on which it is based. These are the prime reasons why unified concepts such as 'person' are illusory and

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<sup>2</sup> An agent is not necessarily an individual; the term is also used for collectives of individuals such as companies, corporate groups etc.

of less use in social studies. The body and mind are not separated in a Cartesian manner; there are obvious connections between the corporeal constitution of the body and the psychosocial self. However, the social significances of corporeal properties are discursively and symbolically constituted more than they are essentialistically biological or phenomenological.

It is safe to say that individuals seldom can be regarded as equal in social practice. For various reasons, some individuals tend to have greater capabilities and structural advantages for manipulating or utilising social structural principles, while others may have fewer prerequisites. Their inequalities are not only a matter of social class or status, but also involve corporeal aspects as well as discursive sensibility and social skills. These are delicate matters, and such a differentiation of individuals might seem Nietzschean or nihilistic to some. But nothing would be more inadequate. I believe that it is important not to mix political agendas with models of performance/agency. After all, political ideologies are utopian and, at best, include strategies for dealing with structural inequalities. No matter how much we would like it to be otherwise, the conditions of social life are not very 'fair' – either in industrial democratic systems or in 'traditional' low-scale societies. Nonetheless, the social sciences have always been subjected to idealistic or political 'bias'. Individuals have been seen as autonomous entities, cultural/discursive dopes, or principally social animals that are biologically constituted. These perspectives are reflected in the diverse theories and traditions of social theory. To begin with, I will discuss a few of them in relation to the question of what constitutes the social individual.

### **The social individual: between roles, identity and institutions?**

The classic sociological way of referring to individuals in social formations is as actors, i.e. carriers of a set of roles. Role theory, developed in the early 20th century by e.g. William James, Charles Cooley and George Mead, has a long and winding trajectory in the social sciences, including archaeology. The concept is simple, developed within psychosocial frameworks, especially fond of theatrical metaphors. The schematic character of role theory makes it very suitable for functional analysis, but it can also be employed in other less closed schemes. Role theory simply acknowledges that the basic performances of individuals can be considered as a repertoire of different roles, which are performed with minor modifications in different social situations. By simplifying the complexity of social interaction, role theory tries to formalise and categorise it to be

manageable and comparable. It builds upon the fact that much in social interaction *is* quite formalised through norms and values of the actual discourse. Different situations constrain or dissolve certain rules and regulations according to many different aspects such as group size, personal/formal relations etc.

According to Parsons, individuals are involved in several interactive relations with other actors. Role is the processual aspect of "what the actor does in his relations with others seen in the context of its functional significance for the social system" (Parsons 1951:25). However, Parsons does not see role theory as sufficient, following Linton (1936); he adds status as an instrument to situate actors hierarchically. In the mid-1960s, Goodenough (1965) delivered an influential text in which he criticised some drawbacks of traditional Parsonian role theory, stressing a more differentiated apparatus including the concept of social identity. First, he argued that the concept of status needs further elaboration. He suggested that a range of social identities would better represent most cases, as an individual might possess a variety of institutionalised roles (e.g. police, parent, warrior). The mix of all social identities a person holds is referred to as the individual's *social persona*. When two or more social identities interact they are engaged in an *identity relationship*, and the outcome of such an encounter is determined by the reciprocal rights and duties that are present in the social identities involved (Goodenough 1965:7f). Goodenough's extended, yet functional, conceptualising is hardly much better than Parsons' version. It is probably only in very special formal situations that rights and duties solely govern and account for social behaviour. This was quite obvious to Goodenough himself, but it did not prevent archaeologists such as Binford (1971), Saxe (1970) or O'Shea (1984) from using his apparatus as a theory of social structure and organisation. They were uninterested in other personal aspects of identity not directly connected to hierarchical structures. In that way, Goodenough's concept fitted the processual archaeologists' aims well. However, if applied outside such a strict functional framework, it is a bit too simplistic. It is still a static view that does not account for the processual aspects of the body, or for the complexity of social identity.

#### ***Cultural dopes or knowledgeable agents?***

Role-theoretical schemes suggest that the social individual is caught in the webs of tradition and normative institutions. Role-theoretical concepts may fit functional and structural analysis on a very general level, but in analysing day-to-day practice there is a need for more

flexible models. For instance, Blumer (1969) argues that socialisation is seldom a passive conduct. Even the most common roles need to be elaborated and modified every time they are performed according to context, goals and means. Blumer stresses that all social situations, even the most regulated, always suffer a chance that one of the actors will 'throw away the script' and act 'unpredictably'. In such a perspective, there is no *codex socialis*, a book where all social behaviour is defined. Some rules and norms are obvious or semi-conscious routine acts, but others may just be hinted, implying a need for interpretation (Blumer 1969:5; cf. Giddens on knowledgeableability, 1984:3, 375).

In order to grasp such deviations, Erwing Goffman employs the notion of *role-distance*, stressing that individuals do not necessarily feel comfortable when playing roles, although they might feel obliged to perform them. A classic example is that of the slave in relation to the master (although role-distance is a more common practice without such strong power relations). Goffman also stresses complementary aspects such as *face*, *line* and *image* to discuss individual behaviour in different social 'encounters' (1967:5). A *line* is 'a pattern of verbal and non-verbal acts' performed in accordance with the individual's subjective apprehension of the conditions of specific social situations (in Giddens' terms, reflexive monitoring of action, 1984:5). The term *face* is the 'positive social value' that individuals claim for themselves in front of others. Face is a part of a person's *image*, which is not necessarily socially sanctioned or functional. Unlike roles, it is rather a strategy that individuals use to present different aspects of their roles as an integrated outer image. The difference from role theory is simple. While Goodenough's social persona, as well as Gestalt theories (e.g. Köhler 1947) and ideal social types, are analytical summaries of functional traits, Goffman's concept of image is performed, changeable and not necessarily rational/functional. Nonetheless, Goffman's agents are remarkably active and intentional in the sense of being able to present themselves as they wish.

### ***Social identity: individual experience or external appropriation?***

Despite the critique, role-theoretical concepts and terminology are not simply relics confined to research programs of the 1950s and 1960s. They are still being deployed in one sense or another in the social sciences,<sup>3</sup> although the trend in recent decades involves a

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<sup>3</sup> A recent example is the work of Ulf Hannerz. He views social life as mainly situational; all social interaction can be described as a series of situations involving two or more actors. The standardised modes of behaviour make up individuals' role-repertoires. The access to roles is

switch from the concepts of status and role to the nested concept of social and cultural *identity* (e.g. Shennan 1989, Friedman 1994, Jones 1997, Wells 1997). In one sense, the concept of identity expands simple status-role notions of social identity to include cultural issues such as ethnicity or personal continuity, the 'sameness' within a individual (e.g. Erikson 1980:109). A person's identity (social and cultural) is built upon a wide array of aspects such as ethnicity/nationality, kinship/family, sex/gender/sexuality, race, corporeality and religion, as well as strictly social aspects such as status and class (cf. Stier 1998:77-85). It is tempting to believe that identity theories, due to their wider scope, are more accountable for the complexity of social relations, providing a basis for a more 'thick' perspective. Indeed, identity theory grasps the variability and flexibility of social interaction better than does the normative role theory, also allowing 'traditional' societies greater social complexity. However, such a broader perspective is unfortunately seldom utilised. The most frequently employed aspects are still matters of ethnicity, social status and gender/sex, which differs little from traditional role theory. It is perhaps mainly a change of terminology: from social identity to cultural identity, from culture to ethnicity, from sex to gender. In a general sense, the focus seems also to have turned from top-down theory of performing agents towards the self-images of experiencing and self-reflective agents.

The emphasis on self-reflexivity in contemporary sociology is probably very much a result of the 'high-modern condition' of the present, which can be argued to have little to do with prehistoric social formations. While the old traditional sources of Western identity are dissolving (nationality, class, family values, gender identities, locality etc.), issues of personal identity are more complicated than ever (e.g. Giddens 1991, 1992). Similarly, the traditional role-repertoires are being diffused and society can no longer be said to impose an obvious set-up for the actors to fit into. This anxiety about a less structured future world has, perhaps, little to do with prehistory or any other non-Western society. However, there are no immediate objections of why this state of uncertainty could not have been apparent in other time-space locales of prehistory, with or without a previous modern or pre-modern-like state. Admittedly, it is important to recognise that the image of the self-reflexive, knowledgeable individual is a product of a specific

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determined by role-discriminatory attributes (Hannerz 1980:151). Hannerz divides the general structures into a number of subsystems (e.g. space-time locales) in which he identifies a limited number of different role-repertoires, which make up a 'role inventory'. Furthermore, such subsystems can be disentangled into smaller areas, 'domains' (households, kin-groups, etc.).

discourse, which might have little to do with the social multiplicity of social formations.

It seems evident that social identity is not only a matter of personal choice, as it is also attributed by others (within or outside a group). Consequently, we might expect a tension between personal apprehension and the level of internalisation of external views (which need not correspond, cf. Butler 1997). There might, for instance, be disagreements over the nature of identity-basing elements and how they are utilised. Those that are corporeal and visible, such as sex and skin colour, are obviously more difficult to ignore or rearrange. In such cases the external and internal apprehensions will have greater probability to coincide, although they do not necessarily put similar emphasis on their relevance or importance. The other category of ideal aspects, such as religious beliefs or ethnic affiliation, is perhaps more flexible and easier to manipulate. Here, we might expect a greater difference in emic/etic, personal/collective apprehensions. It seems evident that we must discuss, in addition to material culture, how issues of corporeality 'intervene' in the formation of social identity and social practice. The complex relations, between the intra-individual experience of identity and the external social aspects, also suggest that we need to discuss the psychological aspects of how 'personal' experiences and self-images are constituted and maintained in social contexts.

