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# Craft Specialization: Operational Sequences and Beyond

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# Towards a Theory of Social Production and Social Practice

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## INTRODUCTION

Seldom has archaeology been so overwhelmed by empirical data, by increasing specialization and fragmentation of research, and by private management of the public heritage, as in the 90s. Despite an apparently more open world, never does archaeology in Europe seem to have been less critical, less communicative, and further from becoming a social tool for a better understanding of the past and, ultimately, changing the present. In our view, the increasing lack of historical content in the archaeological discourse, which all over Europe seems to have become lethargic, demands new and different ways of thinking and organizing archaeological theory, as well as practice. Changes can only take place if technical and disciplinary fragmentation is reintegrated into a general archaeological discussion, if individual academic protagonism is substituted by team work and collaboration, and when private competition over the greater part of the archaeological practice, i.e. rescue excavation, is brought to an end.

Yet, the development of archaeological science, as of any other discipline, also demands a continued and dialectical discussion about the general ontology and epistemology that shall structure our research on past and present societies. Most theoretical developments, such as processualism, post-processualism, Marxism or others, seem to have stagnated after a rather dynamic phase during the 70s and 80s; though possibly one of the few exceptions in this situation is the development of feminist archaeology. These conflicting discussions have been substituted by a whole range of mutually ignoring or independent research lines on particular aspects of social organization (ethnicity, gender, ritual, social complexity, operational sequences, etc.). Their results inevitably remain fragmentary, if not wrong, as the material evidence on which any archaeological interpretation or description is based cannot be disarticulated into different meanings without a general sociological theory that establishes the relationship between the different forms of phenomenological expression of social reality.

In an attempt to proceed in another direction, different Marxist and feminist approaches have been integrated into a general theoretical framework. This consists of a set of interrelated theories, that range from the explanatory level of social organization down to the registration and description of their phenomenology. These have been developed and applied through a series of archaeological and ecological projects concerning the later prehistory of the

Western Mediterranean, namely south-east Iberia and the Balearic Islands (e.g. Gasull *et al.* 1984; Chapman *et al.* 1987; Castro *et al.* in press b, in press c).

The *theory of production of social life* forms the main part of this theoretical framework, as it establishes the conceptual structure, which provides historical explanation of the archaeological phenomenology we observe (for a more detailed discussion of the development and application of this theory see Castro *et al.* in press a, in press c). The aim of this theory is, first, to identify and to explain the objective conditions on which the production of social life is based, and, secondly, to determine whether the social relations established in and between societies exploit, hide or alienate the social subject.

## THE STRUCTURE OF SOCIAL PRODUCTION

The initial premise of the *theory of production of social life* is that any type of social life requires the existence of three objective conditions: men, women and the material objects, which are used by them and which imply a socialization of certain parts of the physical world. The material expression of these three objective conditions forms the *social matter*. All social matter has to be produced, which implies that men, women, and material goods are social subjects, as well as social objects. They operate as subjects in the moment they allow and decide, as social agents, the reproduction of society. They operate as objects in terms of their own production and in the relationships they establish between themselves. Thus men, women and material objects participate in an ambivalent way in the transformation of the physical world. This lies at the basis of the opposition between vulgar materialist and idealist forms of understanding society, but can probably be overcome through an approach that integrates into the historical analysis the social object, as well as the social subject, the products as well the agents, and which ultimately considers matter as well as energy.

All social transformation of the world implies the combination of a series physical elements with a given expenditure of energy. On these factors the successive paradigms developed by western economic thought have been constructed. They can be articulated in what we have defined as the *basic economic scheme*:

$$LO + LF + MP \rightarrow P$$

where:

LO = labour object; it represents the material basis or physical support of the social production. In the form of land it has been considered from Aristotle to the physiocrats as the main factor in the reproduction of society, as it is the main natural element that in terms of matter and energy provides a direct social benefit.

LF = labour force needed for the economic activities; this refers to the effort men and women as social subjects undertake during production. Individual skill, information and experience increase the efficiency of the labour force, and therefore represent objective elements of the technical and social division of labour. The relevance of human labour and, therefore, the idea of the subject in social production only became fully acknowledged with Adam Smith and the development of Political Economy.

