

DIGGING DEEPER IN THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL PSYCHE

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Abstract: This paper looks at the role of the archaeologist from a psychoanalytical perspective. It is an attempt to understand the attractions of archaeology and the archaeological process for individual archaeologists, and how the subject differs from other disciplines involved in studying the human past. Topics such as the physicality of archaeology, the meaning of dirt and the excavation process, the archaeologist's relationship with mute objects, and the search for origins, are discussed in a collaboration between an archaeologist and a psychoanalyst. It is suggested that an understanding of the unconscious in archaeology could be fruitful both for individual archaeologists in their research, and in understanding the search for identity in the archaeological past.

Keywords: psychology, archaeologists' motivations, dirt, eroticism, origins

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Introduction

In the last 25 years the individual has increasingly come to the fore in archaeology, for example in phenomenology, agency and somatic archaeology, and more recently we have been encouraged to be reflexive in our methodology, and to hear multiple accounts of the past by other ‘stakeholders’ such as local communities. Out of these theoretical perspectives the modern version of the site diary, the excavation blog and site wiki, have come to prominence, again stressing the personal voice. Alongside this focus on the individual in the past, there has been a concomitant growth of interest in the history of archaeologists themselves (Murray 1999b, 871), most recently, for example, in the work of the Archives of European Archaeology Project (AREA n.d.), or the oral history of archaeology (Smith 2010). In the non-academic world, the search by individuals and communities for a sense of identity in the remnants of the past has become a major issue in the fields of heritage, nationalism and identity studies (e.g. the papers in the recent ‘Archaeological Ethnographies’ issue of *Public archaeology* (Hamilakis and Anagnostopoulous 2008)). Despite this focus on the individual, there has been relatively little discussion of archaeologists’ own motivations about their subject - what is the attraction of archaeology for us? - why do we want to do what we do? and why do we choose our particular fields of research? Somehow this is taken for granted, or subsumed (sublimated?) in an intellectual discussion of ‘the importance of the past’. We have been keen to critique other archaeologists’ past interpretations, and to contextualise their biases (historical, social, sexual etc), but there seems to be little *self*-reflection. If we are to understand where our biases come from, then it is important that we understand why we are undertaking our research, not just in intellectual terms, but at a more visceral and unconscious level, as this is bound to affect our directions and styles of research as well as our interpretations. Of the various disciplines that have confronted this issue of reflexivity, psychotherapeutic psychology has been amongst the leaders for obvious reasons concerning its direct personal engagement with the ‘objects’ of its study (Guy 1987; Leiper 2001). If we cannot begin to understand ourselves, there is little hope of understanding others. These issues might not seem to be pressing for the professional archaeologist - does it really matter why we do archaeology? - but recent work in ethnography has shown the value of looking at what has been described as ‘*The Shadow Side Of Fieldwork*’ (McLean & Leibling 2007). Corin’s (2007) account of her

delayed realisation of the parallels between her personal life and her research directions, and her subsequent ability to see her previous fieldwork data in a different light, show the benefits of this approach.

This paper, then, is an attempt to look at these deeper aspects of archaeology, and at how archaeological practice differs from cognate subjects such as history. We do this through the medium of psychology, as an inter-disciplinary study between an archaeologist with an interest in psychotherapy (EC) and a clinical psychologist and psychoanalyst with an interest in archaeology (RL). This work follows on from our collaboration at a Theoretical Archaeology Group session in Glasgow in 2004 entitled *Archaeology on the couch: psycho-analysis, archaeology and archaeologists*. The influence of archaeology on Freud's thought is well known (Bowdler 1996; Richards 2004, 161-170), even if the 'archaeological metaphor' which Freud developed for the unconscious has been superseded in modern psychology, but there has been little written on the psychology of archaeology. Although archaeology is by its nature interdisciplinary, cross-disciplinary dialogue is rare (see Garrow and Shove 2007 for an interesting recent example). The paper is presented as a discussion between the two authors, under a number of sub-headings dealing with different aspects of archaeology. This is a personal exploration of one archaeologist's engagement with the subject from a psychological viewpoint and is presented in the hope it will stimulate debate. It does not try to be a definitive account of why archaeologists study archaeology.

