Theory for the Sake of Theory

Or Towards a Narrativistic Archaeology

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This article focuses on the problem of writing archaeological texts. When the archaeologist has collected his material, done his chronology, and typology and found some theories and methods to get a image of the past, the task of writing still remains. This poses the question of how the past should be presented and even what the past is. The author discusses different poetics of writing archaeological and historical texts and how the past can be constituted in different ways. The main sources are Aristotle, Ricœur, and White. There is a clear linguistic turn. This has been obvious in the philosophy of history since the late 1960s. In archaeological theory, this kind of thinking is rather new. The author is also influenced by existential philosophers and hermeneutics such as Heidegger, Gadamer, and Nietzsche. This leads to the conclusion that archaeological and historical writing is ultimately a moral issue.

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I and the Truth

The circumstance that made me write this article is an insight of arcane knowledge. The discipline of archaeology is shattered beyond repair. Archaeology as a discipline is both about the past as the reality that once was, and about the making of (hi)stories about this disappeared reality. This insight is so profound and disturbing that it could drive a wise man mad, and make him stay away from archaeology, or make a mad man wise and a great archaeologist.

This knowledge is not new, nor am I the first person who has felt it. The debate about writing, history, and consequently, archaeology as a form of historical knowledge and the human apprehension of time is an old debate in western thought. One of the first preserved documents on how to write and write well is Aristotle's *Poetics*. The tradition of analysing texts and language has since been a recurring field of study. Among the most important philosophers and

philosophers of history that I have used in this article are Nietzsche, Ricœur, and White. The opinions on the art of writing Aristotle held 2,300 years ago are indeed still state of the art, and have made a lasting impression on my outlook on writing and archaeology. No wonder that with a tutor like that one should seek to conquer the world. Despite this long tradition of writing and the place of historical and archaeological knowledge in relation to other texts, contemplation about such matters is not very common in the archaeological debate.

The word in the subtitle, "narrativistic" does not imply any effort on my part to make people write better archaeology, nor any proposal that I have the key to how one should write. Not at all. If this were the case, I would already have written the optimal treatise and become rich and famous. In this paper I am not aiming at those subjects. My intention is instead to perhaps convey a way of thinking about archaeology.

This can in the end mean that some texts about actual archaeology will have another outlook than they would otherwise have had. Actually I don't think that either. There is always a gap between the theoretical superstructure of a discipline and the practical research done. Instead I advise the reader to read this paper as a thought-experiment.

For the purpose of illustrating my aim with this paper, I recommend an interesting article by the Nestor of Swedish archaeology, Mats Malmer: "On Theoretical Realism in Archaeology" (1993). In his article Malmer in his characteristic, lucid style summarizes the recent history of archaeology. He compares the theoretical debate in archaeology with the debate in history and the social sciences. The debate can be summarized as the battle between Positivists and Relativists. Malmer is right in claiming that the debate has centred around the research process and in recent years a widespread doubt in that process. Malmer opposes relativism and pleads for what he calls it a theoretical realism.

This is all very good, well-written, and a splendid short story about the recent history of archaeological research. My interest starts where Malmer stops. He draws the lines between archaeology, other humanities and the natural sciences from the art of source material and research process. I agree. But what are the differences between the natural sciences, other humanities, and archaeology on the other side of the ridge that separates archaeology from all other sciences? What are the differences in the act of writing and constructing texts in these disciplines? One can, like Malmer, even make things more complicated, and compare scientific writing to writing of historical novels. Malmer seems genuinely worried about archaeology being confused with fiction. Is not all writing in the end about the human condition? There seems to be an anxiety about not writing scientific archaeology. But what are the differences between scientific writing and fiction? Malmer discusses the research process and not the act of writing in

itself. He studies archaeology as the knowledge of the past but not as the writing about the past. My own view, in large measure influenced by Ricœur, is that the differences and connections between scientific archaeological writing and fiction are not simple, and the study of the relationship is definitively rewarding. The line drawn between them should not be seen as a borderline but a zone of discussion and, if you like, of conflict. In this way both the scientist and the author could benefit from a deeper understanding of how a text about the past functions. One should not forget that already Aristotle spoke about these matters: "The distinction between historian and poet is not in the one writing prose and the other verse–you might put the work of Herodotus into verse, and it would still be a species of history; it consists really in this, that the one describes the thing that has been, and the other a kind of thing that might be. Hence poetry is something more philosophic and of graver import than history, since its statements are of the nature rather of universals, whereas those of history are singulars" (Aristotle ch. 9).

