

Creating Culture Through Choosing Heritage

MARK P. LEONE

*Anthropology Department, University of Maryland,
College Park, Md. 20742, U.S.A.
(mleone@anth.umd.edu). 16 11 01*

*In the Museum of Maya Culture: Touring Chichen
Itza.* By Quetzil E. Castaneda. Minneapolis:
University of Minnesota Press. 1996. 341 pp.

The Archaeological Process: An Introduction. By Ian
Hodder. Oxford: Blackwell. 242 pp.

Metaphor and Material Culture. By Christopher
Tilley. Oxford: Blackwell. 298 pp.

Castaneda's *In the Museum of Maya Culture*, Hodder's *The Archaeological Process*, and Tilley's *Metaphor and Material Culture* are attempts to redesign archaeology completely. The theme that drew me to these books is the fluidity of the relationships between people and their culture. People in many circumstances are now seen as choosing their cultures. This has of course been going on at an unconscious level, in the name of historic preservation and culture resource management, in the United States for years, but we thought that it was guided by accuracy and science. Now we know that it is guided by class, power, and ideology. We are also coming to know that elsewhere in the world many archaeologists and ethnographers have described the arbitrariness and the politically situated nature of our common and long-standing practices—our discoveries. Hodder, Tilley, and Castaneda make it clear that culture is no longer justifiably seen as inherited, discovered, and described by anthropologists—that its history shows it to be a metaphor hiding as much as or more than it illuminates.

Hodder's *The Archaeological Process* is a sustained, clear, accessible text that reveals his originality and his secure grasp of what archaeology is and how little we understand it, particularly as it is enthusiastically embraced worldwide. He attempts here to provide a constitution for archaeology. His book only looks like an introductory text; it is in fact a serious reintroduction to archaeology for practicing professionals. It is written not for freshmen but for men and women who are interested in freshening their old training in science with the meaning of their experiences on any dig anywhere.

Permission to reprint items in this section may be obtained only from their authors.

It has some naïve moments and some rather too relativist moments, but then there is a moment of striking maturity (pp. 160–61):

It is naïve, wrong and dangerous to believe that an epistemology can guard us against misuse of the past. "Truth" will not protect us from "politics." Neither objectivism nor relativism nor any other philosophicalism can stand for social and moral evaluation of political uses and abuses in archaeology. Misuse of the past can only be evaluated socially and ethically. As members of society we make ethical evaluations of the use to which epistemologies are put in the service of politics.

It is my opinion that in the present historical moment of global information capitalism and post-colonialism, a dialogue between diverse perspectives on the past is needed in a morally and politically aware archaeology. We live in a plural and multivocal world. This is not the same as saying that we live in a relativist world if by that is meant that we cannot make judgements between the claims of different groups. The difference between plurality and relativism is that the former refers to the rights and dignity of diverse groups. Multivocality is grounded in our diverse needs, morally and materially evaluated.

Hodder uses cameo conversations throughout his book to great rhetorical advantage. This is a fragment of one in which he tells a hypothetical questioner that objectivism is no stronger in defending truth than relativism and that neither can replace moral force. Two points in particular are worth noting here. First, Hodder urges a stand for right and wrong in politics. Second, he says that science, no matter how good it is, is too frail to rely on when dealing with the misuse of the past; such a strand calls for a moral position and a political analysis. I don't know whether his position is fully correct, but we archaeologists must surely think about it.

According to Hodder, the idea that people actively play a part in forming themselves and thus their culture has implications for archaeology. The search for origins is becoming a search for chosen pasts. This is not readily understood by most American archaeologists, but Hodder is correct ethnographically. In fact, his case was quite convincingly made a decade ago by Jonathan Friedman (1992) when he showed how native Hawaiians and modern Greeks struggled for their own place and humanity by constantly negotiating their pasts, including their archaeological heritage. Hodder's observations do not displace human origins or plant domestication as objects of archaeological concern. He does, however, say that what is of value in archaeology is changing and that to place ultimate value on archaeological mitigation, to call ar-

chaeology a resource, and to see the salvage of artifacts as primary is to overlook why such definitions occurred in the first place. Things have no value out of context, particularly the context of local significance. But local meaning is just as pointless without an archaeological understanding of how meaning is established.

A third important observation about modern archaeology is that field methods—artifact categories, electronic data management, stratigraphic recording, electronic photography, and ties between laboratory and dig—should not be seen as fixed in advance. Hodder suggests flexibility of methods because the role of archaeology in local political struggles, its entertainment and media uses, its relations with local government, and its contribution to the fields of conservation, museum studies, and American studies are changing; The methods employed in an excavation will follow from the reasons for undertaking it.

In arguing these points Hodder is telling us that we are at serious risk of being unable to play the role assigned to archaeology today because we do not understand how important it is to modern politics. This is a conservative position, not a relativistic one. Hodder makes a plausible case, and in some ways it is essential to revamping American archaeology so that its empirical contributions can continue.