The physicality of archaeology

Archaeologists engage directly with the physical world, whether through digging in the soil itself, working in the landscape or handling things. This physical experience has been acknowledged in, for example, phenomenological approaches to landscape, or work on auditory and haptic archaeology. The interaction of the material world and the archaeologist is acknowledged in these studies, but there seem to be scope to examine why this type of study has developed.

EC: For myself, the immediate thing which distinguishes archaeology from other areas of the human past project (and from many other professions) is its physicality. Put at its most basic, archaeologists dig. Talking to archaeologists, field archaeology is often their most enduring experience of what it means to be an archaeologist, whether or not their present work involves excavation. On excavations, I find that the hard physical labour of picking, shovelling, and barrowing is extremely satisfying, perhaps because of the contrast with my normal, office-based, mind work and because it is *uncomplicated*.

RL: Well, I'd better stick up for a psychodynamic point of view right at the start: I'm inclined to believe that nothing about ourselves or our motivations is uncomplicated – least of all our wish for things to be so! Probably most of the personal meaning of what is important to us is 'overdetermined' ie it has multiple layers of overlapping significance, sometimes contradictory (Laplanche & Pontallis, 1973). Another prefatory remark might be that since our investigation here is not empirical and is based on what occurs to the two of us (rather than some notional sample of people in your profession) it is important to leave open the diversity of individual motives and dynamics that might be around. For example, it occurs to me that you 'started out' as a geologist – digging the dirt clearly had its particular attractions for you, the ground on which you stand as it were. Others may come at this engagement with 'the earth' from different directions with their own personal resonances.

But it clearly is a major contrast to historiography as you say and oddly, as an outsider, I easily overlook that and focus on the 'object' of your quest rather than the means. Still I wonder about the aim of looking into the past generally as sometimes itself embodying a wish to find something uncomplicated (doubtless disappointed!) – the myth of a lost harmony in a previous golden age in a sense, but more specifically a longing to be relieved of the conflicts and responsibilities that adult life lays on us. This, however, is something that many academic disciplines may seem to offer, some precisely by their very complexity – they create a world of their own. The physicality that you point out distinguishes archaeology is often an attribute seen as 'real' in a way that intellectual work is not. If we have reason to doubt our own reality in some existential sense then physical labour could attract us as a means of self-validation, of relief from a sense of disconnection from others and ourselves.

Playing in the mud

As archaeologists, we are deeply concerned with dirt, so it seems appropriate to look closely at our relationship to it. A classic psychoanalytic position on dirt was laid out long ago by Kubie (1937), who emphasised the ambivalent relationship we have to our bodies which produce 'dirt', and the apertures it comes from. Mary Douglas has a famous discussion of the concept of pollution in a social context, recasting the old aphorism of 'dirt is matter out of place' by defining dirt as 'offending against order' (Douglas 1966, 2), but she says little about the meaning of dirt to the individual.

EC: It is difficult not to get dirty on an excavation, indeed fieldwork is often referred to as 'dirt archaeology'. Excavation calls to mind images of my own childhood (in the days when children were allowed outside!), playing in the garden, 'discovering' things, building dens in the woods, playing make-believe games, getting messy. Dirt, or soil, is an integral part of these activities. Dirt and soil are of course used as euphemisms for faeces, as in dirty or soiled nappies. The Indo-European root word *kakka* (Pokorny 1999, 521), becomes Hindi-Urdu *kahki*, dust, and many childish words for faeces are derived from this root, from French *caca*, English *cack*, to Welsh *cagl*. Dirt (from Old Norse *driten*, shit) has similar ambiguous meanings and origins. In classic psycho-analytic terms this would be interpreted as the well-known fascination of toddlers with their faeces, a desire to find good in the only thing very young children can create, their own bodily products. Of course, as archaeologists actually find things of value (real or imagined) in their diggings, the pleasure is re-enforced.