So this paper is about writing and archaeology. My next stop is a book I read a while ago by an analytical philosopher, W. V. Quine, *In Pursuit of Truth* (1992). This was done with the honest expectation of finding a way to the best interpretation of the weapons from the Iron Age I am supposed to write about in my Ph.D. thesis, and the title of the book sounded very promising. I cannot say that I understood everything in Quine's book. But I understood that much that there is more to learn and that the pursuit of Truth and the interpretation of archaeological artefacts are not that easy. To summarize Quine's book would be too much. Some of the pictures he invokes may be enough. He talks about a jungle language. This language may be compared with the archaeological record. How come when you interpret from the jungle language into English that two interpretations of the same statement may be fundamentally different, even

to the extent that they are mutually exclusive? Can we logically say that one interpretation is better than the other? Is a new interpretation better than an old one or just different? Should a new interpretation try to absorb all older interpretation? But doesn't one sooner or later reach a limit when the interpretations are so different that this path is impossible? Should one instead try to seek battle and disprove the other translations? But have you then the monopoly of Truth, and by the way, what is Truth? There are no facts which convey the truth. These were such important and interesting questions that they could not be left to the philosophers, so I decided to break Malmer's dictum and begin meditating on these matter myself. Of course Quine, as I have understood it, is seen as a very controversial analytical philosopher, and his ideas have been criticized on many levels. In this context, however, his idea that Truth is not absolute but alternative is a challenge for the discussion about interpretation.

At the same time I was completing a historiographical survey of archaeological research about weapons from the Early Iron Age. I noticed one fact that history of archaeology (or historiography or the history of any discipline) is most often written as stages succeeding one another. Evolutionism is succeeded by diffusionism which is succeeded by processual archaeology which is succeeded by post-processualism which is succeeded by post-post processualism which is succeeded by ... (See for instance Trigger 1989). This is not so. Instead the research process makes a spinning movement outwards-downwards, centrifugally. Every new generation of promising young archaeologists or every new stage of the discipline tends to cherish mere details or leftovers from preceding research. In the dawn of archaeology the Promethean heroes battled with the great questions, typology, chronology, and then came research about ethnic groups, social groups, fighting techniques, symbols, gender perspective, religion. Every new field of discussion tends to come nearer the

fringe. We are indeed dwarves on the shoulders of giants! It cannot be said say that we build on the works of others and give a more nuanced picture of prehistory. Instead we begin from a new square one and play our own game. Of course, this is a ideal picture. There are archaeologists active in typology and chronology even today. What I doubt is that anyone is interested in rewriting for instance Ulla Lund Hansen's work on Roman imports or Mats Malmer's *Jungneolitische Studien*. This must in some way mean that every generation or every archaeologist makes his own truth. Maybe this centrifugal movement can be compared to the fall of the tragedy that Frye has described (1955, pp. 33 ff.). Originally the tragedies were about gods, then about heroes. Then the interest shifted to ordinary men. The last step is that the tragedy describes inferior men in an ironic mode. The irony has the power to create new mythologies, so perhaps the circle will repeat itself. But maybe this comparison is not to the taste for scientists who study archaeology for the sake of archaeology.

The different schools of archaeology are about interpretation of the past and how the past could and should be interpreted. In short, I consider an interpretation a truth-claim. You cannot put forward an interpretation which you consider an outright lie or contradict your world view. By the interpretative act the archaeologist tries to redescribe and rewrite reality. To realize this does not necessarily mean that the archaeologist has to question the reality, but should consider his fundamental views of the world and the past as the world now gone. Even if you put in some extra words like: "So far the results point in the direction of ..." or "This is just an interpretation, the final verdict is to come!" you still want to change the reality and make a truth-claim. I am not interested in predicting what is the best interpretation, that prehistory should be interpreted in a cultic, economic, or structuralist way. Instead I want to conceptualize the interpretative act itself. What processes are in

work when one interprets archaeological material? To do this I feel forced to structure my thoughts and I fear that is the first step towards failure. I honestly admit that I do not, and I doubt that anyone does, think in structures.

