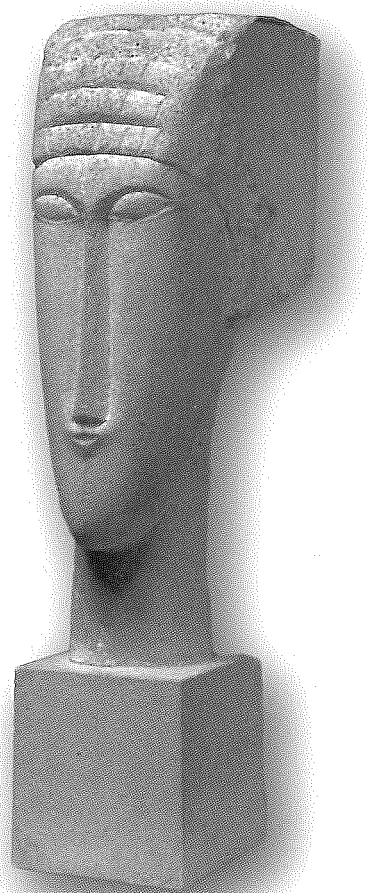# IDEOLOGIES IN
ARCHAEOLOGY

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Ideology, Archaeology

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Ideology pervades all forms of social practice, including theoretical reasoning and scientific practice. This chapter will first define ideology and the place it occupies in ways of thinking and acting. We define ideology as thought that always refers directly or indirectly to a given material reality. This reality is shaped historically and, hence, contains the remains of past ideologies, but it is at the same time the context of contemporary ideologies. The continuous adaptation of ideology to a changing material world becomes important in "scientific reasoning" when science claims to be value-free. The second part of the paper uses a representative archaeological study to analyze how ideology can guide the interpretation of the archaeological record, how it is imported from, and in turn fed back to, the collective consciousness as a settled truth.[1]

Between Ideology and Politics

At the turn from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century, A. Destutt de Tracy coined the term *ideology* to link scientific questions with political objectives.[2] For him and his followers, known as the *Ideologists*, ideology was a practice that addressed reality itself (the proper exis-

tence and development of ideas), that pursued both the knowledge of
reality (the science of ideas) and the project of an emancipated reality
(the control and correction of ideas). Hegel started to solve the di-
lemma of how to distinguish among ideas with his concept of the dia-
lectic of the spirit in the deployment of itself for itself. He questioned
the view of the human spirit as contemplative, passive, *determined*.
Marx in his critique of Feuerbach stood Hegel on his head by identi-
fying *praxis* as the human activity crucial for any change. Marx had
the same faith in knowledge as Hegel, and shared with him two other
beliefs: that History had a meaning and that reason could provide
that meaning. Marx, however, insisted that the meaning of History
is not in the ethereal places where philosophers seek it, but rather that
it is manifested in people's lived experience.[3]

Ideology for Marx was a system of beliefs that are inconsequential
to and incoherent with the material conditions of people's lives. This
discrepancy, only *effective* in a material sense in class societies, finds
its reason for being in its own conditions of social production. "The
ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the
class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time
its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of mate-
rial production at its disposal has control at the same time over the
means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the
ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to
it" (Marx and Engels 1975 [1845]: 59).[4] Marx advocates critique as the
method capable of distinguishing germane thought from ideology
(subjective thought). False consciousness results from lack of knowl-
edge of what is happening or from confusion about what is thought.
In short, it is the result of a conflict between the *effective* sphere and
the *affective* sphere, a type of social schizophrenia.

Unlike contemporary idealisms, Marxist thinking and criticism
has recognized the fragility of Marx's original suggestion. People
sharing the same material conditions may have very different under-
standings of the social reality and equally varied attitudes toward the
organization of social life, and can often be opposed to each other.
For idealists, ideologies do not come from any false consciousness;
they simply show different points of view about how to organize ma-
terial conditions. Ideologies are considered to be *belief systems* for ev-
erybody to follow . . . or not. Nothing is impossible for the subjective

free will. Yet the idealist standpoint neglects a crucial element: the gap between what we think and what we do. This gap is not caused by free will or its weaknesses, but by the conditions under which free will is produced and the difficulties of materializing free will.

We would criticize idealism for its conception of will as unconditioned and unconditional. Thought determines being only if we imagine that the world obeys a rational order. Such order cannot come from human will. We humans are many and our wills do not have to agree. A single order can only come from the Gods; such an order must be alien and superior to everyone's will. All idealist philosophies can be reduced to theology.

If the criticism of idealism is easy, the criticism of vulgar materialism is no more difficult. Considering the adaptation of thoughts to the objective conditions of life to be a distinct aspect of the human condition avoids a small but serious inconvenience: if thoughts were merely part of the objective conditions of life, all forms of thinking would always be conservative because belief systems and their related attitudes could never question reality.

We can only find a solution to that problem when materialism is assisted by dialectics. Life is constantly changing, and here lies the anchor of Marx's proposal. He suggests that human beings will be free to produce their own life conditions when they manage to get rid of all ideology, when they manage to disentangle their own social activity from feelings that confuse the *true sense of things*. This is the way for people to become aware of their place in the world. Becoming aware is nothing more than grasping that place. Awareness is not, by definition, ideology, nor does it come from subjective feelings. How does life change, according to Marx? Changes always require humans becoming aware in order to stand up and live differently from previous conditions. In this way *people* become the means for transcending the alienation that sets the historical process in motion.

