Reclaiming Archaeology

Beyond the Tropes of Modernity

Edited by Alfredo González-Ruibal

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~~Digging~~ alternative archaeologies

Cristóbal Gnecco

Digging is a physical activity – tiresome, carefully conducted, subject to painstaking training – central to archaeological practice (see Edgeworth, this volume). Yet its empirical character (that of an activity requiring bodily skills as well as mental control) hides another of its facets: digging is also a powerful trope intimately linked to that of the buried past. Indeed, it is precisely there, in the entangled relationship of these two tropes, that the importance, relevance, and even uniqueness of archaeology are premised: it affords access to the past (through digging), much more so than document-based histories because it reaches into greater temporal depth. Practitioners still hold to the idea that archaeology is uniquely positioned to account for temporal depth and, thus, for variations and changes (but also continuities) not available to the theoretical and methodological machinery of other social disciplines. The overarching presence of time depth in the specificity of archaeology solidifies the metaphysical pre-eminence of digging.

A (not so) broken consensus

The consensus about archaeology (about its nature, its purpose, its means of evaluation), patiently built by the scientific programme since the 1960s, was shattered two decades later by the emergence of dissenting programmes within the discipline and by contestations of the subalterns. The victims of the shattering were objectivity and epistemic hygiene, positivist legacies from which the discipline has been putting distance ever since, albeit unwillingly. Yet a strong consensus remains around two sturdy discursive objects, which then become the more stable core of archaeology: *excavation* as the more legitimate means of capturing the *materiality* of the past. Excavation and the materiality of the past are so resilient that their existence seems to be beyond any questioning. They simply *are*.

Archaeology is built upon the shared idea that the past is buried and somehow encrypted/codified in things. The secret of the guild – whose access grants privileges and a corporate sense and whose training is the *raison d'être* of the institutional apparatus – is how to decode the past so buried and encrypted; in short, how to *uncover* buried meanings. The adequate performance of uncovering/decoding is the aim of the game. The meaning granted to this adequacy has changed over the years, from unregulated common sense to highly ritualized scientific protocols. The most important, revolutionary move in archaeology in the last three or four decades has been bringing living people (or their *cultures*, however defined) to have a bearing on archaeological hermeneutics. The various strands of ethnoarchaeology fit in that move as much as so-called alternative archaeologies, no matter how disparate they may seem. The procedures for uncovering/decoding have changed; the definition and meaning of what

is covered/codified and hence waiting to be uncovered/decoded for the sake of archaeological knowledge – for the good of humanity at large, as archaeologists prefer to say – has not. The latter is thoroughly naturalized.

Any minimal history of the discipline would thus posit that the scientific consensus was blasted to bits a few decades ago. But was it truly blasted? Is it shattered into something that preserves its most stable ontological and metaphysical core? Is it shattered into something (archaeology) that survives thanks to its overt association with the cosmology of modernity, supported by the trope of uncovering?

Goya and the modern gaze

Two portraits by the Spanish painter Francisco de Goya, *La maja vestida* and *La maja desnuda*, embody the modern gaze and signal the Western obsession with uncovering, undressing, stripping (in relation to this see Shanks 1992; Thomas 2004). The transit from the dressed to the naked *maja* signals the strategy of modernity (that of science): the naked *maja* embodies the truth of that which is exposed to the gaze in its utter reality. The movement backwards to the dressed *maja* only conceals: the formerly exposed truth is abducted into the unseen, where it ceases to be real to become ideology. The idea of nakedness as revelation has a long history in Western thought and entails the difference between a real and an illusory world. The genealogy of stripping, undressing and uncovering points to the Enlightenment as a transcendent moment of the Judaeo-Christian tradition; thenceforth, the capacity to expose that which is buried becomes the operational centre of modern knowledge.