Other activities of archaeologists would be considered dirty to the outsider: some archaeologists study fossil coprolites; others study the insects which live on decaying flesh; others study human skeletal remains from war graves or recent homicides; most of us would see finding a site's midden as hitting 'paydirt' (that word again) - we delight in rummaging through other people's rubbish (e.g. Evans 2010). Both rubbish, and the dead, in a western context, are socially dangerous, and those who surround themselves with rubbish or are fascinated with dead bodies are seen as abnormal or deviant. By arguing that we are 'discovering how our ancestors lived' we cut

ourselves off from normal conventions, and only recently have some of these activities been challenged, for example by native peoples who see museums' justifications of collections of human remains as deeply suspect. All this does not mean that archaeologists are trapped in an anal stage of emotional development (though some may be!), but it should reveal that the urge to dig is deep-seated and therefore deeply satisfying in a way that non-archaeologists might find difficult to understand. That archaeologists do not like to admit to this is apparent from the sanitisation of archaeological photographs - for lectures on this subject it proved difficult for me to find images of the mud-covered archaeologists which we are all familiar with from our own experience (at least in northern Europe!). Perhaps subconsciously we avoid recording this aspect of our work, just as psychologists may have avoided research on excreta (Ross *et al* 1968, 303).

RL: I'm inclined to say that we're all in some degree 'fixated' at the anal stage in that we only ever partially resolve the fundamental issues that are addressed in the trope of evacuation: control over ourselves and over the world outside – otherness; and feeling valued for ourselves versus for what we 'produce'; and so what we identify with or dis-identify from, the good and the bad. These give rise to anxieties about losing control or losing ourselves, being overwhelmed, being discarded – while there is also the desire for these things, to let go and just 'be (or make) a mess'. Your observations suggest to me that archaeologists are inclined – perhaps driven? – to engage with such issues. This enthusiasm for the normally feared, for breaking taboos, might make us think that there is something 'counter-phobic' about such activity – that is dealing with potentially overwhelming anxiety by 'facing it down', defiance, going to the other extreme of seeking out what embodies our fears, getting a thrill from contact, even immersion, in the forbidden realm. This would be to suggest the activity is compulsive and exaggerated – and consequently rather distorting of our sense of reality and so perhaps excessively risky.

However, I like your suggestion that archaeologists have found a way to make engagement with the taboos around filth their play, a form of creativity, to transform the overlooked and the discarded into the precious. This brings to mind Jung's notions of making alchemical gold from base materials as a metaphor for the inner journey of self-transformation. One can detect in what you say also a hint of the

shaman in this archaeological activity: the voyage into a feared realm that is profoundly other (often of course figured as ancestral) to retrieve and re-integrate or re-instate something vital for the self and the wider community (like psychotherapists of course!). And like shamans (and therapists), we might expect archaeologists wishing to engage with such matters to be regarded as (and to aspire to be?) weird, damaged, wounded - to be outsiders, even pariahs. No wonder you keep it quiet!

Digging up or digging down?

It is a commonplace that archaeological excavation is a process of destruction, and anyone who has directed an excavation will have had to deal with the anxieties this causes in a professional sense: am I getting the balance right between the retrieval and destruction of information? But the actual process of digging may also have deeper significance, and this is explored by looking at two specialised areas of archaeology.

EC: It strikes me that a further two sub-groups of field archaeologists can be identified: those who work in the specialised fields of underwater and underground (cave) archaeology. These seem related because they both take place in very different physical environments from other archaeological fieldwork, and archaeologists must have some reason for choosing these. Underwater archaeology takes place in a sealed, watery, quiet environment where the practitioner floats weightless cut off from other human contact. The image which immediately springs to mind is of the womb, with the baby floating in the amniotic fluid, protected from the external world. The cave environment shares some similarities, with a constant damp climate, darkness and separation from the outside world. Caves are also transitional places, entrances to the underworld, and can be interpreted as uterine metaphors. Again there are links with shamanic practices and other worlds. In this case the symbology may be more related to the process of actually penetrating the earth, something which all excavators participate in. The act of digging involves violating the surface of the earth, and it is not difficult to see 'Mother Earth' here as a general symbol for mothers. Indeed, given the discussion of dirt above, it is interesting that the words 'mud' and 'muddy' may be derived from the Old German *mudde*, mother (Oxford English Dictionary).