Quetzil Castaneda's position is not so conservative. While Hodder explains to archaeologists that we must be engaged more actively as people choose their pasts, Castaneda begins with the observation, now decades old in anthropology, that a culture is itself an invention of anthropology, usually in the form of a text. Echoing the now common observation that "native" people will read an ethnographic account and, seeing themselves in it, become what they see, Castaneda suggests that this mirroring process creates an anthropological museum—a locus or topography in which people live, are seen and described by an anthropologist or other observer, and are thereby given a culture. This culture may also be the way the people see themselves—a not uncommon phenomenon now that the concept of culture is ubiquitous. This becoming a culture is then subject to discovery or, perhaps, rediscovery both by people who have lost something they once had (a glorious past available, of course, archaeologically) and by others who, in seeking it out, become tourists. The tourists discover the museum—that is, the anthropologically and archaeologically discovered culture, lived by people who become in part what they have been discovered to be, remnants of glorious antecedents. Heritage tourism is focused on these authentic peoples, and what tourists see is, among other things, reconstructed ruins built since the 1880s by German, British, U.S., or other archaeologists with funding from foundations, governments, and wealthy patrons. Castaneda points out that the first generation of archaeologists often built these tourist attractions with the intention of helping to verify emergent national identities, but, with Hodder and Tilley, observes that archaeologists are not engaged in this now.

Castaneda's book is as much about a touristic envi-

ronment as it is about the Yucatec Maya, but in an attempt to show how a touristic environment operates it discusses the use and impact of culture (p. 18):

What is the invention [in the sense of scientific discovery] of culture . . . and the culture of invention (as an economy and technology of [what is thought to be] the real)? The analytical problem . . . concerns the circuits by which culture travels. How are cultures transported, imported, exported, deported, reported across . . . discourses and . . . localities? As . . . culture . . . traverses landscapes of imagination, how does culture constitute topographies . . . sociogeographic units of identity, belonging, and power These are issues in an economy of culture . . .

By "economy of culture" Castaneda means who pays for the "study/discovery," who benefits from it, how it is used to create impressions of power and subordination, where the tourist location is sited, and how it is brought to life. There is always a locale and a topography. Re-enactments, reconstructions, behind-the-scenes archaeological views, guided tours, guides, guidebooks, souvenir sales, hotels and restaurants help make up topography and economy (p. 173):

At the heart of [these vehicles that make up a topography] and anthropological strategy of knowledge are the ruins of Chichen Itza: a machine that functions to read and write the Maya In the . . . practices of tourism, the Museum of Chichen, which is the strategic order of knowledge embodied in the ruins, is continuously reinvented as a sight, as texts, as photographs, as postcards, as tours, as souvenirs, as an encounter with the Maya, as memory of a culture and a civilization.

Chichen Itza can be at once an archaeological site, a world-famous tourist attraction, a place to earn a living, and a New Age magnet because it is what Christopher Tilley calls a "solid metaphor." In my opinion, the major contribution of Tilley's book comes from his struggle with the difference between the two activities that make humans unique, language and the making of things. A solid metaphor can contain many inconsistent meanings at once; language cannot. According to Tilley, "To perceive similarities [is] to engage with metaphor . . . [that is] substitution on the basis of resemblance" (p. 19). "Solid metaphors contain what might be termed a literal memory . . . residing in the shape, form, colour, etc. that becomes sedimented as a non-verbal mental image of the thing in the mind" (pp. 269–70):

Solid metaphor [becomes] images for the storage and retrieval of information . . . linked to experience . . . in which those artifacts are used. . . . Both solid and linguistic metaphors . . . have their basis in the ability to recognize similarities among the material attributes of things The production, exchange, and consumption of things and [the] linguistic experience of the naming and associations of things pro-

vide the continuous possibility for the creation of new . . . understandings of the world . . . [or] one thing is conceived in terms of another . . . Novel metaphors . . . are activated . . . in . . . performative contexts [that] bring about changes in the manner in which people perceive the world, which in turn affects the way they act in the world.

Arguing that “words can never substitute for things,” Tilley points to the deeply personalized relationships people develop with things made and consumed,” which provide them “a physical, synaesthetic, material experience” that sometimes threatens to “overwhelm the senses,” and suggests that “the passage of time in the making, exchange, and consumption of things further distinguishes them from “the fleeting and momentary spoken word.” The second essential characteristic of solid metaphors is that they convey meaning through ambiguity and easily encompass contradictions while appearing to be concrete.

A tourist site works, then, because it sits in a place and must be visited for its images to work. It works less well when described or presented in a book. It works because it carries many more meanings successfully than anything linguistics, although it holds its many meanings in the verbal exchange that happens at the site and afterwards in ritual contexts.

A tourist site cannot be built by a visitor but can be exported in the form of some authentic piece of it. Its size, color, layout, and appeal to the senses are different from anything linguistic, and, in addition, it lasts. A site

can mean more than a linguistic metaphor because it embodies a far more comprehensive and often contradictory experience. The visual experience is encoded as images in the mind, as metaphors. When these metaphors become linguistic images (another kind of metaphor) in ritualized contexts, people understand their world better, or differently. Tilley argues that rock art, megalithic monuments, and barrows are to be understood as solid metaphors. They are like the cathedrals of England—once used by people involved in rituals and now visited by tourists, all having a splendid time with the emotional and synaesthetic fullness of these metaphors. The impressions left from such experiences “will, if the object becomes the subject of verbal discourses, elicit a verbal translation by means of which sensory, experimental and image-based analogic reasoning . . . acquire semantic expression as linguistic metaphor” (p. 270). The result of such byplay in the mind will be creative and new.

Hodder, Tilley, and Castaneda are all telling us not to stop digging but to be aware of the production of modern identity, the museum of the modern self, and recognize that the metaphor that takes on the form of reality has an economy surrounding it, an economy in which we operate.

References Cited

- FRIEDMAN, JONATHAN. 1992. The past in the future: History and the politics of identity. *American Anthropologist* 94: 837–59.