Archaeology and interpretation – a model borrowed from Ricœur

I think Ricœur makes a good attempt to discern different types of interpretation based on perspectives of the past as the reality that once was (Ricœur 1984), in other words, based on your outlook on reality. He claims that there are three different types of interpretation. All three have their strengths and weaknesses. Perhaps the truth is that every story contains elements of all three perspectives. The first interpretative model consider that the prehistoric Man is the Same. His actions make traces in the archaeological record. Behind the actions are thoughts. The perspective of the Same stipulates that these thoughts can be rethought in exactly the same manner as the original thought. In that way we can know Man. Notice that this process functions even if you consider prehistoric Man different from ourselves. You can understand how and why he is different. This perspective is, I believe, the normal perspective of most archaeologists. It can be called idealistic. In philosophy of history its most influential defender is the archaeologist Collingwood (1946). Of course the criticism of this perspective challenges the proposition that we can know the thoughts of prehistoric man.

The second interpretation is the perspective of the Other. With this outlook you consider true knowledge impossible. Man is too alienated to make true knowledge possible. Perhaps this perspective, in its purest form, can be called postmodern. Most studies carried out under the sign of the Other challenge the archaeological research process and is more of a history of archaeologists than of archaeology or a archaeological study. Examples of relevant questions from a reader with the sign of the Other in front of him

could be: "If the author of the present paper at the time of writing was staying at a sanatorium or if he instead was enjoying a good glass of Scotch, how could these hypothetical situations have directed his thinking?" Of course this perspective can give valuable information about how knowledge is assumed. The critique of this perspective is that it denies the worth of the prehistoric reality.

The third perspective Ricœur calls the Analogy. And that is what this paper is about. This perspective may be called Narrativistic. The best description of the perspective is in my opinion Ricœur's: "We must not therefore confuse the iconic value of a representation of the past with a model, in the sense of a scale model, such as a map, for there is no original with which to compare this model. It is precisely the strangeness of the original, as the documents make it appear to us, that gives rise to History's effort to prefigure in terms of a style" (Ricœur 1987, p. 153). Ricœur immediately claims the philosopher of history Hayden White as an exponent of this perspective. I shall thus revert to analyse some of White's ideas and for the moment leave Ricœur.

Hayden White is probably the most important philosopher of history in the last quarter of a century. His book *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (1973) is a pioneer work of narrative history. Of course there are other philosophers of history who have worked in a narrativistic paradigm (for instance, Ankersmit 1981, Danto 1985, and of course Ricœur 1984–1987). The paradigm of narrativistic history was a reaction against the post-war debate about positivism and relativism. Instead of arguing about the research process the narrativists' aim is to point out that historical writing is a construction of text and to analyse how this phenomenon works. I believe that much of White's thinking is applicable to archaeology as well. In short, White makes a structuralist analysis of historical writing. It would take me too far to give a full account of his ideas.

Instead I refer to the introduction of his book (pp. 1–42) for further reading. His categories are explanation by emplotment, that is, a historical work can be emplotted as a romance, comedy, tragedy, or satire. The second level White uses is explanation by formal argument, whether formist, contextualist, organicist, or mechanicist. The next level is explanation by ideological implication. The ideologies White enumerates are anarchist, radical, liberal, and conservative. These levels of analysis have been used in archaeology to analyse articles about Neolithization in southern Scandinavia (Rudebeck 1994) and pottery from the Middle East (Hodder 1993). Of these articles I think Hodder misunderstands some fundamental aspects of White's ideas. Hodder decides that some pottery is made in a tragic, comic, or ironic fashion. This is to make reality to a text with certain qualities. Nothing in the real world is in itself comic, tragic, ironic, or anything else. These dramatic feelings must be created in a culture-bound text. To analyse, for instance, potsherds and then say that a whole era comprehended the world in a comic or tragic way is just a historicistic dream of control which, I think, has been refuted by Popper (1957). The last and most difficult level White discerns is the theory of tropes, which I am going to pause for a moment to consider.