### **Biological and corporeal aspects of the individual**

The biology–culture issue is probably the most infected one in the social sciences. Most scholars, perhaps due to historical experiences, have avoided the subject. As Featherstone *et al.* (1991:8) put it, "Sociologists have, on the whole, energetically denied the importance of genetic, physical and individual psychological factors in human social life. In so doing, they have reinforced and theorised a traditional Western cultural opposition between nature and culture." On the other side of the fence, primatologists and biologists often neglect the impact of social 'bias' in their studies of behaviour and internal biological processes, favouring biological determinism. Obviously, these questions cannot be handled as a simple disciplinary duality; it seems more fruitful to discuss such issues from a more integrated perspective.

It is very tempting to make fun of sociobiological 'explanations' of human behaviour. An instance is the idea of explaining some form of behaviour or phobias by referring to a distant, pristine time, when our ancestors lived in caves and became 'programmed' to

respond to dangers in different evolutionary-logical ways. The simple fact that most ancestors never lived in caves does not seem to be a problem for the spread of such ideas. Nevertheless, in recent decades, we have seen an increasing interest in biological explanatory models. In popular culture, books like Desmond Morris' *The Naked Ape* (1967) and Richard Dawkins' *The Selfish Gene* (1976) have found more elaborate successors in e.g. Moir & Jessel's *Brainsex* (1989), arguing for biological explanations of human agency and gender differentiation. The new biological movement builds heavily upon the rapid progress in genetics and the increasing focus on neural brain research. It might also result from a growing dissatisfaction with the social sciences' failure to present alternative views that fit with 'experienced' social conditions. I believe that there is an obvious risk, lurking in the sea of post-modern relativism and constructionism, of ignoring the biological aspects of social life. If the social sciences continue to neglect this discussion, we might have to face a serious backlash of neo-evolutionism and biological determinism in the near future.

#### *An emerging paradigm of biosociology?*

Anthony Walsh is one of the neo-biologists who try to merge social and biological theories. He dodges the biophobia in the social sciences by making a simple grammatical switch, presenting *biosociology* as a new paradigm (1995). In contrast to sociobiology, which claims to be the major explanatory perspective on all animal behaviour, biosociology is concerned with "the continuous, mutual, and inseparable interaction between biology and the social environment" (Lancaster *et al.* 1987:2). Walsh argues that "instead of speaking in strong terms like determinism and destiny, we need to speak softly of influence and directional bias" (Walsh 1995:37). Walsh stresses that human interaction has indisputable connections with biology. He points at recent neural and genetic research which claims that genes can be switched on and off, and that functional connections between brain cells are sensitive to environmental input (Walsh 1995:7).

There is, however, nothing substantially different in this new biologism from the scorned sociobiology of e.g. Wilson (1975). It is quite clear that Walsh tends to emphasise biologically related factors over social and cultural aspects. For instance, he stresses twin studies as a method to compare 'interclass correlations for a trait' between monozygotic (MZ) and same-sex dizygotic (DZ) twin pairs. The point is obvious: since MZ twins are genetically identical, any differences in their respective development must be due to

environmental<sup>4</sup> factors (Walsh 1995:34). A complementary method is to study non-related siblings reared together. According to Walsh, twin studies confirm heritability "on a variety of measures of all kinds of traits and abilities" (Bouchard *et al.* 1990), and the opposite is shown by sibling studies (Loehlin *et al.* 1989). Twin studies might seem indisputable, but their results are often biased by the manner of measuring and comparing 'traits' and 'abilities'. Many such works, including comparative studies as well-known as *The bell-curve* (Hernstein & Murray 1994), are quite easy to reject as they often lack requisite source criticism, notoriously neglect social factors, and compare incommensurable or constructed categories like sex or race.<sup>5</sup>

### *Hormones and the sexing of the brain*

Another frequently debated issue concerns the proposed sexing of the brain. In a biological sense, the human (mammal) brain is argued to be essentially 'female'. The differences appear after the 'androgen bath' during the sixth to eight weeks of pregnancy (Goodman 1987). This prenatal moment has rampant effects, not only in developing differentiated sexual organs, but also in making 'appropriate' adjustments of the brain. Walsh and others conclude that, due to hormones, "Females are generally more affiliative, nurturing, empathetic, and altruistic than males; and males are generally more prone to anger, dominance, and aggression." (1995:90) Notwithstanding Walsh's androcentric interpretation of the work of hormones, it is important to point out that its effects are not evident and independent of other biochemical aspects. There is probably a greater variability in the content and amount of hormones, which ought to make the result more of bimodal character than bipolar (see Fig. 7). Hormones are also thought to have significant postnatal effects. However, the hormone debate is caught in a number of circular arguments. As Walsh notes, the sex in "sex-hormones" loses its importance outside the reproductive phase, and the prefix is based on measured differences of *social* individuals. Or in Alice Rossi's words: "contemporary endocrinologists and primatologists are just as likely to study the influence of social and psychological factors upon hormone secretion as they are to trace the influence of hormones upon behaviour" (1977:10).

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<sup>4</sup> 'Environment' in this sense refers to everything that is non-genetic (Walsh 1995:42).

<sup>5</sup> For criticism regarding the bell-curve study, see e.g. Fischer (1996), Jacoby & Glauberman (1995).

***Human nature – animal nature: the individual as a primate***

A related strand within biology is the use of zoology (ethology and primatology), the study of other primates' social behaviour. The difference between the sociobiological approaches is found in their evolutionary postulates. Some of this research aims to challenge the uniform and deterministic sociobiological view by pointing out the variety of behaviour in the animal kingdom (e.g. Leibowitz 1978:ix). A contrary, but more common, way of using this kind of data is to argue that animals (especially apes) display the natural (original), or unsocialised, behaviour that they are presumed to share with humanity.

Behavioural studies of primates are claimed by some to expose the true nature of humanity, which allows analogies with our ancient pre-socialised past. However, it is hard to see what the doings of gorillas and chimpanzees have in common with human social agency. If there is a portion of instinct-governed drives in human constitution, the numerous ways in which they are socially expressed or suppressed make such analogies futile. One cannot separate a natural biological dimension of any animal out of its social context. Moreover, although we share a common ancestral past with other primates, each species is likely to have evolved in its own manner. The comparative model suggests that animals are stagnated, without history. From an evolutionary perspective, it is difficult to see how to use them as a rear mirror of our own past stage on the evolutionary ladder.

A further critical aspect concerns the gathering and interpretation of zoological data. I refer to the traditional obsession in zoology of burdening animal agency with human social properties and behaviour. There are probably more anomalies in nature than modernist zoology wants to recognise. If anything, the animal world(s) show an enormous variety in e.g. sexual behaviour, kinship relations and social properties, as well as many similarities. Within some species, the variation is perhaps due to different environments, but some might be the result of sheer plurality of chance. I believe that it is important to take a critical stance towards ethology, as long as the research is conducted in a tacit manner with little or no recognition of the impact of our contemporary structural properties and ideas in the construction of theory and method. A most treacherous example is the tradition of circular reasoning, where social sciences use observations from zoology, ethology and primatology to construct theories of human evolution, while ethologists compare their observations with the results and ideas of social scientists. Haraway makes the point clear:

We need to understand how and why animal groups have been used in theories of the evolutionary origin of human beings, of 'mental illness', of the natural basis of cooperation and competition, of language and other forms of communication, of technology, and especially of the origin and role of human forms of sex and the family. In short, we need to know the animal science of the body politic as it has been and might be (Haraway 1987: 222-23).

Personally, I find it amusing to watch nature shows on TV because – although very carefully edited – they reveal so much about the imposition of human norms on the social life of animals. An episode described by Berminge (1996:35f) concerns the mating of the caribou deer. We see two males fight each other to prove worthy of mating with a 'passive' female. The speaker pedagogically explains why the males have antlers and the reason why they fight (an evolutionary argument of the survival of the stronger). The interesting point, however, is that while the two competing males use their energy trying to knock each other out, an additional non-aggressive male quietly mates with the female in the background. The whole scenario is exposed by the camera, but totally neglected by the speaker.

Nature shows frequently contain similar 'neglected' anti-evolutionary situations, and the 'loser' is often the hard-working dominant male 'cheated on' by the females of 'his' flock, by younger males, or by outsiders. Berminge also discusses several examples of actual frauds. Animals are sometimes arranged into situations, and illusory cutting techniques have been used to propose an image of how the animals *should* behave. Contrary to the images of popular zoology, it rather seems that the instinct-governed animal world is not as ordered as some of us like to believe.