Before continuing, we must take notice of how *objective alienation* began. It was Hegel who suggested that alienation took place when an *I* declared itself to be in the object (cf. Lull 2007, especially chaps. 1 and 2). That suggestion has a flaw: it was not possible to put an *I* in the object before that *I* had been established. A subject that had not yet been constructed was not able to show alienation. However, if we add a nuance we can agree with Hegel: the first alienation must

have taken place *between us and the object*, an object that would not exist without us. This first, objective, alienation happened when the things we produced were separated from the things that made *us*, thus redefining us as the makers of a new world.

This generic distinction ("us" vs. the world we made), though loaded with particular differences, did not suppose, at the beginning of our species, a distinction between individuals. It was the second alienation that was our first departure from others, the emergence of generic differences within and among what was the *same* (the Babel of tribes, nations, cultures, languages). And the third and last alienation, definitively subjective, was forged when *all* of those differences contrived to distinguish people as autonomous units: individuals, not collectivities anymore. When that last alienation is reached, society becomes an *ideological construct* subject to individual volition and consensus. Society is proclaimed dead when all subjective *spirits*, whatever their particular consciousness may be, constitute a piece of the State, a State loaded with justifications and obligations, summarized as follows: individuals fighting against each other.

Marx argues against the primary role of subjective individualities when he reminds us that consciousness is not ideological. It does not proceed through alienation, like the Hegelian concept of *mediation*, but by restitution of the will to its place of origin: praxis. Consciousness must reject any ideology that would supersede it. Consciousness must find its own material foundations.

But how do we know when we have left behind our false consciousness and reached authentic consciousness? Moreover, what if that (new) consciousness is ideological as well? Are the coherence criteria of transitive correspondence between social fact and consciousness something transparent? Answering this requires locating the proper place of what we call ideology.

The Place of Ideologies

Eating, working, or playing is not ideology, although work and a person's life might be ideologically understood. Not every idea is ideological. Ideology designates *a set of values about what is desirable and correct, and a set of justifications to sustain those values*. Ideologies

are forged socially. The term does not refer to personal ideas or inti-
mate convictions. If ideas only occur in the individual they are not
ideology. We follow this statement with two other equally important
observations. First, ideology's proposals, whether erroneous or cor-
rect, *happen*. Ideology is *something* that moves around socially and
that each person manages to interiorize and make his or her own,
confusing the success of certain ideas with one's own success. Sec-
ond, ideology exists in the place where the world is conceived and
where ideas about correct behaviors are stored. Therefore, ideologies
are shared entities that seek to control social relationships.

Ideologies are rooted in specific social practices and also represent
shared thoughts about those practices. Ideologies look for reasons to
legitimize those practices or to subvert them. This is why ideologies
necessarily imply opposing concepts about social welfare. Goodness
for some usually entails Badness for others. "Good" is not a universal
concept that transcends historical or specific conditions. Every single
objective condition contributes to a certain extent to reinforcing ways
of living, and ways of feeling—subjective thoughts linked by means
of intangible networks. Once established, subjectivity is prone to
break down when it does not fit with or fights against what actually
happens. *Words don't make the world*. Ideologies are ways of thinking
stemming from the world. Hence, ideologies only matter if they are
put into practice; putting them into words is not enough. What mat-
ters is what is *done* or *achieved* with ideologies.

The goal of ideologies is to question other ideas, behaviors, and
practices. Ideologies do not have to rely on truthfulness, coherence,
or logic. All excuses are accepted, but the most important excuses are
common sense and feelings.

Changing ideas might lead to a change in ideology only when
those ideas question a certain way of understanding/expressing the
world. As we have said before, ideology is made of ideas, but not all
ideas are "ideological." When we investigate the leaves of a tree or the
chemical composition of residues, no ideology directs the research,
although ideology might be present. Doubtless, ideology can condi-
tion and even determine science. Ideology refers to a way of *grasping
and conceiving* the world, not science's way of explaining it. The state-
ment that science is ideology is ideological in itself, since it assumes
that scientific practices lie in the realm of the spirit.

Unlike science, ideology is more prescriptive than descriptive; it is more concerned with appraisals than with explanations. Politics, religions, and identities do not need science in order to exist, even though they often appeal to it. Ideologies may use accurate descriptions to illustrate the world they create. Nevertheless, ideologies always impose prejudices on action, leaving the world unknowable.

Ideology and Reason

Groups of people who share an ideology also share identities and common interests. The ideology shared becomes a source of conviction and cohesion for the group. Expanding confidence will embolden a community to search for its reason for being until that reason is finally elaborated. But can reason embody itself in one group and not in another one? Is there only one reason? Is there only one correct way of thinking about the world? Reason is converted to ideology, becomes ideological, when it attempts to understand private matters that are fit only for subjective and private consideration. At the end of the road we meet social consciousness again and ask the question: is consciousness truly individual or, rather, does it develop out of the conviction of groups?