RL: My remarks about counter-phobic risk-taking seem to apply in spades to these activities! But your suggestion is more interesting because it engages with what is desired behind any fears. Usually we think of a wish to be in the womb as a regressive urge towards merger, a loss of separateness, a loss of self. Perhaps this may be a factor for some people, but digging and the fantasy of the penetration of the mother's body strikes me as more central. This 'violation' of course might seem to have a markedly sexual as well as hostile connotation but I think it is more productive to think in terms of our curiosity, our need to know what is hidden, secret. The 'primal scene' (the parents' intercourse) is the familiar Freudian version of this secret. But in the unconscious – and putatively for the infant – what is hidden may be symbolised as the interior of the mother's body and this suggests the aggression inherent in the experience of the act of knowing, a refusal to abide in the unknowability of what is truly other and an attack on that separateness. The concretisation of this in the practice of archaeology may have personal resonance for many practitioners and connect with some sense of being shut out, or of something withheld in their relationships to significant figures.

EC: There are interesting parallels here to the pagan Celtic concept of the marriage of the king to the land (Byrne 1973, 16-17), exemplified by the inauguration ceremonies where the new king inserts his foot into a footprint carved from the living rock, a literal penetration based on the well-understood sexual symbolism of the shoe (Campbell 2003, 55).

RL: Yes, although marriage strikes me as rather different - clearly less 'primitive' (regressive, developmentally early) in psychological terms because the 'one flesh' that is created remains two. Differentiation is maintained and hostility is managed and transformed. It is unclear who is in possession of whom – a dialogue is joined rather than a rape enacted. Yet of course archaeologists must lovingly tend, one might say caress, and 'husband' their site during an excavation. This involves more than professional discipline but also care. An aggressive desire to rip out the secrets of the land must be transformed into a patient and careful responsiveness to it.

EC: That is very interesting, and may explain why archaeologists get so upset by treasure-hunters, metal-detectorists and looters, who do not have the same values of care for sites.

RL: Though I suggest these people could also function as objects for projections of an earlier hostile and greedy impulse that remains alive but unacknowledged in the professional archaeologist.

Humps and bumps

Of course, not all archaeologists dig to recover data. Landscape survey, of various kinds, is a vital part of most archaeological projects, and raises quite different issues which relate to visual engagement with the external world.

EC: Landscape and survey archaeologists walk over the surface of the land, looking for ‘humps and bumps’, minor differences in the topography, or vegetation, that reveal traces of past human activities. Aerial and remote sensing archaeologists do the same, but physically removed from the landscape itself. Walking in open country is in itself a pleasurable physical activity, but I wonder if there is a deeper pleasure being enacted here, connected with the visual aspect of survey work. The first visual activity that a baby engages in is to learn to distinguish the site of the nipple from the rest of mother’s body. The protrusion, colour difference, and rough texture of the nipple differentiate it from the smooth contours of the rest of the mother’s body, and many infants retain a fascination with things that ‘stick out’ as their visual system learns to make sense of a complex world. Is it possible that the intellectual pleasure of differentiating the rough-textured archaeology from the broader rolling natural landforms can be equated to this early skill of the infant in finding the nipple, with its rewards of sustenance. The landscape in this view really is a Mother Earth to the archaeologist. If this is true, the intellectual aspect of survey is an unconscious sublimation of this infant desire for nourishment. It makes a neat counterpoint to arguments such as those of Alcock (2003, 207) that British Iron Age peoples sought out mammiform hills for their settlements for their symbolic properties as metaphors of the mother’s breast.

RL: This is a fascinating version of a 'classical' psychoanalytic view of early relationships. You're more Freudian than me as the Freudian! I agree that the pleasures of looking long and hard, looking closely, do suggest an intimate relationship with the object, a passionate gaze. But my association to this is more to the fascination with the face, which infant research makes increasingly clear has a strong valence in human development. It is an interesting question how and why this fascination is transferred to engagement with knowing the face of the land – or indeed to the objects of the close looking capabilities of other disciplines (one might think of such skills in an art-historical context for instance). Looking in this way takes on echoes of a comforting closeness to something familiar and reassuring (nourishment rather for our sense of self-continuity); but something which is also endlessly changing like a human face, and so engaging, stimulating, delighting - and perhaps also safer than other people!