### ***Embodiment theory: corporeal materialism or 'light' sociobiology?***

In some recent social theory, the individual has come into focus as an embodied agent (e.g. Davis 1997, Welton 1998, Burkitt 1999).<sup>6</sup> The agents are not viewed as immaterial egos, but rather as subjects acting with, and through, material and biologically constituted bodies. Theories of the body can at a basic level be divided, in Hegel's terms, between those which concern the body as a pure physical/biological object, *Körper*, and those which focus on the living (social) body, *Lieb* (Welton 1998:2). In anthropology and

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<sup>6</sup> Some prefer to discuss 'corporeal materialism' or 'situated knowledge' instead of embodiment (Butler 1990, Braidotti 1991, Haraway 1989) as a means to single out a more political dimension of the social body.

archaeology, the focus has mainly been on the *Körper*-dimension: e.g. the body as a system of signs, carrier of meaning and symbolism (cf. Bourdieu 1990). It is the latter perspective that I want to discuss here. It is important to make distinctions in this context between those theories which actually try to merge action theory/performance with corporeal materiality and those only using embodiment as a handy neologism for traditional sociobiology. The literature on active embodied subjects has rapidly grown vast in recent decades, and embraces several different aspects of 'corporeal materialities'. Some projects depart from the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty, stressing that all sensory input is transmitted through the physical body and hence is affected by its constitution (e.g. Bigwood 1998). Others follow strands within post-structuralism such as Foucault's theories of the disciplined body, the body as imprisoned by the soul, exposed to (and exposing) subjectivation and power (e.g. Butler 1997; cf. Foucault 1980).

Notwithstanding the different perspectives on the body, the interesting point in embodiment theory is that a human individual can no longer be seen as divided between mind and matter. Individuals act within a situated context of biology and social discourse. A social individual is always an embodied being, interacting with the physical world of other individuals, actants and environment.

### *Social aspects of corporealities and physiognomy*

The fusion of the psyche and material body has obviously deepened the perspective on the social agent at several levels, and these different aspects inevitably have social connections. It makes clear that individuals are not alike, with identical properties and (dis)advantages. It further illuminates the fact that individuals are not static subjects, but go through changes of materiality. In a biological sense, most individuals experience different stages in life, through childhood, maturities, old age and death. These are not fixed stages with essential social content; the number and form of such stages varies, and so does their social significance. The processual time-biology dimension of the material individual is nevertheless important to acknowledge (cf. Turner 1996:30). The process of ageing, for instance, is not just a socially constructed phase; it also has some physical expressions such as grey hair, weakening bone tissue and, in some cases, declining mental abilities. In addition, physical differences in weight and length may be important factors in some social contexts (but not necessarily only in the sense of physical strength). For instance, Poul Higate

(1998:191f) has made some interesting notes on body size and status in hierarchical organisations such as the US military. His examples indicate that characteristics such as body length often confuse and interact in otherwise formal and strict hierarchical situations.

Although there seems to be an essential basis for some social categories, the social importance of phenotypic aspects such as sex, age, skin colour, ear-shape etc. is situational or discursively determined. A familiar example is the social advantage (as well as duties) of males due to their bodily constitution acting within a patriarchal cosmology. However, phenotypic or genetic differences need not imply a different world-view in a phenomenological sense. Chodorow argues that the actual differences between the sexes, mainly the experience of pregnancy but also the small differences in physiognomy, entail a different experience of the world (e.g. Chodorow 1978; cf. Featherstone et al. 1991:20).<sup>7</sup> The most obvious objection to such theories is that not every woman necessarily becomes a mother, and that the physiognomic differences in body vary more between the groups than within them. As Harré (1998:14) points out, the sexes are genetically bipolar, but their respective physical properties are bimodal.

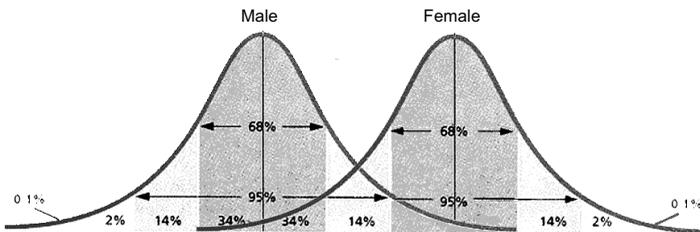


Fig. 7. The bimodal character of biological properties of sex such as body shape, distribution and extent of body hair, body fat etc (Harré 1998:14).

The intermediate zone between the tops of the bell-curves of fig. 7 indicates that there are areas where sexual or gender identity may be diffuse or ambivalent in relation to bodily constitution.<sup>8</sup> It is not very controversial to suggest that *if* there are psychological differences related to biology, for example in brain physiognomy,

<sup>7</sup> Chodorow also argues that the modern concept of the self is mainly based on a male experience, suggesting that a female experience is different (1978:25; cf. Irigaray 1994:83).

<sup>8</sup> Individuals of genetically ambiguous sex (i.e. phenotypic) are ca. one in 54,000 births (Harré 1998:14; cf. Nordbladh & Yates 1990).

they might display a similar distribution. This is, of course, only a hypothesis that cannot be refuted or sustained, inasmuch as sex and the social performances of gender are inseparable. What can be stated is that there are inevitably connections between the physical body and socially constituted ways of life. For instance, Leibowitz (1978:94) refers to a comparison of the achievements in the Olympic Games. The differences between the sexes have gradually decreased from 16% at the 1924 Olympic Games to 7.3% in 1972. This simple observation implies that some differences we experience today might have more to do with socialisation processes and gender constructions than with pure biology. Adding to these 'natural' processes, there are also shifting degrees of active reshaping and manipulation (exposing/hiding) of the body's physiognomy as well as appearance – for instance, surgical operation, body-building, or imitating a particular way of walking or behaviour. In such a perspective, the body is a continuing project, an unfinished biological and social phenomenon (Shilling 1993, Nettleton & Watson 1998:7; cf. Foucault 1980:56). It is important to point out that neither a body, nor a social 'I', is a piece of blank paper to be inscribed with cultural content. Inevitably, there is some kind of dialectical relationship between the corporeal materiality and performance on the one hand, and the culture-specific interpretation and appropriation of these aspects on the other.

### *The body as metaphor*

Notwithstanding the relativist arguments on cultural specificity, there are some diffuse fragments of essence in the human bodily constitution. After all, we are humanoids, not apes or cats. Most individuals share a common constitution having two legs and arms, walk upright etc. Departing from the idea of a general bodily constitution, there are some theories that subsume universal ways of sensing the world. In structural theories, the concepts of left and right (e.g. Turner 1996:30), front and back, up and down are regarded as essential categories. For instance, Giddens extends the Freudian/Lacanian regionalisation of the body to affect also back- and front-regions of time-space locales and buildings etc. (Giddens 1984:122-30; see also e.g. Goffman 1971:238). "The zoning of the body seems in most (all?) societies to be associated with the zoning of activities in time-space in trajectories of the day within locales" (Giddens 1984:129). He stresses that most buildings (shopping centres, factories) have quite distinctive 'private' back-regions and front-regions that are more 'official' (back- and front-regions do not necessarily correlate with the private/hidden and public/official

activities). In archaeology, similar themes are utilised in interpretation of buildings (e.g. Hingley 1990), or in 'reading' rock carvings (e.g. Tilley 1991, 1999:179). Tilley & Thomas (1993) have also proposed the body, and bodily parts (e.g. the torso), as essential metaphors in Neolithic symbolism. Whether these assumptions are universal or not, or to what extent they are culturally exaggerated/depressed, is not very relevant. The question is rather the actual effect they have in social praxis (categorisation and structuration of materialities and ideologies). As hypotheses, bodily centred metaphors are certainly of interest, but as assumptions they need more substantial empirical evidence.

Summing up this far: the question of how much impact we can ascribe to biological factors is ambiguous. This will probably vary according to social and corporeal complexity, among many other factors. In the modern societies of today it seems that biology has only a marginal effect in the structuration of social formations, but the question for archaeology remains to determine its importance in past societies. Although human life is basically biological and embodied, social life far transcends this general constitution as regards variety and complexity. Berger & Luckmann (1966) stress that humans are socioculturally changeable, rejecting the whole idea of an essential human nature. They acknowledge that individuals are driven by biological constitution, for instance in seeking sexual satisfaction or food. Nonetheless, they argue that the ways of fulfilling those needs and other human necessities are not governed, or even hinted, by the same biology. The concept of embodiment/corporeal materialities and situated knowledge is perhaps the most fruitful approach to embracing biological aspects in social interaction. Nevertheless, it is in social interaction that we become individuals and hence (re)produce social formations. To attain a coherent theory of this process, it is also important to discuss sociopsychological aspects of social practices in varying environments and in relation to other individuals and actants.

### **Psychological aspects of the individual: the Ego and the Other(s)**

As argued earlier, theories of social identity and agency need some sort of basis in psychological theory. Social performances/expressions are not simply constituted through social practice; they also need to be meaningfully experienced by the individual and follow 'emotional logic' of ontological trust. In this section, my primary interest is the constitution of the *social subject* in relation to other social subjects and the complex matrix of order(s) that is (re)produced through social praxis. It is probably only through an

integrated perspective that we can understand the slow-flowing properties of social formations as well as how individual performances might initiate new practices. I will not dwell too long on hair-splitting philosophical aspects of psychology. I have rather, although somewhat eclectically, aimed to extract a core from a few interesting theories regarding individual motivation and social interaction. Later on, I will try to tie a few of these strands together in a hypothetical framework that will provide a basis to discuss the constitution of social practice.