In the realm of ideology, people act because of convictions that cannot be justified rationally and do not require justification. The distance between conviction and reason is as ample as the gap that separates false consciousness from any other sort of consciousness. Ideology resides in a place where justifications replace arguments. Something is ideological when it does not require an objective explanation.

The consciousness of an age, because it lacks objective anchors, does not have a realistic translation, being indefinable in scientific terms. It pretends that feelings faithfully express what things manifest.

Ideologies embody both feelings and reason, but they endure longer in feelings that do not need rational arguments in order to become behavior. Ideologies are acquired from habits of communication and shared behaviors. They are learned by ways of speaking and are taught in the same way. Ideologies appeal to emotions in order to shape behavior. Ideologies are based upon feelings.

People embrace an ideology because it satisfies some interest, fur-

nishes them with a sense of belonging, gives them an identity, or allows them to take advantage of others. For that reason, accepting beliefs and engaging in the behavior they dictate is an essential aspect of ideology, although everyone can subvert them in their daily practice. Life does not actually follow the course of ideologies. Ideologies are more concerned with how individuals should behave than with how they do behave, with what they should worry about than with what their actual worries are. Not all beliefs or theories are ideologies.

Ideologies and Points of View

If we are able to change ideology without changing our material state, it is because our material state is compatible with the new ideology we embrace. And when ideologies change as the material conditions of life change, it worries us little why some people suffer while others are blessed by the same conditions. Social conditions frame thoughts. The social feeds the ideological, since ideology matches what one *wants* to say and what ends up being said. Social situations define social roles that can be adopted only when objective and subjective, physical and metaphysical conditions converge.

Following Hume, we think that knowing and believing are facts, not activities. Is ideology then a basic category, in the manner of an a priori idea? We don't think so. Having ideas means using them, whereas embracing an ideology means being used by ideas. It is the activities we engage in, with or without ideological pretexts, that transform our lives and thoughts, not ideologies. Activities constitute a social and moral order that produces ideologies as byproducts. These byproducts disappear when changes in social conditions eliminate the illusions that maintained and sustained the order that produced them.

An ideology is a paradoxical kind of image of the world, diffused and clear at the same time; an idea that imagines its *way of being* in a certain perspective or point of view. But what defines a point of view, a place or an idea? It doesn't matter. Ideologies remain the same in spite of material changes. Ideology is the suppression of change, the alienation of the physical and material place. Can we have the same ideas when we change our point of view? How can ideas from dif-

ferent material positions be shared if they do not appeal to feelings? Sharing ideology means understanding the world in a certain way.

Subordinate ideologies can coexist with a dominant one as long as they do not contradict its main core. Ideologies do not require their followers or promoters to share everything that they think, but only the ruling ideas, those that are socially effective.

Ideas and institutions promoted by ideologies offer products that are not different from the other ones we make. Like all other human things, ideas are produced, appreciated, and consumed socially. Ideas impose themselves only when it is possible.

Ideological Factors

Based on their goals, ideologies combine in variable proportions three types of factors: factors of affirmation, factors of rejection, and factors of escape. *Ideological factors of affirmation* are rooted in the conviction that someone or something is special with respect to others. Factors of affirmation require security and, for that reason, they are nurtured by fear or contempt (ignorance) of the unknown. *Ideological factors of rejection* share with factors of affirmation a conservative impulse that rejects any change, that is, all revolutionary paths, being always ready to sanctify the status quo as the natural social order. Only a nuance differentiates these two types of factors: affirmation can work through indifference, whereas factors of rejection actively confront any alternative social pathway, leading the people on the path to a prison cell or to extermination. Finally, *ideological factors of escape* try to domesticate emotions and to give spiritual and individual solutions to tangible social problems. Escape requires the conviction that the problem is society, not the individual. Escape encourages care of the body and salvation of the soul in an intimate and private sense.

These three types of ideological factors are all based on the *must be*, on illusions of what is to come. All three of them privilege free will in relation to material conditions and to the facts that feed and sustain material conditions. As a result of the concatenation of ideological factors, ideologies are expressed in a wide variety of ways, assorted affirmations and rejections that give individuals an unequivocal sense of belonging. They use mystical ingredients that feed nontransferable

and individual emotions; meanwhile, they nourish sin as a necessary institution. Religious customs overloaded with pompous liturgies constitute an important mechanism to instill events with miraculousness, or inspire feelings that transcend worldly things.

Ideologies can be classified according to the social sphere from which they emerge. These spheres are the political (areas of social decision), the religious (liturgies), and the sphere of identity (personification of the *We*).

- *Political ideology* is expressed in two formal ways: through opportunistic speech and drills. Real interests sustain these ideologies, making discourses and drills come and go. The substrate of both formulations (the underlying class interests) puts everyone in their place.
- *Religious ideology* tries to save those who are ignorant and afraid of the world or of death. Its speech is located outside reality and it elaborates liturgies that express the unreal as being real (Savior). Liturgies become filled with rites, myths, and regalia to create the illusion that fantasy is material, indeed, to render fantasy, in that unreal place, real.
- *Ideologies of identity* encourage feelings of belonging and possession. By invocations of land, blood, and the like, these ideologies confuse particular features with exclusive ones.