Since Kant (1964) the central argument of the Enlightenment has been the opposition between light and dark – and its accompanying dichotomies: good/bad, free/subdued, knowledge/ignorance. When coming to singling out a motto for the Enlightenment Kant (1964) proposed *sapere aude* (dare to know), indicating that human beings could pass from tutelage to free will by illumination, this time not divine (the light that descends to humans from heaven) but fully human (the light thrown into the dark by the conscious and responsible use of reason). God dies in the very moment when humans take light in their own hands. So does a sealed past modelled in the architecture of the cosmos, the supreme craft of god. The past is now something to be found in its materiality and its meaning something to be uncovered.

With these arguments in hand it is easy to see what archaeologists do – and why. As a modern discipline, archaeology fully inherited the modern gaze. The archaeological equivalent of undressing, uncovering and stripping is digging. The past is buried, then, but it is also material. In order to know it, the past (which lies buried in the dark in its material embodiment) has to be exposed, stripped, undressed, illuminated, that is, excavated. Archaeologists excavate because the past is there, somewhere, in its material form: buried. The only way by which the buried past can be brought back to life (that is, made real) is through its coming to light – by digging. Premised upon these facts, it is not surprising that the high standard of the trade is knowing where to dig to recover the buried past. Even surface findings contribute to that purpose: if properly retrieved they will inform about the material past as it was when buried.[1] Reaching below the surface is the condition that grants the archaeological label to things. Consider Michael Schiffer's (1972) well-known distinction between systemic and archaeological contexts; the latter described 'materials which have passed through a cultural system, and which are now the objects of investigation of archaeologists' (Schiffer 1972: 157). Although he does not specify that the archaeological context is buried, the whole paper is a commentary on that implicit statement. Otherwise, how can we accept that the systemic context defines elements participating in a behavioural system? The elements in an archaeological context have somehow

been separated from a behavioural system by intentional or accidental discard; hence, they are away from the world of the living – they have already 'passed through a cultural system' and no longer belong to a 'behavioural system'. How do they re-enter a systemic context, that is, a new behavioural system? There is only one way: by pulling the element out of the archaeological context, that is, by digging. The ultimate producer of such an operation is the archaeologist. (Not in vain, according to Schiffer, the elements in an archaeological context 'are now the objects of investigation of archaeologists'.)

There is no doubt about it: archaeologists excavate. They become part of the guild only by learning where and how to dig. The experience of fieldwork (utterly legitimized by digging) is the ultimate place, source, locus of *archaeologiness* – the sense of being an archaeologist. Two of the most articulate critics of the foundational ontology of anthropology, Johannes Fabian (1990) and Michel-Rolph Trouillot (2003), have highlighted the reification of *the field* – that iconic place where fieldwork is carried out – as the anthropological discursive operation more widely agreed upon, the only possible source of anthropological understanding. A reified field (emptied of any historical, contextual character) is a place where the anthropologist encounters the *savage* and where intersubjective interactions are translated into professional distance. Likewise with archaeological fieldwork and digging, the reified location and operation that permit finding a reified past. Besides, archaeological digging is surrounded by legal proscriptions. In many countries – certainly in Colombia, the place in which I am writing – digging is defined, controlled and policed by institutional norms enacted by the State, enforced by its custodians, and enjoyed by archaeologists, those individuals who thrive in another reification, licit/illicit, that hides the historicity of any morality. Authorizing archaeologists to dig while forbidding outsiders aims to secure professional access to heritage, yet another reified entity. A long chain of reification thus unfolds. But there is more about naturalization. The archaeological pretension that research procedures, including digging, have become autonomous by technical means helps to hide the fact that they are linked to pervasive and powerful cosmologies; it portrays them merely as technical operations in a cultural vacuum. But why this modern obsession with digging? If archaeology is premised upon the idea that the past is buried, the understanding it offers is thus necessarily linked to excavating the past by uncovering layers. Going deep in order to discover is a trademark of the Enlightenment; only by exposing, by bringing to the surface, can light reach down to where dark reigns, where things, desires and meanings are buried. Archaeological truth-making devices are tantamount to stripping off layers of meaning. Only by revealing, by finding what is hidden, can archaeology perform its trade; its modernity is thus an art of uncovering. Any predicate about the modernity of archaeology (or its negation) has to wrestle with the very fact that digging is the master trope of disciplinary operations. Digging uncovers truths objectified on things that elude time – even formation theory aims to isolate *true* marks from added ones (e.g. Sullivan 1978) – and are thus non-contingent; the truths/things revealed by archaeology belong to an essentialist ontology. Curiously enough, however, post-modern accounts of archaeology that postulate that historical meaning is contextual and contingent build upon such ontology: things archaeological are still the way to archaeological truths (no matter how feeble, provisional, strategic and even political) by way of their uncovering through digging. Alternative archaeologies (that is, disciplinary practices purportedly unlinked from Western interests and control) also fall prey to such an ontology, as I will show later.