### *The three little agents and the big bad Freud*

Theories about the self, Ego, the 'I', individual, subject etc. are numerous and stretch across such different disciplines as psychology, sociology, ethology, and anthropology. It is, however, safe to say that most post-Enlightenment psychological theory is somehow related to the work of Freud. His perhaps most successful move was to introduce the notion of a repressive effect of the unconscious. In his first topographic model of the self, a distinction is made between the unconscious and the pre-conscious. A barrier separates the former from the conscious, while the latter wafts between the two domains (Freud 1986:170f, 1969:16f). In his second model (1969:1-4), the self is slightly differently comprehended as consisting of three interrelated parts: the 'id' (the non-personal), the 'ego' (the conscious) and the 'super-ego' (the resistance/repression effect). The second model does not replace the first, but rather supplements it with the notion that both the suppressing instance (super-ego) and the suppressed are recognised as unconscious aspects; both are hidden from the conscious self.

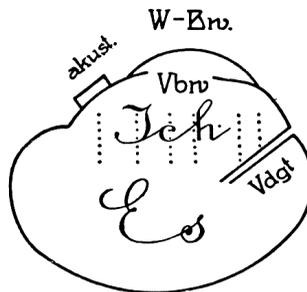


Fig. 8. Freud's 'hörknappe' model of the mind (1986:180). The 'akust' is the hearing apparatus. 'W-Bw' are the perceptive and conscious systems, 'Vbw' is the pre-conscious, 'Ich' is the Ego/I, 'Es' is the Id, and 'Vdgt' is the repressed.

As we can see in Fig. 8, the Ego and the Id are not separate entities. The ego is the conscious with the primary task of self-preservation. It is aware of sensory input, storing experiences in memory, trying to control the demands of instincts. The ego can be described as the interface of the self, acting as intermediary between the id and the external world. The 'id' can be described as the internalisation of discourse. "It contains everything that is inherited, that is present at birth, that is laid down in the constitution – above all, therefore, the instincts, which originate from the somatic organisation and which find a first physical expression here (in the id) in forms unknown to us" (Freud 1969:2). The function of the third part, the super-ego (or ideal-ego), is illustrated by Freud in the following way:

The crudest idea of these systems is the most convenient for us — the spatial one. Let us therefore compare the system of the unconscious to a large entrance hall, in which the mental impulses jostle one another like separate individuals. Adjoining this entrance hall there is a second, narrower, room -- a kind of drawing-room -- in which the conscious, too, resides. But on the threshold between these rooms a watchman performs his function: he examines the different mental impulses, acts as a censor, and will not admit them into the drawing-room if they displease him (Freud 1963:295).

According to Freud, the super-ego functions as a 'watchman', deciding what is allowed to be conscious or not. This virtual instance is constituted by the prolonged influence of the subject's parents, as well as the continuing influence of later successors such as "teachers and models in public life of admired social ideals" (Freud 1969:3). In this sense, the super-ego is a discursive effect. Running the risk of oversimplifying Freud's complex work, the Freudian subject can be seen as rather stably constituted. The major personal traits are established during the initial socialisation process of childhood and the subject acts mainly according to its own biography, building on conscious experiences, as well as sub- and supraconscious instincts/repressions. In a temporal sense, the 'id' and 'super-ego' are effects of the past, whereas the 'ego' is the instant of 'now' and future. However, by giving the id and the super-ego supreme status over the conscious Ego, Freud decentralised the subject in favour of socialising processes and 'natural' instincts such as the destructive drive and Eros (e.g. Freud 1969:5). Although Freud's conception of the unconscious is groundbreaking, his overall theory is nevertheless a bit too essentialist. By focusing on biology and internal processes of the mind, he fails to fully grasp the social/discursive dimension of the constitutional process (cf. Giddens 1984:59).

### *Me, myself and I: the sociopsychology of George Herbert Mead*

Mead presents an example of a less internalist viewpoint, stressing the importance of the social, interactive context. In Mead's framework, the individual core, the self, is divided in two interrelated dimensions. The 'I' is the socially active agent, while the 'me' is retrospective, reflexive, handling the assumed attitudes of community, 'the generalised other' (Mead 1934:154):

The 'I' is the response of the organism to the attitudes of the others; the 'me' is the organized set of attitudes of others which one himself [sic!] assumes. The attitudes of the others constitute the organized 'me,' and then one reacts toward that as an 'I' (Mead 1934:175).

The 'I' and the 'me' are aspects of the conscious subject interacting dialectically, allowing the self to view itself from the 'outside'. The self is thus simultaneously both a subject and an object, formed and modified in a continuous relation with 'the generalised other' (1934:136f). The exact concepts of 'I' and 'me' are not easily definable in Mead's work, but he does ascribe different qualities to the two concepts. For instance, the 'I' is reckoned naive, primitive, non-socialised, while the 'me' is social, normative, controlling, and censuring (Mead 1934:206). Mead emphasises, in accordance with Freud, the primary socialisation of the early years of childhood, a period when the rules of the 'game' (norms, values or discourse) increasingly become clear to the child. By learning to respond properly to 'the significant other' (mainly family members) the child is socialised and later learns to interact (play) with other individuals (1934:149ff). In Mead's sociopsychology the individual is no doubt formed by 'the generalised other' (although it is a subjective interpretation) and hence mainly constituted through interaction rather than from internal processes. It is also clear that the 'me' provides the basis for the agency of the 'I'. Nonetheless, Mead stresses that the self is an *individual* reflection. The 'I' is always present as an unforeseeable, creative, non-determinant aspect. By interacting within a social structure, the 'I' is simultaneously changing it. The actual effect of the 'I' is perhaps marginal in relation to the conservatism of the 'me', but is still the basic element of social change (Mead 1934:209ff).

It may seem to be a molding of the individual by the forces about him (sic!), but the society likewise changes in this process, and becomes to some degree a different society. The change may be desirable or it may be undesirable, but it inevitably takes place (Mead 1934:216).

This notion of a basically structured, yet structuring, individual is not very different from Giddens' well-known mantra of the duality of structure (cf. Sartre 1988:291). This is not the only aspect of Mead's sociology that precedes later theories. Other themes are the liberal element perceiving the self as a continuous, *active* self-reflexive project, but also the dependence of the generalised other, emphasised in French post-structural theory (e.g. the constitution of the self in the Other).

*Jean-Paul Sartre: the temporality of the conscious*

A somewhat similar apprehension of the individual is found in existentialist thought. For instance, Sartre's existentialist phenomenology (1943, 1960, 1991) is not far from Mead's theories (cf. Hayim 1980). Like Mead, Sartre stresses that the 'I' becomes conscious of itself in relation to others (as a non-other). An interesting aspect of Sartre's philosophy is his independence in relation to Freud. The regulative and repressing concept of the super-ego, as well as the unconscious, is absent in Sartre's framework. Instead, he makes a distinction between non-conscious existence (being-for-itself) and conscious existence (being-in-itself), stressing that such aspects are rather to be found in the paradox of being both subject and object, i.e. the conscious being conscious of itself. Furthermore, the conscious 'I' is not a continuously present mini-agent as in the theories of Freud and Mead. It is rather perceived as unbound by time and space, 'popping up' during reflexive acts (Sartre 1991: 30, 34). When occupied with non-reflective activities, like in Sartre's own examples of counting cigarettes or running to catch a tram, the 'ego' is not present (although there might be a consciousness of the tram-as-object-to-catch). The self is obliterated, being in the world of things and their repulsive/attractive qualities (Sartre 1991:28).<sup>9</sup> In modern language, the Sartrean ego might be described as a temporal set of neural connections which responds/reconfigures itself according to social interaction in a world of things. However, if consciousness is such a fugitive entity, it is difficult to explain the continuity of the self. It must base itself on some sort of slow-flowing set of references/memories; otherwise, it would not exhibit those regularities frequently termed personality. Sartre is not very clear on this point; he merely suggests that the ego constructs its states

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<sup>9</sup> The 'I' and the self are, according to Sartre, essentially the same, alternatively two sides of the Ego, which is constituted by the 'states' emanating through the consciousness (Sartre 1991:34, 45). To Sartre, the personal Ego is no more accessible than other persons' egos, only 'more intimate' (1991:57).

and maintains its existence through some kind of 'spontaneity' (Sartre 1991:44). Sartre has frequently, but perhaps somewhat unfairly, been labelled an idealist or subjectivist, proposing an individualistic perspective. Notwithstanding the correctness of that critique, he does seem to propose such a perspective in his more popular writings (e.g. 1988). According to Sartre, we are neither slaves to animal drives nor necessarily determined by our biographies; we have a possibility of being aware of our existence in the world. *Existentially conscious* individuals may, to a certain extent, be able to choose alternative trajectories or at least depart from discourse. Despite the passive constitution of the Ego through experiences and consciousness of states, caught in 'fields of practical inertness', it is nonetheless exposed to its own products (Sartre 1991:46, 1988:292). These 'products' and the temporal (relative) properties of the 'I' (i.e. that it can be conscious of itself as one, or several, historical I's) provide the basis for the individual to stand beside some discursive rules (Sartre 1991:24; cf. Börjesson 1986:160).