A dialogue with the past?

EC: Some archaeologists have told me that they get a physical thrill from touching some ancient artefacts - a feeling of intimate connection to past people and their lives. Mary Beard has recently written that she was inspired to a distinguished career in classics by being allowed as a child to touch a piece of bread from an Egyptian tomb in the British Museum. The notion that long-gone people can talk to us through their artefacts and monuments is almost a commonplace in popular archaeology, and even in academic books with titles such as *And shall these mute stones speak?* (Thomas 1994). However, as Matthew Johnson has put it, 'I have stood in the middle of countless ruins of castles and ancient palaces and listened very carefully and not heard a single syllable' (Johnson 1999, 12). Whether or not one believes objects have agency, or can be read as a text, or have a biography, they certainly do not have a *voice*. Michael Shanks, when pressed on this point, is unconvincing in his attempt to show 'the natural world speaks' (Bazelmans et al 1994, 65-7). Clearly some archaeologists feel a need to communicate with past peoples, but what is at the root of this? and why choose inanimate, and frequently fragmentary, objects for such 'dialogues'? There are a number of strands to be drawn out here: the issue of fragmentation, the issue of the search for origins, and the issue of inarticulacy of

artefacts. Fragmentation is much-discussed at present (Chapman 2000; Jones 2008; Hughes 2007), and this is not the place to go into a major discussion, but the correlation between personal and archaeological fragmentation, and the psychological need to make both whole again has been pointed out (Ferris 2007, 116; Dubois 1998). Archaeologists' fascination with origins is discussed in detail in the next section, as it relates not just to artefacts and monuments, but more generally to human origins.

RL: There is a kind of identification both with the land as you have said above, and with an object and so its prior owners or makers, that seems to be grounded in the physical presence and contact and to depend on a bodily sense, one of inhabiting another reality. At the same time the process of projection of oneself into the physical world can be reversed and the object takes on a life of its own, seeming to be independent of the original subject. One is then 'haunted' by the sense of another consciousness that lives its own life. Freud wrote a famous article about the experience of the 'uncanny' which discusses something of this quality (Freud 1907), in which the sense that something is being repeated is crucial, typically something unconscious from an individual's past. Archaeologists may be ghost hunters in this sense: quite what it is that they are looking to (re-)discover of themselves in this quest would surely be highly individual.

EC: On the issue of a 'dialogue' between archaeologists and mute objects, I wonder if it is possible that this could be a metaphor for some archaeologists' relationship with their parents. This struck me when I considered my own relationship with my parents - my mother was physically and emotionally absent for me in childhood due to her illness, and my father was also distant. Was this why I became a specialist in artefact studies? The role of transitional objects and object relations theory in the emotional and neurological development of infants has been intensively studied since the pioneering work of Melanie Klein, but has been almost totally ignored by archaeologists despite its obvious significance to material culture studies (Russell 2004). At the toddler stage, some important objects (such as Linus' blanket in the Peanuts cartoon) help the child to engage in the process of differentiating themselves from their mother. These transitional objects become tangible and separate representations of the mother, which can then be carried away from the physical security of the mother, enabling the beginnings of independent action. Objects

therefore carry the potential to help us make sense of the world and relationships. If a parent was missing (physically or emotionally) at young age, the child may have difficulty in achieving this separation and will keep searching for meaning and security through objects. The muteness of the object then reflects the actual one-sided muteness of the dialogue with the missing parent. By making sense of these objects (by classifying them or incorporating them in narratives), the archaeologists may be trying to make sense of, or heal, a broken relationship. This is a very deep and unconscious need which can be attempted to be addressed by physical reconstruction (of pots say) or at a more abstract level by understanding a whole society or process. Freud's analysis of Jensen's novel *Gradiva* (Freud 1919), suggests a pertinent example of this process. In the book, an archaeologist becomes obsessed with a statue from Pompeii, but gradually realises it is a symbol for his childhood sweetheart, with whom he is eventually reconciled. The move from a stage of artefact obsession to one of healed relationships shows one way in which the archaeological process has the potential to be a therapeutic process.

RL: Is there evidence for this issue of loss or inaccessibility as foundational other than in your personal experience?