As with ideologies, which we cannot escape but talk *through* (Hall 2010: 299), we may also talk *through* digging. Neither catharsis nor hygiene, talking *through* digging is a viewing strategy: it enables us to see how it has been central in building the metaphysical and ontological fabric of archaeology; it allows us to see with new eyes, to see anew. Myths are good places to gauge how this new seeing may unfold. Those underlying modernity are all-encompassing and time-

resilient: dark reigns in the deep, light on the surface. The myth of Orpheus and that of the cavern laid out by Plato in *The Republic* are good examples. Orpheus loses Eurydice, who is following him out of the underworld, because he betrays the attraction of light and looks back to the dark, where she lingers. The dark underworld is shown as the sad, tragic opposite of light, where happiness and fulfilment are possible. In the same vein, in the myth of the cavern Socrates states that

> in the region of the knowable the last thing to be seen, and that with considerable effort, is the idea of good; but once seen, it must be concluded that this is indeed the cause for all things of all that is right and beautiful – in the visible realm it gives birth to light and its sovereign; in the intelligible realm, itself sovereign, it provided truth and intelligence – and that the man who is going to act prudently in private or in public must see it.
>
> *(Plato 1993: 327)*

Myths build ontologies. The myth of modernity (modernity as a myth) is powerful and durable and has naturalized the historical character of its concepts. It centrally posits light as the provider of knowledge, freedom and truth. As an extension of this sturdy meaning, digging is the ultimate means through which the past as matter comes to light to be decoded as true. Not surprisingly, an African archaeologist wrote that:

> *Only by digging* into the conceptualizations of rural and urban African societies, especially as expressed in ethnographic and oral historical sources, can we gain entry into the fabric of African knowledge systems. ... Understanding those knowledge systems is a firm basis for learning the social and environmental plans and designs of past populations and for formulating actions for social and environmental planning today.
>
> *(Andah 1995: 173; emphasis added)*

Shall we understand this 'only by digging' metaphorically since it alludes to 'ethnographic and oral historical sources'? Even if we accept its metaphorical use, what is the meaning of 'digging' if not the finding of what is buried?

In the mythology of many Andean Amerindian societies the cosmos is organized in three levels. A division of a world above, this world and the world below is quite frequent. Although it may be fully syncretic with the Christian dogma, it also departs from it: the world below (where spirits and ancestors reside, among other beings) is always in contact with *this world*, mostly through water bodies (lakes, rivers, cascades). It doesn't have to be uncovered in order *to be*. The beings from the underworld are alive; their below-this-world character is not tantamount to being dead. This extends to other symbolic realms as well. In the ethnic struggles of the last three decades, the recovery of culture has been paramount. The beings dwelling in the world below, through the mediation of shamans, become cultural providers. The meaning of *recovering* is central to ethnic agendas for it implies regaining that which has been taken away – mostly by colonialism. There is quite a difference between *recovering* and *digging*: the former implies getting back what is already alive; the latter deals with dead matter, which is revived only by hermeneutical procedures (but see Olsen 2003). Thus, in many non-modern cosmologies a relationship with the past, the ancestors, is not mediated by stripping/uncovering/digging. Consequently, there are powerful cosmological reasons to reject digging. In some research I participated in with a Nasa community from south-west Colombia which was related to *the archaeological* but approached from a different cosmology, digging was not contemplated as a way of encountering the ancestors. When the territory was walked, the shamans had the ancestors talking through their all-visible traces – which, by modern accounts, have always been