In this perspective, single individuals may, by their semi-independent actions, actually change structuring principles and properties of social formations. Needless to say, Sartre's conception of the social individual fits quite well with social- constructionist performance theory as well as Giddens' structuration theory. Sartre's existentialism partly dissolves the normative and essentialist aspects of Freudian theory; by proposing a fugitive Ego and the possibility of choice, Sartre also dismisses the idea of an essentialist core within the subjects.

#### *The Other point of view. Lacan on the imaginary and the symbolic*

A somewhat more strained alternative to Sartre's existentialism is found within various strands of structuralism. The French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan is a prominent and frequently quoted example. His theory of the relations between subjects and the Other is perhaps the most complex account in the social sciences. His texts are often contradictory, which makes any simple characterisation misleading. A first problem is that there are at least three different kinds of subjects (*sujets*) in Lacanian theory. In some paragraphs he is referring to the philosophical and social subject, the individual. Elsewhere he refers to the specific subject of psychoanalytic practice, or the subject of his own theoretical framework, created in the play of significance: the subject as a result (symptom) of the symbolic order (Matthis, in Lacan 1996:9). Similarly, the Other changes meaning according to context; sometimes Lacan refers to

the Other of language, the Other of the universal discourse (*le grand Autre*), the primary other (*le petit autre*), or the Other as the third reference participant in dialogue (Miller, in Lacan 1996:20).

Lacan's framework is, like Freud's, centred on a triad of concepts. *L'imaginaire* is the phenomenological experience of the world (perceived or imagined). *Le symbolique* is the linguistic and unconscious symbolic structure of society. The symbolic precedes the subjects, partly based on human biology, and hence is something that individuals have to face and relate to in their constitutional process. The third aspect, *le réel*, is not simply reality. It is rather the antithesis of the imaginary and the symbolic, functioning as a mediating link between the two.<sup>10</sup> These three 'orders' are not to be confused with (or replacing) Freud's topographies, but are rather to be conceived as dimensions of human conscious and unconscious.<sup>11</sup> The life-world of individuals is based on personal mixtures of imaginary 'phantasms' and internalised parts of the symbolic order. Compared with Mead's notions of the 'me' and the 'I', the former can be said to be symbolically constituted, while the latter is the imaginary aspect. In the so-called L-scheme (Fig. 9) Lacan tries to illustrate the complex relations between the subject and the social world.

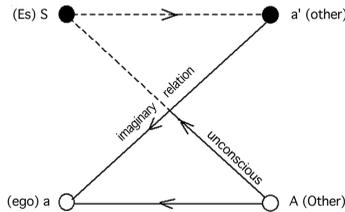


Fig 9. S= the unconscious subject, a= the 'I', a'=the object of the subject (the other), A=the point where the subject may question its existence (the Other).  
(After Lacan 1988:109, 243; cf. Larsson 1972:10f.)

Lacan presents a rather pessimistic image of a lost and dissolved subject having imaginary relations to the other (a to a'), always

<sup>10</sup> On the relations between the Imaginary, Symbolic and Real, see Miller in Lacan 1996:22, translator's note in Lacan 1977:279f. For an extended discussion see e.g. Feldstein et al. (eds.) 1996: 39-237.

<sup>11</sup> A further distinction from Freudian theory is Lacan's emphasis on language and structural linguistics. Lacan stresses that language is present before the subject, who thus is subjected to its structure (Lacan 1977:169). An important postulate, frequently repeated in his lectures, is that the unconscious is structured like language (e.g. 1977:20, 203). Again, this is related to the nature of psychoanalytic practice; speech is the medium to 'articulate desire' (Lacan 1977:84).

with the Other of discourse (A) lurking in the background. However, it is important to recognise that the main aim of psychoanalysis is normative, that is, to make the patient content as a social individual in his/her 'local discourse'/symbolic order (cf. Lacan 1996:110).<sup>12</sup> The subject (as a patient) is thus always subjected to the symbolic order and the constitution of the Other. It is important to note that although the social subject (individual) might be caught in a complex relation to other(s) and discourse, in social life the other (a') is not a therapist but another 'unfixed' subject. This implies that the relation between the two need not be wholly imaginary.

In line with Sartre, Lacan dismisses the deterministic biologism in Freudian psychology. Instead, he makes a simple distinction between the world of animals (nature) on one side and human social life (society) and language (culture) on the other, stressing that the collective character of social life inevitably makes us subjugated to the symbolic order (Lacan 1996:171). It is noteworthy that these rather naive distinctions are based on structural anthropological assumptions such as the work of e.g. Levi-Strauss and the 'law' of the incest-taboo (e.g. Lacan 1996:106, 116; cf. Jansson & Johansson 1999:338). A more convincing argument is the notion of the 'biological defect', i.e. that human offspring cannot cope without help from others (mainly parents).<sup>13</sup> This circumstance has social importance, as the infant until the age of 6-8 months is not aware of itself as a subject (it is united with its mother). During the *mirror stage* the child develops a sense of self via reflection of the Other and begins to appropriate the symbolic order (Lacan 1977, Lacan 1996:28f; cf. Weber 1991).<sup>14</sup> Regarding the view of the self as illusory, constituted by chains or webs of signifiers in the Other (Lacan 1977:185; cf. Thomas 1989:102, Hall 1992:287, Cornell 1999), it is thus no surprise that Lacan's theory departs from the only factor which can be known: the Other, rather than from the subject itself (Miller 1996:22).

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<sup>12</sup> As a complement to the Freudian method of dream analysis, Lacanian psychoanalysis emphasises the speech of the patient, what is said and what is absent. As the analyst (a') is aware of the process of transference and the subject's imaginary relation to the others (a' and A), the unconscious desire and imaginary phantasms of the patient may be exposed.

<sup>13</sup> Humans do differ from other primates, since our brain as infants is only a third of its full size. Other primates deliver their offspring with an almost 'full-sized' brain, which makes them less dependent on their parents (Dunbar 1998:137; cf. Freud 1986:191).

<sup>14</sup> Lacan's concept of the mirror stage is related to ethological studies of the reactions of chimpanzees and other animals when confronted with mirrors (Lacan 1972, 1995:41f). Contrary to human infants, most animals soon lose interest in mirrored reflections, even when being manipulated by dots of paint on their foreheads etc. In a sense, Lacan argues, animals are thus more adapted to reality...(1995:42).

*The symbolic order: a final frontier of social practice?*

It seems evident that the concept of the symbolic along with the concept of the Other(s) occupies a central place in Lacanian theory, yet their constitution and social effects are not necessarily universal. The symbolic order should not be confused with the concepts of social structure or social organisation. Obviously, there are links connecting them and the latter two reflect/impose on the former, whereas social structure is more of an etic variant of the emic symbolic order (the imaginary is consequently not synonymous with the emic or the subjective experience as opposed to the 'objective' social structure). The symbolic is more of the common practice/performance, norm and normality. It is the general frame of reference, but also the final frontier of thought and practice. It does not, however, have an existence by itself; like any social structure it needs to be (re)produced by social subjects.

It is, however, necessary to point out that the symbolic order, as presented by Lacan, is derived from heterosexual (phallocratic) norms and the properties of the nuclear family (cf. Irigaray 1994). Hence, Lacan emphasises fundamental differences between the sexes, along with language and culture as primary forms of symbolic representations involved in the formation of the subject.<sup>15</sup> Lacan's symbolic order is hence a quite recent, particularly Western construction. After all, why should it not be? Lacan discusses the modern, Western social subject. However, the *concept* of a symbolic order is not necessarily uninteresting for archaeology. Obviously, there are certain aspects that must be regarded as universal, such as the fact that it takes two persons of opposite sex to produce offspring, or the infant's dependence on primary others for survival. Of course, family organisation does take different forms in different social contexts. It would make perfect sense if societies employing 'rude polyandry' or living in 'extensive families' were to develop a quite different symbolic order. The symbolic order of the 20<sup>th</sup> century can therefore not be taken for granted neither in prehistory nor in non-Western societies. Nonetheless, the presence of a symbolic order is hard to neglect. Being derived from biological 'facts' and mainly working on the unconscious level, it may very well account for the slow-flowing inertness of structural properties

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<sup>15</sup> Lacan's and many other psychoanalysts' bipolar view of biological sex has been criticised by many feminists (e.g. Irigaray 1992, Butler 1990). Perhaps Freud's notion of penis envy is the main source of this 'misunderstanding'. He argued that during the third phase of sexual development girls and boys go separate ways. The boy discovers his penis and the girl that she 'lacks' one (1969:11ff). Contrary to such phallogocentric theory, I suspect that what the little girl realises at this age is not a 'lack', but rather that she (and her mother) are confined to an inferior, subjugated category in relation to the phallogocentric symbolic order.

and principles of social formations. In fact, it seems difficult to bring about profound social change without alterations of the symbolic order.

### **Merging social and psychological theory**

Giddens (1987, 1992:30), among others (e.g. Burke 1992), has objected to the decentralising of the subject (as well as to essential ego-psychological models). He prefers to follow the school of object-relation, rather than the (post)structuralist psychology of Lacan (Giddens 1984:51, 1992:113). Giddens' perception of the self derives mainly from critical readings of Freud, the hermeneutic psychology of Erik Erikson and Harry Stack Sullivan. Following Sullivan, he sees the formation of the self as a 'continuing interrogation of past, present and future', formed through a 'series of passages' (1991:79, 1992:30). According to Giddens, the individual of the era of high modernity is a 'reflexive project of the self', mediating discursive and creative behaviour (1990, 1991, 1992).