EC: In the volumes of potted biographies produced recently (Murray 1999a; Cohen & Joukowsky 2004; Diaz-Andreu & Sorensen 1998), most archaeologists seem to spring from their mothers' wombs as trowel-wielding adults, so little can be gathered about the influence of their childhoods. However, it is significant that where information on early life is available, a parent is often lost at an early age, or one parent is emotionally very distant. Thus, Pitt-Rivers lost his father at age five (Thomson 1977, 12); Grahame Clark lost his at seven (Fagan 2001, 2); Mortimer Wheeler was very distant from his mother (Hawkes 1982) and Gordon Childe from his father (Green 1981, 6); Charles Phillips lost both parents at five (Phillips 1980, 110); Gertrude Bell's mother died at three; Harriet Boyd Hawes' mother died when she was a baby; and Jane Dieulafoy's father died when she was a baby (Cohen & Joukowsky 2004). This helps to support the view that some archaeologists may be trying to contact their missing parent through the medium of archaeology. One participant at the Glasgow TAG conference told us that her interest in archaeology stemmed from a visit at an

early age to see the Egyptian mummies at the British Museum and her response - 'But where are all the daddies?'. Her search for the daddies led to archaeology as a career.

RL: The evidence you cite from biography does seem to underwrite the compelling nature of the archaeological quest as a route to working out a relationship with a lost or elusive human 'object'. Your implication is that the muteness of the archaeological object mimics or echoes the remoteness of an earlier attachment experience: one might hope that it would be possible to 'persuade' the object to speak, to respond and offer up its secrets while re-experiencing in a more controlled way the original trauma of its remoteness and inaccessibility.

A transitional object has the further (and rather 'uncanny') quality of being both inside and outside at once, both real and imbued with fantasy in ways that are not to be tested out or challenged - it is the beginning of realising our imaginations, of creating art in fact! Perhaps there are some features of our professional apparatus that take on and hold this quality for all of us in different fields. These become repositories of our creativity. I think of Freud's collection of archaeological artefacts (Armstrong 1999) somewhat this way - they stood there in his study to sustain an alive sense of the notion of a dynamic unconscious as he worked out what this might mean!

Your focus on the search for the lost parent does surely point up the general sense of a quest to rediscover that is present, indeed foundational, to many academic disciplines - but archaeology does seem to engage with that in ways that are particularly direct (looking to the inaccessible past) and concrete (the fascination with objects and the physical).

The social archaeologist

EC: On a more mundane level of personal connection, almost all fieldwork is a social activity, and many archaeologists particularly enjoy this aspect of the subject.

Particularly for young people, thrown together in an often challenging living environment, the social side of the excavation can be a liberating experience. The digging 'circuit', with its mixture of students, itinerant semi-professional supervisors, and a variety of unqualified but interested local people enables a variety of

relationships, often romantic, to be established. The freedom of the excavation environment was a striking feature of digging, particularly in its heyday in the 1960s and '70s. One world-famous archaeologist has told us that what attracted him to excavation was 'the girls', and Mary Beard has said that 'digging up nasty bits of pottery was the price one paid for fun in the evening' (Laity 2007). Thurston Shaw's splendidly anachronistic account of his feelings on switching from classics to archaeology in the 1930s - 'stepping out of a rudderless canoe on a sluggish stream of treacle under an overcast sky into a pulsating disco with psychedelic lights flashing and thrills every other moment' (Connah 1999, 729) - captures some of the excitement of the subject.

RL: What can I say? Get it on! But I suppose I might add that there does seem to be in the circumstances that you describe both the need to make contact, be included in a community or partnership but at the same time to be on the outside of ordinary life, to be at the margins. That ambivalent dynamic must have strong resonance for those who were drawn into 'the field' in the circumstances you are recalling.