in full light. This mythology allows seeing and sensing differently. Instead of the modern obsession with light and undressing, there was delight in encountering that which has never been in the dark. These can legitimately be called alternative ways of seeing because by their distance from modern mythology they position themselves quite elsewhere in the horizon of gazing.

Can I say the same about the alternative archaeologies that have emerged in the last decades?

Alternative archaeologies?

Alternative archaeologies could be described as departing from mainstream disciplinary tenets. They could even be seen as challenging the hegemony enjoyed by archaeology for so long a time, a domination built by a consent nowadays shattered. Feminist and indigenous perspectives have been singled out as the most salient dissenting proposals within the discipline, labelled as alternative archaeologies when fully developed into programmes on their own. Do they really depart from mainstream archaeology, challenging its domination? Are they really alternative? One way to sketch an answer is to assess their metaphysical and ontological outlook. In doing so, it is possible to see that more often than not alternative archaeologies retain the modern tenets of disciplinary practice; they retain digging, for instance.

Consider the case of so-called indigenous archaeologies (Watkins 2000; Smith and Wobst 2005), which take digging/uncovering a buried material past for granted. A pressing question thus arises: those alternative archaeologies retaining central tenets of modern archaeology are alternatives to what? They may depart from certain archaeological practices, especially if colonial, and they may even position their own agendas, but they accept the foundational principles of the discipline. Indigenous archaeologies are the best thing that has happened to archaeology since the scientific consensus broke off: the ethnic other is no longer a nemesis but an ally.[2] Indigenous peoples even willingly offer to dissolve radical dichotomies: 'Indigenous Archaeology is perhaps uniquely positioned to creatively challenge hegemonic categories and dismantle binary frameworks such as "Indian" and "archaeologist"' (Colwell-Chanthaphonh et al. 2010: 231). Good intentions notwithstanding, banishing a perhaps important confrontational dichotomy mostly serves to unify and solidify archaeology by making it more democratic. If the dichotomy of indigenes/archaeologists was heated and strenuous some while ago, exclusive and irreconcilable, indigenous archaeologies purport now to dissolve it. Recognizing this possibility the ethical principles of the Canadian Archaeological Association, the Australian Archaeological Association, and the World Archaeological Congress define as a priority the training of native archaeologists and the recruitment of natives as professional archaeologists.

According to Nicholas (2008: 1660), indigenous archaeology is characterized by any one or more of the following:

> (1) The proactive participation or consultation of Indigenous peoples in archaeology; (2) A political statement concerned with issues of Aboriginal self-government, sovereignty, land rights, identity, and heritage; (3) A postcolonial enterprise designed to decolonize the discipline; (4) A manifestation of Indigenous epistemologies; (5) The basis for alternative models of cultural heritage management or stewardship; (6) The product of choices and actions made by individual archaeologists; (7) A means of empowerment and cultural revitalization or political resistance; (8) An extension, evaluation, critique, or application of current archaeological theory.