An archaeological theory of tropes

The theory of tropes is a rather puzzling part of White's book. I have the feeling that the concept has to be reworked and widened to have an implication for historical and archaeological thought. In the state White leaves the theory of tropes I must agree with Ricœur that it is fragile and adds nothing essential to the other levels of analysis (Ricœur 1984, p. 163). Instead I will try to elaborate the theory of the tropes in a way hinted by Ankersmit: "He [White] could have offered a 'transcendental deduction' (to use a Kantian term) for his four tropes: i.e. he could have tried to prove that knowledge of the past is

only made possible by these four tropes" (Ankersmit 1981, p. 87). I am not sure whether I am prepared to go so far as to declare that knowledge of the past is impossible without the tropes. I do, however, believe that much of our thinking and writing is filtered through the tropes. To illustrate what I mean I have made a figure showing the four tropes in relation to the discipline of archaeology.

The figure needs some further explanation and elaboration. By metaphor or description I mean the verbal or pictorial description of artefacts or archaeological remains. The issue here is whether these objects should be called metaphors. I am more and more convinced that they should, and that in fact we only can apprehend the world in metaphors and never understand anything in itself. To illustrate this, look at the picture of a sword. What is it? A weapon? A symbol of death and destruction? The Christian cross? In fact it is only some black ink on a paper. In that way we continually construct metaphors to be able to understand an artefact. Of course, this is in theory. In practice we can get along quite well without the theoretical use of metaphors. We must relate an artefact to the rest of the world to be able to understand it. Support for a view that everything is metaphors can be extracted from many sources. Perhaps even Aristotle could be read in this way. The discussion of language and how language works was the starting point for Wittgenstein in his *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* and *Philosophische Untersuchungen*. In the first book Wittgenstein maintained a view that there was something fundamental and universal in language. In the latter work he became more critical and rejected much of his own earlier thinking. In *Philosophische Untersuchungen* Wittgenstein comes close to regarding everything as metaphors, for instance: "43. Man kann für eine *große* Klasse von Fällen der Benützung des Wortes 'Bedeutung' – wenn auch nicht für *alle* Fälle seiner Benützung – dieses Wort zu erklären: Die Bedeutung eines Wortes ist sein Gebrauch in der

Sprache. Und die *Bedeutung* eines Namens erklärt man manchmal dadurch, daß man auf seinen *Träger* zeigt" (Wittgenstein 1958, paragraph 43).

The second trope, the metonym, is the trope of theory. By this trope one somehow seeks a cause-effect relation in the archaeological record. An example is a map which shows the find spots of double-edged Roman swords in Östergötland. What one tried to do is to relate the archaeological material to some external factors, some model, structure, or, in this case, geographical factors. One can say that this trope too is objective, since it gives measurements, numbers, or dots on a map. The subjective factor is that you choose one theory or cause-effect relationship from among innumerable possible causes and effects. The measurements then line up against these. Often the author speaks of a hidden reality or deep structures, which the participants themselves were not aware of. The archaeologist's quest is to uncover these hidden structures. In this sense the stance of theoretical realism adopted by Malmer in the article quoted above, and in the article by Winberg to which Malmer refers, works in the field of the metonym. "The scientist cannot be satisfied with trying to understand how the persons in question themselves perceived what happened around them, what is what the 'new historism' recommends. The scientist's task is instead to penetrate behind these swarming occurrences, to go deep and discern the forces which were active at the bottom, usually without the acting persons themselves being conscious about them" (Winberg 1990, p. 14, my trans.). In this way even the seemingly strong position of Malmer becomes rhetoric. In the model I have named the level of the metonym the level of interpretation.

The third trope, the synecdoche, is the trope where a part determines the whole in a qualitative way. This trope can be seen as fundamental for all of archaeology. We have just part and fragments of prehistoric society. From a potsherd we deduce subsistence, social systems, and how our fellow humans, now gone, think and per-

ceive the world. On a lower level we can consider the example of the double-edged swords from the Roman Iron Age in Östergötland. The swords can be seen as synecdoches for a society based on violence, where fighting ability is crucial for one's position in society. In my model I call the synecdochic level the meaning.