The basic component in Giddens' theory builds on a translation of Freud's first topography into neologisms such as basic security system, practical and discursive consciousness, along with a notion of an unconscious (Giddens 1984:41f, 56ff). Giddens is not clear about the meaning of the first term, but its main element is derived from Erikson's notions of ontological trust/insecurity (e.g. Giddens 1984:50, 1991:53). Ontological trust is mainly unconsciously grounded, but is necessary for stable and lasting social relations as well as the belief in a continuous self-identity (Giddens 1990:927). *Discursive consciousness* is "what actors are able to say, or to give verbal expression to, about social conditions, including especially the conditions of their own action; awareness which has a discursive form." (Giddens 1984:374,49.) Discursive consciousness can be seen as a variation of Sartre's existential consciousness, or in Mead's terms the 'I'. *Practical consciousness* is "what actors know (believe) about social conditions, including especially the conditions of their own action, but cannot express discursively" (Giddens 1984:375, 49). This part of the conscious is not very far from Mead's concept of the 'me' or Freud's pre-conscious. According to Giddens, there is no bar of repression between the two forms of consciousness; the boundary between them is fluid. However, as in the theory of Freud, a barrier separates the unconscious from the conscious (Giddens 1984:7,51; Tucker 1998:81). The unconscious is only fragmentarily exposed as 'slips of the tongue' (cf. 1984:93-104). In one sense Giddens' conception of the self seems plausible. From an internal, subjectivist perspective the unconscious is separated

from the conscious, but in a *social* perspective, the unconscious is active (although only potentially recognisable by others). According to psychological theory, the unconscious can be articulated ‘between the lines’ of speech, but it is not possible for the individual to draw consciously upon the unconscious. Yet if we abandon unifying ego-psychological models in favour of socially flexible ones, the unconscious is socially active (although only fragmentarily recognised by others). From such a social point of view, the practical consciousness is perhaps better seen as an interjacent layer, mediating between the conscious and unconscious (Fig. 10).

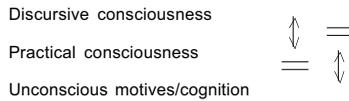


Fig. 10. Suggested relations between discursive and practical consciousness and the unconscious (cf. Giddens 1984:9).

Related to Giddens’ emphasis on routine action, it is plausible that most social action is (semi-)unconscious and hence mainly discursively constituted. Such a perspective certainly favours analyses of practice and routine (semiconscious practices) as discourses, rather than focusing on emic, subjective apprehensions and motives. Giddens recognises, like Freud and Lacan, the importance of primary socialisation in the constitution of the individual self, but he nevertheless leans towards a subjectivist perspective, stressing the conscious aspects of the agent such as knowledgeability and reflexivity. However, as stressed earlier, even self-reflexive, knowledgeable agents are limited by unacknowledged conditions and unintended consequences of their action, including aspects of unconscious motivation/repression (Giddens 1984:5, 12f, 294; Thompson 1984:151f). The notion of ontological trust/insecurity, pointed out by Giddens, and the distinction between discursive and practical consciousness might prove to be valuable in combination with other aspects derived from Lacan and Sartre.

### *The constitution of the social subject*

The general nature of the discussed theories on the constitution of the subject is similar to the classic individual–structure debate. However, it seems more relevant to speak of an individual dependence on ‘the other’ rather than society or social structure.

Regarding the temporal aspects in the constitution of subjects, a distinction can be made between those who stress socialising processes during childhood, whereas others also acknowledge secondary, continuous socially constitutional processes. Although many of the basic features of personality (including phantasms, desire and the introduction to the symbolic) are likely to be established during early childhood, social constructionist and existential thought also emphasise secondary socialisation(s) as well as individual creativity. In such perspectives, the whole lifespan is a continuing socialisation process with varying potential for self-reconstruction. Such continuing reconstruction of memories, individual and collective, experience of new situations, groups, institutions and milieus (variants of socialisation) makes it hard to subscribe to the idea of a stable essence of individual personality. From a temporal and social perspective, it seems more favourable to distinguish between the performative embodied individual and the social subject – both being processes, the individual as linear, passing through stages, and the social aspect as more or less flexible according to social context. To paraphrase Margaret Thatcher: there are no such things as individuals, only social subjects, corporeal materialities, their desires and phantasms.

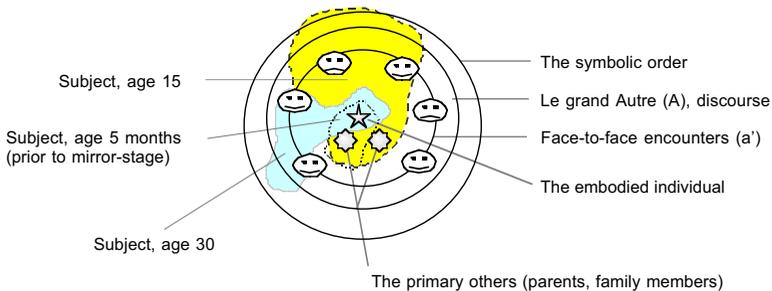


Fig 11. The changing constitutional aspects of the social subject in relation to different phases of embodied life.

The social subject seems likely to be quite flexible and primarily socially constituted. The intra-individual dialogue may strive to preserve continuity or bring about change, but the 'arguments' of the conscious and unconscious ego are nonetheless socially or discursively constituted. If the social aspect of the individual is constituted through social practice and the order of the Other(s),

what about the intentions and motives of agents? What about the relative autonomy that most of us experience as individuals? The social sciences have often mixed idealism and theory when discussing the individual. Psychoanalysis tells us that we are mere products of our family system and local discourse with the symbolic order as 'the final frontier'. Despite these arguments, referring to the social constitution of the subject, the view of the intentional and autonomous agent is still favoured in many circles of social theory.

### **On the constitution and initiation of social practice**

Both Blumer and Goffman assign a general creative ability to individuals, which is supposed to allow them to combine and, to some extent, invent new roles (cf. Turner 1968). But where does this creative ability originate? Is it a general aspect of all human performance and equally distributed? To simply acknowledge such creativity is as doubtful as to disparage it. A more probable explanation for this problem is that the questions are posed from an erroneous perspective – in this particular case, an idealistic idea of all individuals sharing equal abilities and possibilities. If we reject such a perspective, it seems obvious that a general definition of a social agent is impossible to achieve. In fact, history has repeatedly shown that certain individuals, for different reasons, have proved to make more difference in the structuration process than others. Neither contemporary societies, nor prehistoric societies, consist of a grey mass of anonymous similar beings. The 'burden' of structuration is probably quite unequally distributed. Except for the obvious circumstance that the individuals' trajectories and backgrounds, material corporealities etc. may differ, social individuals are always in a state of *possible* reconstitution. In addition, rapid social change can change the prerequisites and power-platforms of certain individuals for the better or worse.

It thus seems important to discuss how certain individuals, despite the normalising effects of social structure, are able to change and manipulate their (or others') discourse (or social formations). We need a social theory that accounts for how structuring principles are being reproduced, but also how they can be altered in the long or the short term. I will continue by discussing theories that try to account for how certain individuals relate to social structure/ discourse and how such performances might even change them.

### ***Charisma and initiators of discursive practice***

There are only a few social theories that discuss 'extraordinary' or 'transdiscursive' individuals in another sense than traditional retrospective notions of important scientists, religious thinkers, political leaders, or 'culturally important' figures such as artists or writers. Social theory certainly lacks coherent theories of other kinds of transdiscursive agents, but there are some attempts worth mentioning. A basic discussion of 'extraordinary' individuals is found in Weber's concept of charisma:

The term 'charisma' will be applied to a certain quality of individual personality by virtue of which he (sic!) is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities (Weber 1964:358).

It is quite evident that Weber mainly referred to individuals claiming divine powers or fanatical visions in primitive societies. He believed them to be "prophets, to people with a reputation for therapeutic or legal wisdom, to leaders in the hunt, and heroes in war" (Weber 1964:359). Weber's concept of charisma is, in its original sense, both naive and limited. It concerns only a minority of possible candidates. Nevertheless, the interesting part of Weber's concept is his work on the institutionalisation of charisma. It is evident that an individual-centred vision cannot survive in the *longue durée*, given the limited life-span of individuals. According to Weber, "...in its pure form charismatic authority may be said to exist only in the process of originating. It cannot remain stable, but becomes either traditionalised or rationalised, or a combination of both" (Weber 1964:364). The ways of incorporating charismatic structures are plentiful according to Weber (1964:363-373). He discusses several ways in which original, individual visions can be transposed and adjusted by disciples to merge with (or replace) structuring principles. Through the concept of charisma, he thus acknowledges the possibility of individual significance in social formations. In fact, Weber regarded charisma as one of the most important prime movers of history (Berger 1963:147f). A conception similar to Weber's charisma is found in the work of Michel Foucault. Although, in some of his work, he has decentralised the individual in favour of discourse, he nevertheless acknowledges the presence of 'transdiscursive' individuals (Foucault 1977:131f). In a text titled 'What is an author?' he identifies individuals who, through their work, can be considered as 'initiators of discourse', rather than followers of discourse:

Somewhat arbitrarily, we might call them 'initiators of discursive practices'. The distinctive contribution of these authors is that they produce not only their own work, but the possibility and the rules of formation of other texts. In this sense, their roles differ entirely from that of a novelist, for example, who is basically never more than the author of his own text. Freud is not simply the author of *The Interpretation of Dreams* or of *Wit and its Relation to the Unconscious*, and Marx is not simply the author of the *Communist Manifesto* or *Capital*: they both established the endless possibility of discourse (1977:131).