How can points 3, 4 and 5 be reconciled with point 8, which besides positing a critique of current archaeological theory also engulfs its extension? Theoretical work following Joe Watkins'

(2000) book, which 'has begun to explicitly frame Indigenous Archaeology as an effort to challenge the discipline's colonialist underpinnings' (Colwell-Chanthaphonh et al. 2010: 228; see Atalay 2006; Smith and Wobst 2005), is based on the implicit assumption that a 'decolonized' archaeology can (and should) retain the modern core of the discipline. How can alternative archaeologies be defined 'as multiple discourses and practices on things from another time' (Hamilakis 2011: 408) if they retain the ontological core of the modern conception of time pasts? Can 'another time' be effectively enacted through/from modern ontology? Alternative archaeologies have even explored other research methodologies (attuned to non-Western cosmologies?), such as the round excavation units proposed by Million (2005). Yet innovative methodologies accept digging as a legitimate way of reaching into the past; as such, they leave untouched the very ontology that subdued non-Western cosmologies in the first place. This is surprising, however, because one of the main tenets of indigenous archaeologies, as put forward by one of its better know proponents, states that 'While focus and specifics may vary, one common thread among Indigenous archaeologies that I have observed is an incorporation of, and respect for, the experiences and epistemologies of Indigenous groups globally' (Atalay 2008: 29). How can those experiences and epistemologies be respected by retaining hard modern tropes? Atalay herself (2008: 30) seems to advance an answer:

> Archaeology on Indigenous land, conducted by Native people without a critical gaze that includes collaboration; that does not incorporate Indigenous epistemologies and Native conceptions of the past, history, and time; or that neglect to question the role of research in the community would be a replication of the dominant positivist archaeological paradigm.

Indigenous archaeologies are at odds to secure being an alternative to something. If *indigenous* is to retain an anti-modern stance (or, at least, a will to be alternative to modernity), where most of its political power and utopian promises lie, it cannot be an adjective to archaeology (a modern discipline practised by indigenes) but a substantive implying alternative cosmologies in their own. Alternative archaeologies that retain the basic tenets of archaeology reassure Western cosmology.

Alternative archaeologies can be profitably compared with ethno-development in order to see how the establishment rearticulates potential dissonances. In a seminal paper on the topic Mexican anthropologist Guillermo Bonfil (1982: 131) stated that ethnodevelopment is 'the exercise of the social capacity of a people to construct its future, benefitting from the teachings of its historical experience and the real and potential resources of its culture, following a project defined according to its own values and expectations'. Yet, a working paper of the World Bank (Partridge and Uquillas 1996: 7) unveils what multilateral agencies think about it: 'In the language of the World Bank, we would say that for economic development to be sustainable it must provide new opportunities for people to achieve their potential and realize their goals as defined in their own cultural context.' In broad light the 'project defined according to its own values and expectations' defended by Bonfil becomes 'new opportunities for people to achieve their potential and realize their goals' according to global capitalism. Thus, alternative archaeologies are to archaeology what ethnodevelopment is to development: an adjective that does not alter the noun but makes it more legitimate.

If alternative archaeologies are considered from the standpoint of the *field*, as defined by Pierre Bourdieu (2002), some very interesting things arise. The archaeological field would be constituted by (1) the existence of a common capital, *the archaeological*, defined by a temporality (progressive, teleological), a reified target (the past), a materiality (the past in things), and a localization (the past in things buried); and (2) the struggle to appropriate it (in terms of train-

ing, participation, even a style). First, a common capital is defined through hegemony, that is, by consent: everyone participating in the field accepts that *the archaeological* is their common capital. Second, the very fact of participating in the struggle reproduces the field by accepting its rules (how to define and reproduce its capital) and also reproduces established positions within the field: who dominates it, who is subservient to its domination, who strives to be dominant.

But other alternatives are possible.

Other worlds

If digging is the master trope of modern archaeological operations, what would no digging entail? More precisely, can archaeology without digging be an alternative archaeology? If so, is it archaeology anyway? These questions can be answered by reflecting about *archaeological* experiences that do away with digging – sensing and talking about them, while their archaeological nature is only used as a floating referent, not as a yardstick against which they can be measured. In any case, these alternative archaeologies, even if not archaeological altogether, erase digging instead of attempting to eliminate it; by doing so, digging is read within a different field of signification in all its historical concreteness. Not digging, then, but ~~digging~~. The reification of digging is thus contested by erasure. By erasing it we can arrive at a new field of knowing in which it is all but taken for granted. Archaeology – but also modernity – is then talked about, rendered not as a self-evident entity that 'goes without saying because it comes without saying' (Bourdieu 1977: 167) but as a historical creation that is fully expressible and thinkable.