The fourth trope is perhaps a consequence of the second book of Aristotle about Comedy, never written or lost. That is the trope of irony, the trope of exposure and human failure. Perhaps there even are two types or levels of irony (cf. Frye 1955). One is the present irony, where a whole work is permeated with irony (one example may be Nicklasson 1994). This irony makes the reader aware that the words are negated and that the meaning is something different from what is said. The second level of the irony is where all attempts to describe or understand the human condition end – in utter failure. Frye describes this form of irony as: "When we try to isolate the ironic as such, we find that it seems to be simply the attitude of the poet as such, a dispassionate construction of a literary form, with all assertive elements, implied or expressed, eliminated" (Frye 1957, pp. 40 f.) In this way one can talk of irony as the master trope. One can even consider that the more an archaeologist clings to the simple naive tropes of describing the world by metaphors or interpreting it by the metonym, or even fill it with meaning by the synecdoche, without considering that it is wrong the higher the fall into irony will be. How can a mere description of artefacts be a description of human conditions? I think the role of irony is best described by White: "I have noted the Ironic component in the work of all philosophers of history, and I have indicated how it differs from the Irony that is implicitly present in every historians attempt to wrest the truth about the past from the documents. The historian's Irony is a function of the scepticism which requires him to submit the documents to critical scrutiny. He must treat the historical record Ironically at some point in his

work, must assume that the documents mean something other than what they say or that they are saying something other than what they mean, and that he can distinguish between saying and meaning, or there would be no point in his writing a history" (White 1973, p. 375).

The language consists of all four tropes. No communication is possible without any of them. In all archaeological texts all the four tropes are present. In a certain work one trope may dominate in the text as a whole. The dominant trope also varies with genre. A catalogue takes most of its inspiration from the metaphor, an objective and value-neutral endless description of the world. The archaeological site report takes inspiration from the metonym. In the report the archaeologist tries to interpret the disparate features to make some intelligible whole. For the academic text to be considered complete, the synecdoche or evaluation is almost indispensable. In this kind of work you have to fill the past with some kind of meaning. Of course there is a great deal of variation among the categories and between archaeologists. One archaeologist may be interested in the typology and description of certain artefacts. Another archaeologist may be more interested in the theoretical relationship between the presence of certain artefacts in burials from a certain period of time and economic growth. The trope of irony may seem underrepresented in scientific texts. Is this the consequence of the second book of Aristotle never having been written or having been lost, so that we do not have an archaic teacher in the use of irony? As I said above, the irony is always present, and the more you try to avoid, or omit it, the more it will entangle you. This is not deplorable, it is just how irony works. The tropes work in cooperation or rivalry with each other but not alone. This explains the wavy line between them in my figure. The vertical lines between them indicate that I do not consider that there is any cause-effect relationship between them, even if it may seem so. Pleas of having studied the material and then having

arrived at a conclusion thus have no relevance. From a mere description or typologization of the content of a rich grave one cannot reach conclusions about social structure, status, or the society in itself. One fabricates these conclusion by studying the materials not as metaphors but as metonyms or synecdoches. The conclusions drawn from the study of archaeological material can in this way be seen as a shift in language, not as a logical chain of evidence and inevitable cause-effect relations.

Narrativism and relativism

I cannot really understand the confusion of narrativism and relativism. I think that relativism is an impossible construction, invented for thought-provoking purposes. I think the famous relativist Feyerabend is aware of this and formulates it thus: "There is no need to fear that the diminished concern for law and order in science and society that characterizes an anarchism of this kind will lead to chaos. The human nervous system is too well organized for that (Even in undetermined and ambiguous situations, uniformity of action is soon achieved and adhered to tenaciously [Feyerabend's note].)". In one way I think this is enough to kill the debate about narrativism and relativism. But perhaps Feyerabend's irony is not enough to counter the dark implication of archaeological writing.

I think that the question about relativism and objectivism is a central question in humanistic and hence archaeological sciences. The new "post-processual" or "post-modern" archaeologies of the nineties prophesy a more humane archaeology with a democratic outlook, with room for every minority which would like to split off from the "normal" and allow a great many views of the past. This kind of archaeologist can only pray to God and hope that this world where everything is allowed will never materialize. This would of course be the end of society and civilisation. The alternative is to keep the humanistic ideals on the same intellectual level as Feyerabend and play

fascinating mind games with no relevance whatsoever to society.

I myself have been more tempted by a conservative approach to the question about relativism and objectivism through existential philosophers such as Heidegger, Nietzsche, and even Aristotle. Of course the ghost of conservatism is either taking refuge in dogmatism or is just the unhappy spectator looking at a world gone wrong with nothing but therapeutic consolation to offer. Neither the post-processual "humanistic" way nor the conservative existential approach seems to offer a satisfying answer to the question about objectivism and relativism. But it may be that it is not the answers that are wrong, but the question. It may be that the long struggle of objectivism, relativism and science is in itself a ghost and that it is time to reconsider some fundamental pillars of Western knowledge. Bernstein points to the hermeneutics of Gadamer and giving practical philosophy a higher status as a way of getting beyond the question of relativism and objectivism (Gadamer 1960; Bernstein 1983).