If those three ideologies were united they would form *The Ideology*. This ideology would take up the space of all ideologies; it would not even be the *dominant* ideology because it would be the only possible one: something quite similar to what we call today *unique thought*. However, its supposed antithesis, tolerance, respects equally exclusive interests. Debates are created, confrontations are put on stage, and fights or even wars are started, as long as the mass media responsible for their broadcasting stays in the same hands and the investments of the owners of those hands are respected.

Ideologies always defend a one-way path, consolidating gains and never questioning the place of departure. All of them claim to be right: religions claim to have the truth revealed by a thousand prophets; political ideologies appropriate arguments for coexistence; and ideologies of identity use emotions that divide people from others. All

of them are ideologies of consciousness. The rituals of consciousness are always ideological practices, as are all ceremonies.

Ideologies in Conflict

The modern philosophical understanding of ideology as a system of ideas rather than as a science of ideas has two facets. On the one hand, the plural form *ideologies* refers to the *ways of thinking* that obtain in specific times and places, a poor copy of what Hegel called "the spirit of the time." On the other hand, the singular version is defined as false consciousness or distorted representation of reality due to a confusion between reality and desire. In both senses, ideology shows (or fails to show) a certain correspondence between either private or collective behavior and its internalization in thoughts and how we share them. The way people think is bounded along with the ways they act, and tied to the usages and customs of a given time and place.

But with consciousness bound to a specific place and time, how can the general schemes of an era be transcended? Would "appropriate" consciousness (supposedly adjusted to reality) need false consciousness in order to move on? Would not the unfolding of history then be reduced to a mere conflict of ideologies? We believe that this is not so. At first, it seems that ideological conflicts take place between people who maintain incompatible concepts, but this is not the case. Nobody fights for criteria or opinions. *People fight for what ideas translate into in reality:* not for what they mean, but rather for what they materialize. *The actual struggle is among contrasting realities,* not contradictory ideas. Ideologies represent systems of thought that we must not forget were made to confuse, sweeten, or legitimate the reasons for fighting.

The distances between what is thought and what is said, on the one hand, and what is said and what is done, on the other, are not the same. Where between those two pathways does ideology reside? On the first path, between thought and word, the realization of an idea is limited to the spoken word, the statement. Here there is no danger for social coexistence. For a conflict to start, something more than words is needed. In political and social struggles, the contenders are not thoughts but real people. Do we enter into conflict when we have an argument? Is debate a simple division of opinions? Ideologies con-

fuse any debate about their foundations when expounding arguments and encouraging the confrontation of emotions. What is at stake, the relevant aspect of the debate, is not what is said or what is thought. The important aspect of the debate is *exterior* to it, since what matters in ideology is what can be taken from others, their freedom and their goods.

Archaeology and Ideology

The debate about whether ideology is false consciousness or a conception of the world may turn out to be a false problem, a triviality, a crossing of irrelevant glances. In any case, ideology names, erroneously or suitably, something shared. Ideologies *happen* socially. The individual, insufficient and dispensable, is only concerned with the decision of complying or not with what transcends him or her.

Ideologies are ideas, beliefs, and attitudes all at the same time. They emerge as syntheses of understandings of the different settings where people live. Being products of experience, ideologies are not a freely chosen set of elements; but once consolidated, they impose their dictates to curtail any future resistance.

Having a critical thought requires knowing where the thought comes from, understanding its process. It means, first of all, understanding it as a historical product. However, a critical thought that is incapable of socializing, of expanding and materializing its criticism, usually ends up as an academic ideology that only reproduces the stance of its proponents and nothing more.

Ideologies produce objects adapted to their aims. Nevertheless, there is no reason to assume that archaeological objects are simply signs used in ideological speeches. They are items that, in principle, may offer an account of realities not produced by, or for, any ideology. However, how archaeologists select them as research material may respond to ideological interests or to intellectual prejudices. We can observe archaeological ideologies if we critically investigate the use that is made of archaeological objects.

"Theoretical" archaeology has dedicated a remarkable effort to debating the scientific status of the discipline: that is to say, whether archaeological explanations can be tested by means of empirical facts

or if we have to content ourselves with more or less coherent interpretations. At present, archaeological debate also focuses on whether the coherence between our ideas and reality should be evaluated according to how well it fits certain philosophical, sociological, ethnological, or ecological premises. This focus is an ideological debate much more concerned with how one thinks, writes, and communicates than with archaeological praxis, understood as a process for the recovery and investigation of social materiality.

When we evaluate archaeological activities we chiefly consider professional standards that call for exhaustive and rigorous methods of excavation, conservation, and documentation. However, the influence of ideology on this process is insufficiently mentioned. Some argue that male and female archaeologists with different or even opposed theoretical perspectives can understand each other perfectly when investigating a megalithic tomb or a burnt level, as long as they focus their efforts on obtaining the maximum possible information from archaeological contexts and materials. For those archaeologists who are concerned with interpretation or explanation, it is only at the final stages of the research process that the archaeological record is evaluated and "read" in different ways. Indeed, many believe that the first stage of engagement with the object of study is free from ideology, that only the second stage is ideology's realm.