MP = technical means of production; these are all the technical elements which become implemented in economic activities, mediating between LO and LF. Possibly one of Marx's most important contributions to economic theory was to explain the central role of the means of production not in generating, but in transforming energy in more socially efficient ways.

P = the final product; this is the target and necessary condition of every economic practice, forming a good which is needed for, desired by or imposed on social reproduction.

The final aim of all production is consumption. Production is a moment of consumption, but consumption is also a moment of production. Each element is at the same time its contrary (Marx 1973: 81-100). Therefore, any analysis of social production also has to deal with the individual consumption of what is produced, and vice versa. Yet, this unity does not imply identity, given that between production and consumption a spatial and temporal movement always takes place, which we call distribution. Given that production forms the general/social aspect, and consumption the singular/individual aspect of social production, distribution acts as the bridge between the social and the individual. It is this sphere of the production-consumption transitivity where the social relations of production are objectively established, and where the *social matter* becomes the subjective expression of the social experience, generating the communicative and symbolic structures and the aesthetic values necessary in any form of social organization. Finally, the movement from production to distribution and consumption results in and allows the reproductive cycle of society to take place.

In social and economic theory, production has normally been a concept used in the singular, referring only to the generation of goods, considered as the bases of all economic activity. In this way a whole set of social practices, which fulfil the conditions of the basic economic scheme, have been omitted from the social analysis. In order to overcome this unequal and partial evaluation of social labour, it is considered that all societies reproduce themselves through

three types of production: *basic production*, in which women guarantee the biological reproduction of society, the *production of material objects*, responsible for the generation of utilities, and *maintenance production*, which is intended to keep in a satisfactory state the properties and capabilities of social objects and subjects. To place all three types of production at the same level of necessity in the social reproduction inevitably requires their joint evaluation in any kind of research.

*Basic production* refers to the generation of new subjects, which provide the labour force necessary for social reproduction. To recognise this form of production means to consider biological reproduction as a specific and socially necessary labour process, and avoids explicitly all forms of naturalisation or occultation of it. It implies for women an activity, which only they can undertake, but which renders a collective product, as the new subjects become part of social life. Therefore, *basic production* has to be materially compensated if sexual exploitation on the basis of biological reproduction is to be avoided.

*Object production* refers to the generation of food supplies and all other types of products designed to be used or consumed. Basically one can distinguish between subsistence goods, means of production and artifacts for direct consumption. In each case the distribution and individual consumption of these goods present specific characteristics. This form of production has normally been over-emphasised by modern economic theories.

Finally, *maintenance production* allows the increase of the social value of things without changing their use value, either artificially or through the improvement of the physical, chemical, affective and aesthetic characteristics of social subjects and objects. This production is a key element in order to increase the production force and to avoid the exhaustion of subjects and objects. The recognition of maintenance production allows us to overcome the hierarchical differentiation between production and services, which has led to an unequal economic evaluation of producers, mainly male, against servants, mainly female. Nevertheless, the dependency of *maintenance production* in relation to the other two types of production lays the basis for a social dependency of the agents, who specialise in activities of maintenance or services. For this reason the labour invested in maintenance has tended to be considered of low social value, despite the fact that most social products would be of short existence or used without this type of implementation.

When these three forms of production are analysed in terms of the *basic economic scheme*, it becomes clear that men, women and objects can or must participate in very different ways in the production of social life. Natural resources (LO), labour force coming from men or women (LF) and the products which are used as means of production (MP),

provide the necessary conditions for *object production*. The obtained product (P), is normally individually consumed.