Foucault's notion of initiators of discourse is interesting, a bit more elaborated than Weber's charisma, but nonetheless restricted to authors and their texts. Like Weber before him, Foucault acknowledges the differences between the original text and its transformations as an object of knowledge. In this sense, the founders have little or nothing to do with later readings of their texts: "...the work of these initiators is not situated in relation to a science or in the space it defines; rather, it is science or discursive practice that relates to their work as the primary points of reference" (Foucault 1977:134; cf. Burke 1992:92). Foucault does not hint whether similar aspects are also valid for performative acts, but neither are there any objections to such an extension. The major difference, using an archaeological vocabulary, is that texts are 'closed finds' of *longue durée*, while performances are confined to their actual time-space context and processes of their possible further consequences.

The discussions of Goffman, Weber and Foucault are interesting as such, but not very impressive. They all recognise the necessity of differentiated models of individual agency, but fail to give suggestions of *how* certain individuals are able to initiate discourse. They oppose the view favoured by social anthropology, that the social individual is subjected to social norms, as non-sufficient. This seems instead to be a dialectical relationship: social norms and organisation are flexible results of social practice rather than determining it. Or in Giddens' words: 'social structure is both the medium *and* the outcome of social action' (Giddens 1979:5, 69, 218). The distinction between initiation and institutionalisation of thought or practice is important here. Both Marx and Freud may be initiators of discourse, but in the *longue durée* their effect is dependent on other subjects using them as 'points of reference'. The author (or creative agent) may be dead in an interpretative sense, a conglomerate of discursive fragments, or a chain of signifiers in the other, but all agree nonetheless that some individuals possess a potential to be active in the (re)constitution of discourse. However, such individual-based structural power seems not to be a pure matter of capital, class or status, although there are connections

between possession or power over authoritative and allocative resources and how they are exploited (cf. Wallerstein 1990). The social power and ability to act according to conscious intentions seems flexible, and perhaps not as simple as a question of cultural, symbolic and economic capital. There should also, at least hypothetically, be other kinds of important, powerful, influential individuals on a day-to-day basis. We certainly need more elaborated social theories in order to be able to discuss their relevance, who they are, and how to find them in the archaeological record. To do that, it is necessary to discuss psychological aspects of Being in relation to social practice.

*Motivational effects: desire, ontological trust, and a will to know*

According to Lacan, motivation is not as much derived from biological drives (*Trieb*) as it is socially initiated. In contrast to Freud's concepts of Wunsch, Begierde and Lust, Lacan stresses that a subject's desire is rather socially constituted, derived from the space between needs (biology) and demands (the objects).<sup>16</sup> It is a lack or emptiness that the subject strives to fill. Desire is thus a powerful motivational factor continuously reconstituted by the simple act of being biological individuals living in a social world of symbolic order. A desire is, if not unique, partly personal, which provides a basis for a theory of motivation that recognises disparate subjects rather than sameness. However, even if the concept of desire is far better than simple notions of biological drives (e.g. Eros or destructiveness), it is not sufficient from a social perspective. Initiation of social practice is, of course, very much derived from social encounters and social community. One such aspect is found in the nature of communication between social subjects.

It is certainly not too controversial to stress that social interaction is more or less equal to communication. Without this, any complex social community is hard to imagine. However, communication is not very straightforward or simply constituted. Successful communication is dependent on some sort of common references (perceived or 'real'). I emphasise that, apart from simple schematic theories of sender and receiver, there are hardly any situations of pure communication (cf. Bauman 1973:89). As Habermas (1970:144) puts it: "The speech situation, which is determined by pure intersubjectivity, is an idealization." Nonetheless, Habermas believes that it is possible to get close to an

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<sup>16</sup> See translator's note in Lacan 1977:viii.

ideal situation of mutual understanding by developing 'communicative competence', i.e. learning to anticipate the bias of social 'empirical' factors. Unfortunately, Habermas' idealism has very little to do with social interaction. There are very few issues that can be transmitted without bias – apart from simple imperatives. Communication beyond this level is bound to be plagued with misinterpretations, something that conversation analysis often indicates. Such communicative situations are less about simply interpreting a message than about relating to memory/experiences, metaphorical values, and the empirical basis of the momentarily perceived life-world. Social communication is a complex act involving the fission between the imaginary and the symbolic, as well as systems of symbolic codes and linguistic structures.

Somewhat contrary to Habermas, I suggest that most human day-to-day communication is as much based on misunderstandings/misinterpretation, as it is understood as intended. Intersubjectivity is as much an illusion as the theories of a transcendental ego. Since communication is both conscious and unconscious, there are always undertones present, as well as discrepancies/contradictions in relation to e.g. voice modulation or performance/body language. This complexity goes far beyond any theory of metaphors or symbolic schemes. It is not simply a matter of having the same cultural background or discursive capital. Misunderstandings are as likely within a discourse/field/thought collective/reference-group, or any social category (age, gender class etc.). The essential elements in understanding the work of these effects are the notions of ontological trust, the will to know, and the biosocial power of Desire. Ontological trust is perhaps one of the few psychological parameters that are inevitable for any social subject. The experiences of the life-world must make some sense, following an emotional logic in order to be intelligible. It can also be perceived as an individual coherence between the imaginary and the symbolic; the gap between them must not be too obvious, as it would inevitably create an existential crisis (neurosis) of the subject. Ontological trust is not a totality; it is partly personal, but mainly based on the temporality and specificity of the symbolic order in which the subject is living. The effort to maintain an emotional logic that accounts for both internal and external experiences, individual and collective memories, is a powerful 'effect' that involves personal motivation/creativity as well as normalising, streamlining aspects of social collective life.

The second element, the will to know, is of course borrowed from Foucault (1976). According to Foucault, the will to know is a general discursive practice/strategy that formed (constituted) much of the modern episteme. However, Foucault argues from the perspective of power strategies; this certainly has a bearing upon the modern episteme, but what I seek to discuss here is the will to know as a social *effect*. It cannot be reduced to individual or discursive power strategies; it is basically a general will to know what it is to be a conscious human. That includes the continuous work of balancing personal and collective phantasms and the symbolic, and of controlling what is repressed. The will to know would perhaps be better expressed as an *obsession* with knowledge. It is, like ontological trust, an inevitable outcome of being social, which may be more or less articulated/exploited in different discourses. The effect is, however, not exactly a quest for knowledge, but rather a general desire for understanding and consensus. Social existence (ontological trust) can hardly be 'logical' if we do not believe in successful communication; it is a cornerstone of social collective life.

The paradox, due to the complexity and variability of language, is that consensus can only be reached from a series of mutual misinterpretations. It is the nature of language, its nuances, complexity and its links with the social context that make communication more than simply coding and interpretation. Without the consensual effect, most communication, besides the utterly basic, would be meaningless and hardly effective. In a sense, the same is true for archaeological interpretations. Another way of illustrating this effect is by the metaphor of the hermeneutic spiral. The similarities are obvious, yet there are a few important differences – primarily in matters of temporality and the fact that the hermeneutic spiral best accounts for repeated encounters with 'silent monuments' (e.g. texts). Performative communication is, on the contrary, an instant process between two or more subjects contextualised by the symbolic order and discourse.

The main point of this reasoning is that discursive (social or symbolic) change can be understood from individual, collective and discursive perspectives due to the effects in the nature of communication as well as unintended effects. The need for ontological trust/basic security is a personal project although, being a social subject, such trust must be linked to discursive practices and the 'truth' of a symbolic order. In this sense, subjects might paradoxically change the same order by their will to understand (i.e. misunderstand) in combination with chains of unintended consequences. Moreover, it is necessary to take account of daily

conscious and unconscious efforts to change the symbolic to match individual (or collective) phantasms (identity, ideology, and cosmology). These are powerful drives which, along with the concept of desire, account for the stability of social formations as well as for social change. The desire, related to biology and the symbolic order, is in a sense a stabilising, conservative effect constituted during the initial socialising process, whereas ontological trust and the will to know represent effects from continuing secondary processes.

### **Summary: individuals, discourse and the Other(s)**

In this extensive chapter, I have explicitly studied the constitution and drives of individuals as embodied and social subjects. Are we governed by our biology? In one sense, assuredly; but as argued, the ways of expressing and handling our needs and drives in a social context seem very flexible - and quite often, even contradictory in the sense of conscious and unconscious repression of biological impulses. However, it seems plausible that our corporeal constitution as individuals is very much involved in the constitution of social practices. Physical properties, such as biological sex and visible corporealities, might potentially be charged with social significance; this matrix is, of course, much more social than essentialist, and may thus be expected to vary in different contexts.

There might be some phenomenological aspects of our different bodily constitution, such as body posture, bodily experiences (e.g. pregnancy, disablement, or aspects connected with age), that may determine some regular 'deviancies' in social action. However, such universal aspects are very difficult to postulate, as social practices have in any case frequently proved to alter or mask such possible differences. Therefore, phenomenological aspects are no more than hypotheses that remain to be explored. Any universal status of such aspects must, however, be ruled out. The question of social significance of corporealities is an interesting area of study for archaeology. By investigating 'discriminatory attributes' of individual and collective identity, some social categories may be exposed and help to interpret structuring properties and principles of prehistoric social formations.