Narrativism is about how you write or construct your texts and even if you are a positivist you have to construct texts or else communication is impossible. Despite this, I have encountered the opinion that a narrativistic perspective allows every way of writing archaeology, that you can construct whatever past you want. If you have done something bad, just re-enact it as a comedy and the laughs are with you, or as a satire, and nobody cares. I have the feeling that this sort of criticism to a large extent comes from those who already write whatever past they want and do not want to be caught red-handed. For instance, in describing the Battleaxe people as invaders, fighting to subdue the Funnel Beaker people, archaeology can legitimize conquest through aggression, depict this from another point of view, as the fall of civilization. Perhaps these questions have no deeper ethical implications. Nobody nowadays has a close relationship to either a Battleaxe person or a Funnel Beaker

person. So what's the worry? Archaeology is about bygone times, and the study of them should be pure archaeology for the sake of archaeology.

Of course this is a naive answer. Everybody knows that history and archaeology have great power as myth-creators. In a narrativistic way I think the greatest power is not to be found in what we write about the past but in how. Perhaps writing about the past as a struggle between different social and ethnic groups makes people aware of the existence and importance of these "facts". The dark side of the story will be when the innocuous story about the social structures in the Iron Age cemetery turns the minds of the readers to celebrate an ideology of fighting differences.

It is very sad that even the theory of narrativism has been used to make some past legal. Hayden White's writings have, for instance, been used by revisionists. Of course, this is a parallel case to Nietzsche. Perhaps the ideas which promise most freedom to humanity will be the most abused. Perhaps humanity is not humane. There has been a great deal of criticism of White's relativism in historical reviews. White himself has backed away from the most extreme "relativistic" views and in his later writing he has been more concerned about the ethics of the historian. He even concludes one paper (White 1987): "If it were only a matter of realism in representation, one could make a pretty good case for both the annals [think of the archaeological catalogue, my comment] and chronicle forms [think of the archaeological report, my comment] as paradigms of ways of that reality offers itself to perception. It is possible that their failure to narrativize reality adequately, has to do, not at all with the modes of perception that they presuppose, but with their failure to represent the moral under the aspect of the aesthetic? And could we answer that question without giving a narrative account of the history of objectivity itself, an account that would already prejudice the outcome of the story we would tell

in favour of the moral in general? Could we ever narrativize without moralizing?" Perhaps it is one's moral judgement on the past which decides the future. To decide on a good moral verdict on the past you do not have the support of the elders of archaeology, nor Nietzsche, nor White, nor Ricœur. The difficult test is that is you who must set a good moral example when judging your deceased fellow human beings. The scaring thing is that sometimes I think I am going to fail.

It may be that it is the moral aspect of historical and archaeological writing that differentiates it from fiction. Ricœur talks about the historian's debt to the past, which in my view comes very near to White. However, I think it is definitely more rewarding to consider the relationship between fiction and historical writing as complicated and intertwined, than to try to separate them altogether.

Of course there are objections to a narrativistic approach to the writing of archaeology. I do not consider objections about the impertinence of mingling in ones texts as relevant. If you mind that other people read and analyse your text, or if you, like Malmer, are just interested in the part of the research process that leads to the point where you start to write a text, you should not write at all. But I do not think this is an alternative for anyone, especially not such a splendid writer as Malmer. Instead, the objections must rise from the theoretical foundations of narrativism. I consider the notion that history and archaeology in themselves are meaningless as fundamental for the narrativistic approach. By considering the past as the-world-now-gone as meaningless, you also consider the present as meaningless. Meaning is created by the storyteller. This means that you must get rid of some very fundamental thoughts in archaeological writing. The first is that there are no cause-effect relationships. This has bothered me to a very high degree. I have spent many sleepless nights in considering the consequences of everything being due to nothing. But perhaps it is not the answers that are wrong. It may be