Erased digging becomes historical. The reification of digging as the producer of truth (on which apparently disparate operations, such as psychoanalysis and the legal system, are premised) is contested by erasure. Alternative archaeologies can thus become not archaeologies at all; they can become alternatives to archaeology. Indeed, the past itself is also erased because it embodies a temporality which is fully modern (that of bourgeois evolutionism) and alternatives to archaeology are against modernity – aligned, as they are, with different social horizons, away from Western mandates. All in all, this paper *digs* down the reified trope of digging. Yet, it only does so metaphorically because it does not aim to discover but to weaken archaeology and its modernity; by doing so, it strives to help building *another* house for historical life.

Doing away with digging is doing away with the material conditions of the past. The past liberated from digging appears elsewhere: in memories, in landscapes, in teachings, alas, in the future. We can excavate upwards, as it were. An archaeology that retains digging and materiality, no matter how radical and alternative, is modern, in spite of itself. On the contrary, archaeology without digging destabilizes modernity, the very ontology that feeds archaeology. The sense of place is transformed: it is no longer the location of archaeological fieldwork – the iconic locus where digging occurs, established and determined by disciplinary preoccupations – but the location of history as lived experience. Thinking of history as event (relation, becoming, power) cannot but destabilize that which has been stabilized by hard hegemonic and ideological work. Destabilize the archaeological canon: such could be the minimum aim of erasing digging. Destabilize the canon but only to open other doors; as Arturo Escobar (1998: 39) stated about his critique of development, 'The purpose of the analysis is to contribute to liberate the discursive field so the task of imagining alternatives can begin.' The liberation of the archaeological discursive field begins by thinking historically, that is, by historicizing the master concepts of the discipline, its more stable metaphysical and ontological core. It implies historicizing the past (and the means to reach into it), that immanent and timeless modern entity in search of which the archaeologists go with the same zeal and urgency as medieval knights after the grail. The strategy is simple:

to de-autonomize the past from its Western matrix, taking it out of there, accompanying it to live somewhere else.

Tim Ingold (2010: 160) has ventured into the shifting grounds of prediction to imagine what archaeology and anthropology are going to look like four decades from now. In that time, archaeology:

> has become an anachronism for the subject that still goes by that name has long since lost its association with antiquity. It is not that archaeologists have ceased to dig down for evidence of past lives, any more than ethnographers have ceased to participate in the lives that are going on around them, in what we call the present. But they have dropped the pretense that what is past is any older, or more ancient, than the present, recognising that the occurrences of the past are not deposited at successive moments while time moves on, but are themselves constitutive of that very moment.

Even a heterodox thinker such as this, whose work is a powerful call to take seriously non-Western, relational ontologies, takes for granted that archaeologists excavate and that the past is buried ('It is not that archaeologists have ceased to dig down for evidence of past lives'). Even those archaeologists who accept the philosophical limits of their trade and their political entanglements still save a field of operation where the discipline reigns: the past as matter, only accessible by digging. Any 'archaeological' approach based on digging is trapped on the very modern premises that built the discipline. Hence the announcement can be made that modernity is safe because its more fundamental tenets remain unchallenged. Alternative archaeologies that posit:

> collaboration with local communities; development of research questions and agendas that benefit local groups that are developed and approved by them; respect for and adherence to local traditions when carrying out field and lab work; utilization of traditional practices of cultural resource management; combining indigenous methods with western scientific approaches; and a recognition and respect for the unbroken connection of the past with the present and future
>
> *(Atalay 2008: 30)*

also accept that the traces of the past are codified in buried things. Purportedly, they adopt archaeology in order to engage it 'differently':