In *basic production* the body (LO) and the energy (LF) of women fulfil all the factors of the scheme. The product is incorporated into social life in the form of new men and women. This supposes a fundamental sexual and social difference in society, and necessarily affects, by means of compensating or exploiting strategies, the organization of all other forms of production. The direct relation LO-LF has been used to legitimate sexual division of labour, naturalizing reproduction by reducing women to a labour object (LO) and omitting the physical effort (LF) necessary in the generation of new social subjects. Furthermore, the fact that in *basic production* no specific instruments (MP) are needed, implies that an increase in production is not possible through technical improvement, as in the other forms of production, but only through a greater physical effort of women. Women are confronted with the social relations of production with only one means to avoid exploitation: to remain in control of their bodies and to obtain material compensation for the products they generate.

In *maintenance production* the initial LO is already a product (men, women or objects), the LF can be provided by men or women, while the MP can be other products, or non-existent. The frequent absence of a specialized technology has supposed that these activities have often been considered as natural aspects of social life, rather than as economic practices, and have often been ascribed to the domain of the woman. In this form of production the final product is individually consumed although seldom, or only partially, by its producer.

## SOCIAL DIFFERENTIATION AND SURPLUS VALUE

The question about the allocation or appropriation of the products generated by the three types of production, makes it clear that the historical approach to social organization cannot restrict itself to the analysis of the transformation of energy into social matter (e.g. Caracciolo & Morelli 1996). In order to move from the description of the physical world and its dynamics, to an explanation of its social transformations, it is necessary to consider the problem of the distribution and consumption of the produced matter. This inevitably leads us to take into account the differentiated participation of the social agents in the transformation and appropriation of the physical world or, put in another way, to the distribution of the material and energy costs and benefits within society (Risch 1995).

The asymmetry which can arise in these terms between social production and individual consumption determines the level of economic exploitation and social distance reached by society. Economic exploitation implies an unequal individual appropriation of social production, and necessarily results in the existence of *property*. The direct

material consequence of this development is that some part of P becomes *surplus value*. This is that share of production which does not revert in any form to the group or individual that has generated it. How the surplus is produced relates to the economic analysis, yet its forms of appropriation and consumption concerns the social organization of the community. Therefore, the two questions which should direct any social analysis are:

1. who undertakes the social practices of the production of men, women, objects and the maintenance of all of these, and how do they do so? and
2. who benefits (consumption/use/enjoyment) from the resulting products?

Depending on the answers we can approach *social asymmetry*, when exploitation is established between classes, or *sexual differentiation* when exploitation is exercised on the whole or parts of the female community, or a combination of both. In a general sense, the triad exploitation-property-surplus value is the expression of a society divided in terms of the participation in and access to forms of social production. The degree to which these differences become imposed, maintained and institutionalised defines the level of social differentiation and ultimately results in the formation of social classes and their political correlate, the state (Lull & Risch 1996).

Any, some, or all of the factors established by the basic economic scheme in the three forms of social production are liable to be appropriated by individuals or groups and transformed into property. Therefore the analysis of surplus value results ultimately in an historical analysis of the dialectical relationship existing between production and property. In the case of *object production*, the understanding of the appropriation of any of the economic factors involved lies at the basis of the definition of the modes of production in classical Marxist theory: feudalism is constructed on the control of the main LO (land), the slave mode of production is based on the direct appropriation of LF, capitalism implies the property of the MP, while the Asiatic organizations are centred on the unequal access to the factor P. Yet, if we also consider *basic production* and *maintenance production*, the analysis of social exploitation and its historical origins becomes much more complete, sexually differentiated and the social subject is not eliminated from production, as has occurred in many Marxist as well as functionalist approaches. The combination of the relations of production established in the three forms of production defines the *modes of social reproduction*.

The difficulty for archaeology in defining *surplus value* through archaeological objects lies in the fact that artifacts are at the same time products and utilities. The existence of surplus value in a society is not determined by differences in the consumption of products, but by the differences in the social value of what is being individually consumed.

Furthermore, the social value of things is not absolute, but depends on the material costs and benefits of their production and consumption. This means that surplus value can only be determined:

1. through a global analysis of the types of social production, along the lines just described, and
2. through the definition of the function the artifact plays in the basic economic scheme of each form of production.

The procedure proposed consists in the analysis of the factors of the basic economic scheme in all three types of social production in each of its moments, i.e. production, distribution and consumption/use of the social matter (e.g. Castro *et al.* in press c).