the question. Instead of asking why, the archaeologist should ask how. But is an archaeology that does not try to answer the fundamental *Quo vadis?* relevant or even interesting? The other old comrade you have to get rid of is Truth. Of course this is what the last passages were about. A narrative statement cannot be falsified, one story cannot be more true than another. The truth-claim goes for the narrative account as a whole. Individual facts can be proven wrong or you can even blame someone for omitting crucial facts. If you have the facts right and decide to write a tragic account of the rise and decline of the weapon graves during the Iron Age, you cannot claim a comedy on the same subject to be less true. Of course, this is very disturbing. But it is our fate as humans not to know the Truth, and never be able to. (The questions of cause-effect and truth are discussed at length in Ankersmit 1981.) The thing is that we cannot even stop narrativizing. Telling stories is possibly one of the most fundamental human behaviours, and to stop telling stories and dramatizing the past is the road to barbarism. You can't win, you can't get even. In fact, you can't even leave the game.

Of course, these considerations are disturbing and may in the end lead to narrativism being abandoned for another ism. But consider for a moment the diametrical opposite, that the world is not meaningless, that there is an intrinsic meaning in the world and also in the past.

A tropological model of knowledge

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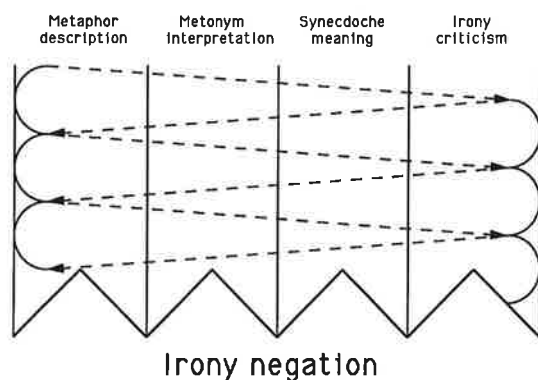
A philosophical question is if we are capable of considering the world as meaningless. If we do so, doesn't even the self disappear? Of course, such a question is impossible for an archaeologist (and even for a philosopher?) to answer.

This way of thinking comes close to Hegel's world-mind (*Weltgeist*). Hegel is a very complex philosopher and it is unfair to discuss his ideas just in passing. I recommend his *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte* as an introduction to his thinking. Of course few people nowadays are primarily interested in the subject that Hegel considered central, that of the State. But perhaps one could consider another world-mind whose goals are more in line with our world. But perhaps different world-minds are inconceivable for Hegel? But in such case, must we all live with Hegel's mind? Or am I only narrativizing? From the point of view that there is meaning in the world you can consider the narrativistic perspective as not being chosen by the archaeologist, but found in the same way that the archaeological objects are. The meaning is a consequence of the nature of the facts (this point of view can be found in Dray 1989). This perspective means less freedom but has the advantage that one cannot narrate archaeology in whatever way one wants. The truth is somewhere to be found. In fact, I consider this Hegelian critique of the narrativistic perspective strong. One cannot dismiss Hegel's complex philosophy of history. So where does the journey end? How can this thought-experiment influence archaeological writing? I do not think it will. To write an essay from a narrativistic point of view is difficult, maybe even impossible. The narrativistic approach was invented by philosophers and philosophers of history who themselves do not write accounts of the past. Instead they torment other historians by scrutinizing their texts. So maybe one cannot write in a narrativistic account, but can one read an archaeological text without narrativism?

So perhaps everything ends up in nothing. I finish by quoting an imaginary conversation in Todtnauberg in 1926. The young student Martin Heidegger has just get the commented manuscript of his Ph.D. thesis *Sein und Zeit* back from his tutor Edmund Husserl. The old professor had only corrected two spelling mistakes. Below the last passage of the second volume, "Demnach muß eine ursprüngliche Zeitigungsweise der ekstatischen Zeitlichkeit selbst den ekstatischen Entwurf von Sein überhaupt ermöglichen. Wie ist dieser Zeitigungsmodus der Zeitlichkeit zu interpretieren? Führt ein Weg von der ursprünglichen *Zeit* zum Sinn des *Seins*? Offenbart sich die Zeit selbst als Horizont des *Seins*?" (*Sein und Zeit* 1926 (1977), p. 577) stood the words: "Good! Should be expanded!" with Husserl's handwriting. Heidegger, with an anxious voice:

"But don't you think I have made one or two points? Don't you think that my work is important?"

Husserl shrugged his shoulders and looked embarrassed.

"But don't you think that the manuscript is good?"

"Well," Husserl said, hesitantly, "I think most of it is only theory for the sake of theory."

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