> I argue that the goal of researching and developing Indigenous archaeology approaches is not to dismantle Western archaeological practice.[3]... The discipline of archaeology is not inherently good or bad; it is the application and practice of the discipline that has the potential to disenfranchise and be used as a colonizing force.
>
> *(Atalay 2008: 33)*

Thus the colonial evilness of archaeology does not rest in itself ('archaeology is not inherently good or bad') but in the way it has been used. This statement exonerates modern ontology of any guilt in the composition and structuring of the world in the last five or six centuries and leaves the guilt to its practitioners. It is precisely on this kind of reasoning that the trumpeted triumph of modernity more comfortably rests: modernity produces no consequences because it is neutral; the wrongdoings, if any, are to be only attributed to unchecked modernizers.[4] In the process of adoption, critical as it may be, a remodelled archaeology is said to arise:

> Rather than dismantling, archaeology requires critical reflection and positive change if it is to remain relevant and effective. Indigenous archaeology approaches offer a set of tools to use in building positive change from within the discipline; but these are tools, concepts, epistemologies, and experiences for remodeling, not dismantling.
>
> *(Atalay 2008: 33)*

Is the 'added' knowledge provided by a remodelled archaeology really needed other than as a force to 'speak back to the power of nationalist, colonialist, and imperialist interpretations of the past' (Atalay 2008: 31)? Is modern ontology truly necessary to strengthen, deepen and widen local, indigenous conceptions of history? Affirmative answers to these questions are inherently tautological: any archaeological information aimed to serve alternative needs (indigenous and otherwise) can only fulfil its role if produced by alternative interpretations.

But it may well be the case that other worlds do not need archaeology. Peter Schmidt (1995: 119) wrote that 'most of ancient African history is accessible only through archaeological approaches' and therefore that 'there is compelling reason to refocus attention on archaeological constructions of the past as a means to build an independent, authentic and distinctly African history'; yet his positivist certainty was soon countered by his recognition of a paradox:

> At the same time archaeology is a distinctly Western activity. Its governing paradigms and epistemologies often conflict with African historical needs, views of the past, and ways of structuring time and space. Thus the paradox unfolds: a repertoire of techniques and approaches that promise significant ways of recuperating African pasts heretofore obscured is accompanied by theoretical assumptions that are often out of tune with African sensibilities, needs, and structures.
>
> *(Schmidt 1995: 119)*

How can this paradox be resolved? Turning local what modernity wants to be universal? Isn't that a quick way to reinforce modernity? This is no minor matter. Those of us who are interested in a different archaeology see with concern how the subalterns strengthen the discipline in the process of making it theirs. Perhaps it is about time to move forward, not by proposing alternative archaeologies (and in the process pleasing modernity very much) but by seeking to build alternatives to archaeology which truly are alternatives to Western cosmology.

The manifesto on indigenous archaeology recently subscribed by some of its most articulate and eloquent proponents (Colwell-Chanthaphonh et al. 2010: 233) forcefully states:

> For more than a century, the political majority, a select group of self-appointed stewards empowered by affluence and endorsed by laws, have dominated archaeological inquiry. Indigenous Archaeology is the attempt to introduce and incorporate different perspectives of the past into the study and management of heritage – to accommodate the diverse values for archaeology that exist in our pluralist democracy.

Are 'the diverse values for archaeology' what a pluralist democracy is after in 'the study and management of heritage'? If contemporary democracy seeks to protect the rights of the minorities lest they are devoured by those of the majorities, shall that protection be consecrated by granting the disenfranchised access to dominant worldviews? Such is a widely held conception of democracy – indeed, it is the way favoured by multicultural societies. Although the writers of the manifesto on indigenous archaeology make it clear that the democracy they have in mind does 'not mean the simple opening up of the field to all, but rather should encourage us

to pursue common ground by investigating how diverse standpoints work to enlarge the discipline's philosophical commitments and methodological practices' (Colwell-Chanthaphonh et al. 2010: 233), time has proven (and it will do more firmly in the years to come) that disciplinary commitments and methodological practices have not been enlarged but deepened – that is, an unwavering commitment to the cosmology of the West and a blind faith in the existence of a buried and encrypted past.[5] At any rate, why should they be enlarged if even declared opponents to modernity, such as indigenous peoples, come to encounter archaeology?