Archaeological critiques of ideology have focused on nationalism, colonialism, and male chauvinism, and these "isms" appear, with good reason, on the "black list" of political correctness. Today, we have no difficulty recognizing and even denouncing these specific forms of false consciousness, although they still thrive in our society. Meanwhile, however, the ontological premises of widely accepted explanatory models escape criticism of their ideological content.

Archaeological criticism is more concerned with methods. Critics routinely evaluate the formal or technical aspects of an investigation (sample size, postdepositional processes, reliability or precision of analysis, logical coherence . . .). But they usually uncritically accept the theoretical premises that allow an argument to be understood. In archaeology, a new explanatory model often enjoys much more tolerance than, for example, a new chronological framework. Although disagreements might be equally deep in theory, the corporate academic relationship perhaps leads archaeologists, unlike politicians—

much wiser in navigating between what is said and what is done—
to avoid discussing the ideological burden of their proposals. In ar-
chaeology, ideological critique is often understood as a personal at-
tack. In other cases, debate remains lodged in methodology while
the diversity of explanations and interpretations of the past enjoys an
apparent tolerance that is the hallmark of modern Western society.
Archaeologists seldom raise the suspicion that the success of such tol-
erance originates not from debate, but from the economic powers that
decide what is tolerable.

   We will now turn to a classic case study to reveal the ideological
underpinnings of archaeological interpretation—Renfrew's model of
competition for limited resources among megalithic societies. This
model comes from an intellectual tradition, which might be labeled as
functionalism, that claims to create scientific explanations rather than
ideological speculations. More recent interpretations, generally aris-
ing out of postmodern multivocality, are less useful for our purposes,
since scholars build them on self-referenced ideological discourses.

Why Did Megalithic Societies Compete
for Limited Resources

Renfrew's scholarship embodies a Western vision of human history as
a unique, logical, and univocal process. This vision usually overlooks
a number of human trajectories very different from the dominant
one, or else conceives of them as exotic, rare, or dangerous cases. It
is an approach that rarely leads to a questioning of the "logic" of our
understanding of the world. The economic and political ideology of
capitalism forms the theoretical basis to grasp any prehistoric phe-
nomenon. Renfrew's analysis of Atlantic megalithism, specifically,
provides an example of how a social materiality that we would con-
sider indeed "exotic" and in need of complex explanatory inferences is
"fitted" into the pattern of our own society, the "right" and "straight"
idiosyncrasy that in a capitalist archaeology becomes universal. Fi-
nally, we will observe how the dominant archaeology tends to glorify
certain forms of power, competition, and violence. In doing so it si-
lences strategies of collaboration, cooperation, and mutual support.

The latter social practices challenge the idea of a set trajectory that leads inevitably to modern capitalism.

"Of Course There Can Be More Than One Reason to Raise a Monument" (Renfrew 1984b: 97)

In the 1970s and 1980s, processual archaeology sought to surpass the descriptive approach that had characterized our discipline. Processualism's advocates argued that archaeology had to investigate material remains scientifically and objectively and find reliable *explanations* in economic and social terms. However, the neopositivist epistemological framework these archaeologists embraced neglected the origins and ideological components of "models" and "hypotheses," while emphasizing methods and instrumental techniques.[5]

Certain ideas rather than others form the basis of the most influential and unquestioned processual studies because they conform to beliefs that Western society uses to legitimate its own operation and development. These dominant archaeological, anthropological, and philosophical accounts seem more reasonable to modern readers than others because they better fit our expectations of normal behavior in Western society, and/or the dominant image that has been created of such beliefs.

One of the best known and most successful models of processual archaeology is Colin Renfrew's theory (1973a, 1973b, 1984a) of the megalithic phenomenon in Atlantic Europe, especially in the British Isles. He argues that megalithic monuments were constructed as territorial symbols of communities in competition for limited resources. His argument has deeply influenced the scientific community, and has been accepted even more widely by the segment of the general public interested in archaeological issues. The explanation offered by Renfrew as a hypothesis appears today in popular texts and handbooks of prehistoric archaeology as an established fact (e.g., Mohen 1989; Renfrew and Bahn 2008; Bahn 2000). In order to understand this metamorphosis from science to narrative, we will consider the arguments for Renfrew's interpretation of the so-called megalithic phenomenon on the Atlantic coast.

The model begins with the demographic effect of plant and animal domestication on the first Neolithic populations.[6] Renfrew argues that exponential population growth resulting from agriculture would have triggered a gradual migration of people from the Near East toward less-populated areas in Asia and Europe. These people would have introduced a new production system in these regions. When this wave of westward colonization encountered its geographic limits on the Atlantic coast, and relations between communities became more and more strained, the impossibility of diverting excess population toward new territories forced groups to change their ways of life. Demographic pressure would have sparked increased competition between communities for the control of now scarce resources, and consequently it would have become necessary to establish explicit territorial limits.[7] In such a situation, constructing megalithic monuments would be a way to impose certain social rules and to establish visible territorial limits that would guarantee kinship groups exclusive access to resources.[8] Renfrew used the spatial distribution of megalithic tombs relative to good agricultural land on the Scottish islands of Arran and Rousay to empirically support his interpretation.