Origins

EC: The search for origins is explicitly given as the driving force for some archaeologists - for example in his retrospective Childe (1958, 69) states 'I began the study of European archaeology in the hope of finding the cradle of the Indo-Europeans'. Pitt-Rivers' search for the Ur-weapon in his classification schemes is an example from material culture. It is certainly a major aspect of archaeology in the popular imagination, linked both to the origins of humans in general, and to particular cultures and nations. The use (or misuse) of archaeology in nationalist agendas is well documented (Diaz-Andreu 2007), but I wonder if attempts to ascribe this to purely social forces of nationalism or imperialism hide a deeper human need to understand where we personally come from? I had thought that this particular aspect of archaeology was not relevant to my own work, as it is not an issue that particularly engages me. However, writing this paper I realised that one significant part of my work has been an investigation of the origins early medieval Scotland (I am a Scot),

even though that was an iconoclastic attack on long-held assumptions (Campbell 2001).

RL: Clearly this is the most explicit kind of ‘motivation’ – it is a commonplace of looking to the past, both in terms of current culture (‘genes re-united’ and the fascination of the family tree) and historical practice (lineage as a rhetoric of legitimation). But why should this be so? What is it about the need to trace, establish and make some form of contact with origins that is so compelling? Its being commonplace obscures its being a puzzle. One form of answer may be to draw on the language of childhood development. The drive in popular archaeology is clear and perhaps underpins some of the experiences we’ve been discussing – the visceral connection to the past, the parental quest that you have identified in the experiential dimension of several specialist aspects of practice. One answer of course is simply to draw again on the parental metaphor. Taking for granted the influence of parental relations we may be helped (up to a point) to illuminate the nature of an individual’s quest and questions as expressed through their practice in life, personally and professionally. But the issue can be framed more existentially (rather than developmentally): what I mean, who I am, is predicated on where I’m from. The anxiety underlying this is ‘ontological’ – to do with the security of the sense of self - but also inevitably sociological, potentiated by the flux and loss of taken for granted self-definitions and supports for identity. I would find it surprising if archaeologists themselves, as well as their supporters in the wider culture, were not deeply moved in their personal histories by such doubting and seeking - even if that manifests itself in the contrarian, perhaps counter-dependent, impulse to challenge what would otherwise appear to be a source of security!

Conclusions

Two themes run through this attempt to understand the fascination of archaeology - *Thanatos* and *Eros*. Dirt, formed of decay and decomposition (fragmentation), and of course the past in general, are aspects of death. Archaeologists are almost always dealing with the dead. We have discussed how this attempted dialogue with the dead may disguise a deep human need to contact our parents, but it may also be an

existential attempt to deal with our own mortality. Some aspects of the inherent eroticism of archaeology have been noted before - Shanks' (1992, 68) 'excavation as striptease', or Wallace's (2004, 79-100) account of the impact of the discovery of the preserved bodies and erotic images of Pompeii on the popular and literary imagination. We hope that we have shown that all of the physical side of archaeology is deeply embedded in this eroticism, whether in the delight in touching artefacts and the soil, or the more abstract visual discrimination of contexts and landscape features, or the make-believe of reconstructing past lives, or the thrill of approaching the unclean or dead. In an analytical sense these are all aspects of play, which is itself a sublimated sexuality.

Within these overarching themes of *eros/thanatos*, which characterise much of life, there is perhaps the sense of a relational theme specific to the practice - the pursuit - of archaeology: the search for a lost, inaccessible, fragmentary or mute other; the quest to enter a community, a world from which one feels excluded; the attempt to reclaim, retrieve or re-contact something that feels distant or elusive in the internal world (and perhaps the personal history) of the practitioner. If this is so, at least some of the time, the question may be raised of how it impacts on the meanings and interpretations of our findings. What could such a reflexive awareness tell us about the ways in which as professional archaeologists we relate to our work, see our findings, understand the past? Investigating the hidden side of ourselves and our subject has potential to throw up novel interpretations, as has happened in cognate subjects (McLean & Leibing 2007 for ethnography; Steedman 2001 for history).

Putting the archaeologist into archaeology is perhaps no longer controversial, but to do it successfully requires an honesty that critical self-analysis can provide. In a therapeutic situation it is often by addressing the difficult areas, where resistance is encountered, that progress can be made. In giving previous versions of this paper to a number of audiences, we have found that archaeologists have shown great interest in these ideas, but are often reluctant to reveal their own motivations and backgrounds. Perhaps this paper will encourage others to look more closely at why they are archaeologists, and how their own personal history might illuminate their archaeological research.

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