Consenting to the modern conception of the past (buried and material) can be both a strategic move on the part of those opposing modernity in other respects as well as a legitimate means of building history, as many advocates of indigenous archaeology have forcefully stated. But if accepting archaeology's hard ontological and metaphysical core occurs at the expense of other cosmologies, and contributes to dull radical oppositions, the price is way too high. Nevertheless, Joe Watkins (2000: 178) is optimistic about the future of archaeology as seen from an indigenous perspective: 'Archaeologists are slow to change, but they are changing.' The same optimism is reflected regarding the discipline at large in those who foster an ethnographic approach in archaeology (Hollowell and Mortensen 2009; Hamilakis 2011). I am not among those optimists. Two contemporary conditions solidify the self-isolation of archaeology, deepen its modern origins, and hamper its political edge: (1) its accommodated relationship with multicultural policies, especially those dictating political correctness and the commodification of otherness; and (2) its articulation to CRM/CHM projects, whereby disciplinary practice is geared to the needs of development. I am afraid subaltern consent to archaeology, however reformed, can soon be added to the list. Indeed, a 'reformed' establishment is happy to share what it cherishes most with previously marginalized parties: disciplinary epistemic coherence. The gains are numerous: it keeps practising archaeology as it was laid out by modern standards (it changes nothing in its metaphysical and ontological fabric); it does so in public (generously); it feels more democratic (by sharing); it gets closer to what it used to call the 'savage', appeasing her/his demands while convincing itself that disciplinary nearness is tantamount to spatial, temporal and cultural coalescence. In the meantime archaeology keeps spreading the fruits of Enlightenment and gets other (local) actors to participate in institutional spaces created to control the definition and management of disciplinary principles.

Notes

1 The condition of surface items is very particular in this regard. They truly are on a metaphysical threshold: they technically belong to the systemic context yet they inform about the archaeological context. The relevant point for my argument, however, is that although their peculiar condition would appear to subtract them from digging operations, it does not. Archaeologists have come to treat surface items in the same way as they treat buried elements: they treat them as if they were buried, imagining how they were and placed before the displacement from their archaeological location. Surface items are thus also excavated – current techniques for properly recovering surface items equal those of any excavation.

2 The masterstroke of archaeology in multicultural times – change to keep doing the same – mimics what textualist anthropologists of the 1980s did, and about whom Johannes Fabian (1990: 761) wrote: 'Should we therefore fear that what looks like a crisis is just a lot of noise made by anthropologists regrouping in their attempts to save their representer's privileges?' Saving privileges: that is all it is about. The archaeologists, members of a privileged cognitive minority, do not want to lose the privileges granted to them by being the owners of a way of representation that, at most, they are willing to share but doubtful about changing.

3 In the same vein, talking about how 'multivocality' in archaeology must imply sharing authority over things archaeological and discourses, Colwell-Chanthaphonh et al. (2010: 233) state that 'Sharing authority *does not call for any changes to "scientific attributes"* but merely to the underlying assumptions

of scientific ownership of the past free and clear of the social and political contexts that surround archaeology' (emphasis added).

4 Needless to say, this is the same general argument used to justify capitalism.

5 That is exactly what philosopher of archaeology Alison Wylie (2005) has been arguing for: the commitment to the principles of archaeology *qua* (scientific) realism. Why not state, then, that 'incorporating Indigenous perspectives into our work provides broad intellectual benefits for the discipline' (Colwell-Chanthaphonh et al. 2010: 233)?

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