Turning to the psychological aspects of the social subject, we find, not surprisingly, that our conscious is very much constituted by social interaction with materialities and the social Other(s). Instead of continuing the tiresome debate about individuals versus society, I believe that it is more relevant to discuss individual relations to the Other(s). It is thus important to note that this relation is an 'uneven

dialectic'. Whether or not Lacan is correct in postulating a symbolic order, our biological 'defect' makes us dependent on the primary others (other displaced social subjects), which are not necessarily the biological parents or restricted to two persons performing similar functions. However, this is not to say that primary socialisation alone determines social performance. Neither does it more than hint at the constitution of the symbolic order. Secondary internalisation processes, day-to-day encounters in social groups and sub-groups, materialities are important here as suggested by Freud, Mead and Berger & Luckmann.

Hence, the personal project of the self seems to be in an unstable state of possible reconstruction. It is certainly an important project for all living individuals, but the intra-individual perspective is dubious as a main point of reference in archaeological studies. Here I suggest that social studies can benefit by departing from the practice of the Other (discourse). This suggestion is based on the assumption that material culture and the social structuration of the environment are the outcomes of actual social practice. The emic and personal experiences of being a social subject in different social and physical milieus are not uninteresting; after all, individual mental processes certainly may initiate some social practices. Nonetheless, the incompleteness of the symbolic and the gaps in intersubjectivity are more likely to be initiating factors, making small changes through series of ontological misunderstandings.

I have also suggested a few examples of such effects as the will/obsession to understand and the power of individual desire. Desire is created, as Lacan suggests, between biology and culture, based at times on biological necessities and at times on social communality (discourse of the Other). Another important internal aspect is the fission between imaginary phantasms and the symbolic/discourse. This makes individual motivation as flexible according to social contexts as the social subject itself. Still, I believe that Giddens is correct in his criticism of agency; much social practice is routine and semiconscious (that is, in a sense mainly discursive) and the play of unconditioned consequences of action makes it hard to depart from intentional agents (whether existentially conscious or not). Even so, as Foucault points out, single individuals can make profound changes in discourse, and not necessarily due to high social status or authoritative powers. However, the initiator of discourse is dependent on others in order to be socially significant. This, of course, is another argument for a discursive approach.



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## Summary and suggestions of further studies

*" It is also possible that these humanoids will not  
make decisions based on tactical probabilities.  
Their cognitive process is...unpredictable."  
Pralor automated unit 3947<sup>1</sup>*

If the reader believes in jumping to the summary for a quick overview of the contents of a text, s/he will be disappointed in this case. There is no good way to summarise a text like the foregoing. There are no grand theories to present and no final conclusions regarding social theory, archaeology and science fiction. On the contrary, this text poses more questions than it answers. Nonetheless, I will summarise some of the arguments put forward here in order to suggest directions for further studies as well as indicating some potential areas of empirical research.

In Chapter 2, I argued that the conceptual scheme (Fig. 6) provided the internal 'logic' of the text. However, as the observant reader surely has noted by now, the 'red thread' in the text is a bit 'curly'. I point to this 'inconsistency' because I believe it is a good thing. There can be no models in social theory or archaeology that are followed from A to Z to secure consistent and impeccable arguments (cf. Zizek 1989). As Michael Mann (like the automated unit 3947) notes: 'Human societies are often messier than our theories about them'. Models are important to clarify arguments and

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<sup>1</sup> *Prototype*, episode XXIX, Star Trek Voyager.

to prevent theories from becoming too open and general to be operative. They are good to think with, but may also be restrictive if followed slavishly.

In my attempt to discuss issues of social identity and social practice I have begun from Giddens' structuration theory, suggesting that it would work as a *general theory* of social practice. It still seems to fulfil that purpose, although it needs some modifications such as the incorporation of environmental aspects and material culture as potentially being socially significant. Furthermore, I have discussed social formations as an *analytic* concept arguing that such totalities are too general to serve as an object of study. Social formations are constituted by diverse aspects of territorial references, multivocal emic and etic apprehensions which make such entities almost impossible to frame. In Giddens' framework, structuring principles and properties are the defining parameters for social formations (yet intersocietal). However, as structuring principles and properties are directly related to social practice, they mediate social practice at the micro- and macro-levels. In an analytical sense they may function as bridges from the particular to the general. It should perhaps be pointed out that Giddens' use of these concepts is rather stiff; they seem to have greater potential when less general. I have in mind the construction of social categories and individual identities that seem to be general features of all social networks.

The fuzziness of concepts like the social formation restricts their general validity for those networks of social interaction that we apprehend in contemporary societies as well as in archaeological contexts. After all, the implied global system is more of an etic notion of how social formations are interconnected. Social practices regulated by structuring principles and properties cannot provide the boundaries for locales or social formations, as they are not confined to spatial boundaries. The emic apprehensions of ethnicity or affinity as suggested by Barth (1969) are problematic enough in 'living' societies. To use such concepts as indications of social boundaries for 'dead' social formations would be speculative and not very fruitful. For archaeological studies, I find the spatial concept of *locales* more promising. A locale is neither a culture area nor an archaeological site, but is defined by its environmental properties and the social practices that are involved in the structuration process. Moreover, considering the structuration of social activity and properties of the particular locale, it seems better to depart from an active and social perspective – a taskscape in Ingold's terms – than from the experience of dwelling. These two perspectives do not really exclude each other, but according to the discussion about emic and etic views, the latter is more difficult and

awkward. Similarly, it seems that the experiences of individuals are a less appropriate foundation for archaeological studies. There is not one general social subject, but rather a flexible continuum of possible variations based on corporealities, social power (over authoritative and allocative resources), existential consciousness, individual desire, somewhat temporally delimited by the constitution of the symbolic order. The social agent is, so to speak, wafting in a bowl, with its corporeal materialities as a point of spatial and mental reference, utilising or being subjected to structural properties. Such aspects (social organisation, social structure, institutions) are social products, not necessarily intentionally constituted, but rather effects of the subjects being 'unsettled'. Nonetheless, the social significance of physiognomic aspects of the body can contribute to archaeology. Some parameters, like sex, body posture, and age, are distinguishable in the material record. By using extended techniques such as molecular analysis, information on biological kinship and 'outsiders' can also be extracted. These parameters might, in combination with material culture, suggest patterns that can be interpreted in order to find identity-discriminatory attributes and hence relevant social categories.

The notion of a symbolic order is perhaps just another way of discussing cosmology or social structure. But as hinted by Lacan, the symbolic order is based on some realities related to the structuration of social practice. Lacan's concept of the symbolic order is particularly interesting, as it is based on some specific human realities. Archaeology might benefit from studying such phenomena from the aspects of group size (day-to-day encounters), the structuration of buildings, and the constitution of family-like subgroups. Perhaps such studies can indicate the constitution of the symbolic order in different social formations and thus be useful in further interpretations of social practice.

### **Suggestions for empirical studies**

In future case studies, I would like to explore the possibilities of a microarchaeology of locales. In a spatial sense it will concern intensive field survey in order to identify the placing and function of activity areas (sites, shrines, burials, resource areas etc.) and their relation to environmental properties. I have already hinted at some possible operative strategies in Chapter 3, such as GIS-generated embodied maps, and the use of multivariate statistics (correspondence analysis) to establish patterns between archaeological and environmental features. This is probably not a strategy that fits all time periods and types of landscapes. It is mainly an outcome of my participation in field surveys in Arcadia,

Greece, and the special characteristics of that particular area have naturally influenced much of the outlined approach. Nonetheless, if modified, some procedures of this strategy might also be operable in other contexts. On a lower level, a similar approach can also be applied to intra-site analysis and household studies. As suggested above, the structuration of places, such as sites and burial grounds, or of buildings' properties is certainly of interest in discussing the constitution of symbolic order and social identities/categories.

Another promising way of discussing identities and social categories is through analysis of burials. Genetic data, extracted through molecular analysis of the osteological material, can indeed provide additional interesting information, combined with corporeal properties of individuals (or groups of individuals), related material culture and spatial aspects. Burial analysis is a classic area of social studies in archaeology and needs no further presentation. There are, however, no complete operational strategies to apply. For instance, the approaches deployed by Saxe and O'Shea in the 1970s and 1980s are too crude and tied to quite stiff conceptions of what a burial represents. I do believe that multivariate statistics are suitable for handling information on larger cemeteries, but only as an operative instrument. The resulting categories and groups can only serve as a basis for further interpretation. I have also hinted at the possibilities of using structural binary-opposition techniques to arrange data, although with objections similar to those faced by statistics. As argued, structuralism may not serve for meta-theories, but its operative tools may prove valuable in suggesting relations and groupings of data.

There is, of course, much more to discuss regarding these issues, but there is little sense in continuing without reference to empirical data. I should, however, add that the suggested operational strategies do not necessarily have to be performed as a package at a particular locale. It would certainly be interesting to contrast the results of each strategy, but such extensive analysis would be too time-consuming and costly to be realistic. Yet independently, or in various combinations, such proposed strategies seem both feasible and worthwhile.

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