Apart from its psychic, symbolic and aesthetic implications, any strategy of surplus value production also has direct physical consequences on the *social matter*, as it depends on the potential to force surplus labour and to alter or vary the social value of products. Thus, a strategy of aiming towards *absolute surplus value* implies an intensification of the labour force (LF) under constant technical conditions (MP). On the other hand, the production of *relative surplus value* reduces the social value of products through a development of the means of production (MP) and/or an improvement of the labour object (LO), leading to an increase in the productivity of the labour force (LF) (Marx 1959). It is the responsibility of archaeological theory to find the ways of recognising these material changes.

The question regarding social distance and the notion of surplus value articulates and gives sense to an empirical analysis of production processes, social division of labour and the social mechanisms of appropriation of surplus production. Standardisation of the artifacts, technical exclusiveness of the spaces of production, simplification of the production processes and production volume are the axis along which the *economic strategies of surplus production* can be defined. The spatial distribution of labour objects and means of production, the relationship between natural resources, production areas and consumption areas, and nutritional and health patterns as identified by the human remains, are the main archaeological features which allow us to identify the *social organization of surplus production and consumption*. This also implies that archaeological remains cannot be understood as isolated objects with a unique meaning, but should be recognised in the multiple forms in which they express the appropriation of nature and society. The theoretical weakness of a concept such as an 'operational sequence' consists in its marginal relation to a general sociological theory. Independently of the cognitive aspects one wishes to attach to this concept, it implies a reduction of production to technology, an identification of technological processes with social relations to production and an inductive research procedure. Its application necessarily leads to an understanding of the archaeological

record in terms of a limited set of techno-economic factors, whose relation to social organization has not been formulated.

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

In order to put the *theory of production of social life* into practice in terms of the archaeological record, a series of interrelated descriptive theories and methods have been developed.

The aim of the *theory of archaeological sets* is to obtain, through archaeological excavation, groups of synchronic objects with a socio-historical meaning (Castro *et al.* in press c). The archaeological set is not a certainty nor an empirical fact, but an explanatory hypothesis about the observed sediments, archaeological objects and their meaningful associations. In this sense it represents an attempt to overcome the difficulties of the inductive and unit orientated Harris-system.

The *theory of archaeological objects* articulates and defines the material sphere in which social practices and natural conditions interact, forming what we have defined as *artifacts*, *arteuses* and *circundata* (Lull 1988). The materiality of the archaeological object informs us about the environment (*circundata*), about its dimension as a socially appropriated part of it (*arteuso*), and about its dimension as an artificially transformed material (*artifact*). Archaeological objects and social spaces do not constitute units of meaning, but present multiple spheres in which the dialectical relations between nature and society, and between at least two sectors of society, male and female, become expressed.

The *theory of social space* articulates and defines the spatial sphere in which social practices and natural conditions interact (Gili 1995). Social space represents the integration of the *environment* into *territories* and *landscapes*. While in the territories the appropriation of natural resources and products takes place, the symbolic universe through which society perceives the environment and the territories configures the social landscapes.

The *theory of social practices* operates at the highest descriptive level of the empirical world we observe (Castro *et al.* 1996). The *social practices* constitute the relational contexts between men and women, and between them and the material world they use, generate and represent. The *socio-parental*, *socio-economic* and *socio-political practices* result in experiences and consciences and therefore form the phenomenological expression and the factual universe of social existence.

This brief description of this sociology, and the theories necessary for its application, might have put forward the range of problems and considerations archaeological theory

needs to approach in order to arrive at a better understanding of the development and organization of society. It might also have shown that such an aim can hardly be achieved through an academic proliferation of unconnected interpretative frameworks, nor through an arbitrary and superficial recovery of the archaeological record. Quantity of interpretations and of data cannot be mistaken for a situation in which plurality of and conflict between ideas generates an advance towards the explanation of society. The *theory of production of social life* attempts to propose an alternative conceptual structure for such an explanation in terms of social matter.

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