In the south of England (Wessex), the situation was more complex. Accepting the premises of *central-place theory* from locational geography, Renfrew proposed that the distribution of causewayed enclosures during the early Neolithic indicates the existence of five or six independent territories (figure 12.1). He argued that the large size of these enclosures would have required for their construction the cooperation of the inhabitants from each of the territories marked by megalithic tombs or long barrows (the dots in figure 12.1A). During the late Neolithic, when people had abandoned all those monuments, a henge was built in each of the territories. This type of monument would have required the mobilization of still greater populations and the coordination and organization of dispersed groups in an extensive territory. Individual burials under barrows with remarkable grave goods emphasized the importance of these henges: toward the end of the third millennium, people often placed such burials in the environs of the henges, especially around Stonehenge. According to Renfrew, the henges served to reinforce the social bonds and norms that allowed groups to establish territorial boundaries in order to defend their rights over land in a situation of increasing conflict caused by

Figure 12.1. Distribution of megalithic structures in Wessex, southern England *(A)*, and territorial model proposed by Renfrew *(B)*

scarce resources. Renfrew interprets the construction of fewer, larger monuments in this period as evidence of a movement toward political centralization. Assuming that the mobilization of a workforce for such constructions always demands centralized control, Renfrew posits the appearance of leaders and hierarchies.[9] He sees the spatial and chronological distribution of monuments in Wessex as reflecting an increasing hierarchical structure in communities that, by the time of the final construction of Stonehenge, would be unified under a single chiefdom.[10]

The notion of the chiefdom as a stage of sociopolitical organization did not emerge from archaeological investigations, but instead sprang from neoevolutionary anthropology in the United States between the 1950s and 1970s. Renfrew sought to find the archaeological signatures of chiefdoms in megalithic societies, without questioning the validity of the anthropological category itself. In the same way that Renfrew's model of the Atlantic megaliths is accepted as fact, the model itself assumes an anthropological stage (the chiefdom) that is based on similar ideological premises as itself.[11] Neither the model nor the stage has been confirmed. A particular form of understanding

and interpretation of the political organization of non-Western societ-
ies thus becomes established as a given fact. Perhaps this reading of
the past will adjust itself to reality or perhaps not, but in any case we
need to ask what role ideology played, if any, in the generation of this
understanding of the world.

Reappraisal

As Renfrew himself noted, it is possible to reach very different conclu-
sions if we change the starting point of the argument, and if we do
so without looking for support in particular readings of non-Western
communities. In any case, it is necessary to differentiate between an
empirical criticism of the model, which would consider issues such
as chronology or the distribution of megalithic monuments, and a
questioning of the ideological content of the inferences in the model.
Our interest is mainly in the second question. We propose to return
to the data, the same data originally used, and reread them with very
different assumptions about society—in fact, fewer assumptions. We
will not assume that factors such as demographic pressure, shortage
of resources, intergroup competitiveness, and hierarchical structuring
were innate traits of megalithic societies.

Our approach analyzes megalithic monuments as products of a
socioeconomic organization. The relevant question is, what was the
role of such efforts in the reproductive cycle of these communities?
Our primary conclusion is that megaliths do not act "productively" in
the classic economic sense, that is, people did not use them as a means
of production for the manufacture of material goods.

Collective burial structures separate the deceased from the liv-
ing spaces of a society (settlements, cultivation areas, pastures, etc.).
Grave goods and evidence of food consumption found in associa-
tion with these megaliths emphasizes their importance as places for
the obliteration of production. In causewayed enclosures, ceremonial
and funerary use seems to be combined in some cases with dwelling
areas and certain economic activities, such as the care of cattle and
the manufacture of flint artifacts or axes (Malone 2001: 73–97). How-
ever, in henges, especially Stonehenge, artifacts, particularly pottery
and animal bones, are scarce. Therefore, archaeologists have usually
interpreted henges as strictly ceremonial centers, rarely frequented

by people (Parker Pearson and Ramilisonina 1998). The function of other structures, like early-Neolithic *cursus* monuments or the huge artificial Silbury Hill (150 meters in diameter and 37 meters in height), is still more difficult to unravel, resulting in many esoteric explanations. The scarcity of artifact remains in these sites implies that the activities carried out in them after their construction did not involve material transformations of production or consumption. Some of the activities performed in henges may have been economic, such as the distribution and maintenance of goods and people, or even giving birth. However, none of these activities, nor the burial of the deceased, makes megalithic monuments economically indispensable.

Based on archaeological evidence, megaliths represent "final items," the result of an important collective effort, and at the same time spaces used for consumption and perhaps distribution. From a material point of view, their use only contributed marginally to the economy, no matter how important the ceremonial and political activities developed around them were for the organization of production and consumption. We would classify these monuments as *secondary products of consumptive character*, since their construction and their use depend on previous productive activities, in particular on *primary production* and *basic production*.[12] Primary production is essential for such monumental practices because it provides the raw materials and subsistence resources necessary to maintain the workforce. Basic production carried out by women is the origin of the population itself. In other words, only those communities may construct megaliths that generate a superabundance[13] that can be directed for a more or less prolonged period of time toward the production of chiefly ceremonial "objects."

This leads us to conclude that megalithic monuments, whatever their social use might have been, *cannot be the result of a shortage in economic resources*. The size of these constructions and the workforce investment involved are directly proportional to the productivity and volume of production in the primary sector. Such achievements could not have happened without successful farming and cattle-holding strategies, especially if monumental investment, as a ceremonial obliteration, was "nonrepayable" in a material sense. The increase observed through time in the size of ceremonial structures indicates, therefore, an increase in the economic superabundance achieved by those societies.

If the means of production became more and more fruitful during the fourth and third millennia BCE, and since signs of large-scale environmental degradation and famine are absent, *there is no reason to postulate, a priori, any type of competition for limited resources among communities.* Rather, the archaeological record points to an excess of fertile land whose exploitation allowed a gradual demographic and economic development on the Atlantic facade.

In situations where resources surpass social necessities, it makes no sense to establish territorial limits as barriers against other communities. In situations where land or other resources are exhausted, an easier alternative is to move to uninhabited zones. The archaeological record indeed reflects the high mobility of Neolithic populations on the Atlantic facade, and nothing obliges us to think that agricultural land was insufficient or limited in relation to the estimated population. Even in other areas of central-western Europe, where there is greater evidence of settlements than on the Atlantic, the average occupation of a place seems to have been between 20 and 30 years.[14] In a context of high mobility, megaliths could have served as reminders of spaces occupied periodically throughout generations.

Renfrew proposes that resource scarcity, which is the relative lack of correspondence between population and resources, springs from the supposed demographic consequences of the introduction of a Neolithic economy. The archaeological data in many regions of Asia and Europe confirm that a sedentary way of life and a farming economy lead to major population increases. However, what is much less certain is that this development would have led to the overexploitation of the environment and to insufficiency of resources for such growing populations.

The excellent documentary record available for the Linear Pottery Culture communities of the Ruhr valley is revealing in this regard: a simulation of economic territories reveals the existence of "islands" of settlements along the river courses.[15] Around 4100 BCE, when agriculture and husbandry were finally introduced into southern Scandinavia and the British Isles, population density seems to have been even lower than during the Linear Pottery Culture period (Shennan and Edinborough 2007). There are no indications of subsistence crises in this period that could have forced migrations. On the contrary, the "boom" of the great Funnelbeaker Culture megalithic tombs in

northern Germany took place at a time (3500–3300 BCE) of economic dynamism and technological innovation (Müller 2004). Without any doubt, the introduction of the plough and the cart leads to increased productivity in subsistence production.

In the British Isles, the distribution of megalithic monuments does not match the pattern that would be expected if the Atlantic coast had been a border for a supposed wave of colonization coming from the east, thereby promoting a situation of demographic stress. Rather, the greatest investment of social resources in megalithic complexes occurs in regions that stand out in the availability and fertility of land, such as Wessex in England or the Boyne valley in Ireland.

The economic conditions for the production of superabundance and its channeling toward works of chiefly ceremonial and consumptive character exist in such instances of improved productivity. Moreover, from this perspective megalithic buildings emerge as symbols of collective strength and solidarity for the people involved in their construction and use. The superabundance generated by these societies was not stored, nor did it become surplus in the service of particular interests. Up to the end of the third millennium BCE, *the ever-increasing size of monuments implies an increasing consumption of increasing economic resources*. The spatial and social centralization of these efforts, as observed in the case of Wessex, could reflect a dynamic and complex economic situation in which communities were trying to reinforce solidarity links over large territories, perhaps in order to avoid the appropriation of production by particular groups and the consequent emergence of surplus. Until the second half of the third millennium, with the emergence of Bell Beaker Culture individual tombs, there is no archaeological evidence that suggests the concentration of surplus in the hands of particular individuals or groups, or the separation of a dominant group from the rest of the population.[16]

Leaving aside critiques of other applications of Renfrew's model,[17] the question remains why this specific explanation of Atlantic megalithism seems highly convincing to many archaeologists, even though its assumptions are, to say the least, controversial. The only assumption that we have made here is that the reproduction of human societies, whatever they are and wherever they are, must fulfill the logic determined by the lives of subjects and objects through production, distribution, and consumption. In material terms, such a postulate

is much less controversial than ideological notions of scarcity, competition, or the necessity for leadership—unless we believe that these things are genetically predetermined in humans, a proposition that is far from proven and strongly questioned.[18] If we distrust the origin and the context of concepts such as competition, shortage, and leadership, it is nevertheless immediately apparent that they are very familiar to us not only in the capitalist market economy, but also in politics, family, friendship, and education. The economic system in which we live entails exploitation, and property relations that drive us to an ever-increasing consumption of goods. Irrespective of the availability of commodities, capitalist ideology sets the trap by setting up *willpower* (individual choice) as the driving force for social action.

We would note one last dimension of capitalist ideology and the influence it exerts on our emotions. Many people in contemporary societies understand life as a struggle against nature, a reality overloaded with obligations and pains that can only and only partly be alleviated by work or success. This ideology installs *necessity* as a decisive and decision-making social category that taints our vision of the world with uneasiness. Facing that foreseen necessity, we allow the *anything-goes* principle to progressively prevail in our social practices while forgetting, too often, that it was the *satisfaction* of life that brought us here (cf. Lull 2007: 200). The real impact of life, in its original sense, is interiorized through that filter of dissatisfaction that ideologies of scarcity or shortage impose in their attempt to naturalize themselves. Science, while declaring itself eminently aseptic in questions of ideology, advances the same nonsense by giving the world new necessities. These sometimes improve the quality of life, but generally they fill the earth and space with rubbish. Some people think that waste is an inevitable consequence of progress, but there can be no progress if the accumulation of waste exceeds the hoped-for increases in quality of life that were to justify it.

By evaluating Renfrew's model strictly from an archaeological perspective, we have been able to show that competition with others for scarce material goods makes no sense when the resources available to a society are sufficient or when social mobility is possible. Renfrew's assumptions that social enrichment happens through competition, the inevitability of private property, and the necessity of leadership

disappear from the explanation of Atlantic megalithism. The claim of
an unequal and competitive megalithic society may be initially con-
vincing because we are most comfortable believing that our capitalist
reality has always been present. Such comfort frees us from the effort
of looking more deeply and unmasking our own ignorance about the
road that brought us here.

Acknowledgments

Notes

1. The original text of this paper was finished in 2007 and does not include
insights into Atlantic megalithism (the subject of the study we analyze) made
since that year.

2. "Mémoire sur la faculté de penser," *Mémoires de l'Institut National/Sciences
morales et politiques* (1798 [Thermidor of the year 6): 287, 323ff.; cited in Fernán-
dez Cepadal 1994: 37 n. 1.

3. The famous Thesis 11 of the "Theses on Feuerbach": "The philosophers
have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it" (Marx
and Engels 1978: 123).

4. The text following these sentences is also excellent:

> The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant
> material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas;
> hence of the relationships which make the one class the ruling one, therefore,
> the ideas of its dominance. The individuals composing the ruling class possess
> among other things consciousness, and therefore think. Insofar, therefore,
> as they rule as a class and determine the extent and compass of an epoch, it
> is self-evident that they do this in its whole range, hence among other things
> rule also as thinkers, as producers of ideas, and regulate the production and
> distribution of the ideas of their age: thus their ideas are the ruling ideas of the
> epoch. For instance, in an age and in a country where royal power, aristocracy,
> and bourgeoisie are contending for mastery and where, therefore, mastery is
> shared, the doctrine of the separation of powers proves to be the dominant
> idea and is expressed as an "eternal law."

5. The neopositivist epistemology focused on the problem of verification and falsification of theories, but was little concerned with the problem of their generation or justification. Popper, for example, argued that new explanatory hypotheses do not arise so much out of observations as out of a *creative capacity* innate to human beings, who are confronted in their lives with practical or theoretical problems (Popper 1973: 270–278).

6. "It is generally accepted that in Europe as in other areas . . . the development of farming resulted in substantial population increase" (Renfrew 1984a: 188).

7. "A much greater density of population must have become possible, and it is likely that the population increased very rapidly. . . . This must have had a number of social consequences, one of which must have been a developing scarcity of land, accompanied by a greater concern for establishing and defining community territories and boundaries" (Renfrew 1973b: 144).

8. "An increasing population and an increasing pressure on land . . . together with peaceful competition of neighboring groups, expressed in social terms by generous gift exchange or the erection of still finer monuments, would favor the rapid evolution of unifying and prestige-bestowing monuments and hence of megalithic architecture" (Renfrew 1973b: 144–145).

9. "The organization of public labor on such a scale necessitated some measure of redistribution of food, and some central, organized control, at least during construction, presumably vested in an individual" (Renfrew 1973a: 554).

10. "We might envisage the five Wessex chiefdoms coalescing into one great chiefdom with five constituent tribes" (Renfrew 1973a: 552).

11. Keith Hart tends to conclude about his profession: "Anthropology is the secular ideology of modern western society."

12. For a definition of *basic production*, see Castro et al. 1998a: 74.

13. *Superabundance*, which we use as an equivalent to the Spanish term *sobrante* or the German term *Überschuß*, does not, like *surplus*, imply an asymmetric distribution of material and energetic costs and benefits within society.

14. In this regard, the most reliable data come from research on Linear Pottery Culture settlements of the second half of the sixth millennium on the Aldenhovener Platte in the Ruhr region of Germany (Stehli 1989; Zimmermann et al. 2004), and also from the Neolithic lake dwellings of the Alpine fringes (e.g., Schlichterle 1997).

15. According to Zimmermann et al. (2004), the estimated population density of the early Neolithic (0.4 inhabitants per square kilometer) would not have been significantly higher than in the Mesolithic. Even on the Thessalian plain in Greece, with a denser and more stable Neolithic occupation than in central and western Europe, land seems to have been sufficient to feed the estimated population (see, e.g., Perlès 1999).

16. A circumstance that could be illustrated by the "Amesbury Archer" (Fitzpatrick 2002), ca. 2300 BCE.

17. For example, the hypothesis of a massive colonization of Europe by farming communities coming from the Near East. The first genetic studies on Linear Pottery Culture skeletal material (using mitochondrial DNA) indicate significant differences between Neolithic communities and the present-day populations of both Europe and the Near East (Haak et al. 2005).

18. Recent investigations about "mirror neurons" could suggest something very different (see Rizzolatti and Sinigaglia 2006; Bauer 2006).