
GENERAL PERSPECTIVES

MAKING PRODUCERS OUT OF CONSUMERS: ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE MEDIA INTO THE 1990'S

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"I consume therefore I am" -- Barbara Kruger's dictum -- neatly sums up the consumerist emphasis of the 1980s. In my opinion the recent 'Heritage' debate (Baker and Hill 1988, Bintliff 1989, Hewison, Lowenthal and Wright 1985, Merriman 1988) has over-concentrated upon the consumers of the archaeological media rather than its producers. In this article I hope to reassess the relationships between the consumers and the producers of the archaeological knowledge dispersed by the media of television, publishing, heritage centres and museums. I also intend to examine the impact of new and cheap technologies on the power monopoly of the traditional media. Finally, I will propose a new criterion for the assessment of the worth of media presentations of archaeology.

Authorship: opening the black box

In the media which present archaeology it is the issue of authorship which is crucial. The *BBC* television's *Chronicle* has full credits which are rushed over the screen but it is not clear who is the author of this chronicle. Is it the narrator, the researcher, the producer, or the series editor? And if it is all of them, who has the final decision on controversial questions? Similarly, in most museums the authors of the exhibitions remain anonymous. The work and labour behind the production and presentation of knowledge is edited out of the public domain by doors marked "Private, No Public Admittance".

The authoritative received pronunciation of the *BBC* narrator provides a blanket, corporate image smothering the uniqueness of the past. The codification of the past by the dull scientific-style labels in museums has an analogous effect. Different languages and dialects are cut short by the dubbing machine, truncated by the narrator's familiar tones comfortably echoing the voices associated with television holiday advertisements. The past is safely captured in the picture postcard aesthetics of the present, not allowed to express its potential difference and otherness to that present. The audience comes to recognise itself in the familiar reflections of this mirror -- and, indeed, it is perhaps partly the need to see the present reinforced by the past which prompts people to watch *Chronicle* or to visit museums in the first place (Merriman 1988).

Thus, through the media of archaeological presentation the audience are cast as passive consumers of the past, rather than as active agents in its production. It seems important to try and begin to change the balance of this equation. Much as, for example, Bertolt Brecht (1964) challenged theatrical conventions with his 'epic theatre' - seeking to alienate the audience from the play so as to make them more critical of its content - so there is a need to make the consumers of the past more critical of *its* content.

Perhaps my profession of publishing¹ exemplifies most clearly the 'black box' problem barring any such shift in the presentational emphasis of the past. Here there are no credits rapidly disappearing at the bottom of the screen, nor a majestic curator's door to knock upon. All the consumer normally has to refer to are the text, the author's name(s), and perhaps a brief biographical account of the author(s) noting no more than institutional attachments and other such incidental information. Only a few people 'in the know' might be able to glean more information from the acknowledgements and references, so as to be able to peer through the dusty window into the 'black box' that is publishing a book and getting published. And yet, it is in this 'black box' that most books start and grow.

While the author may physically write a book or article, it is commissioned, edited, re-written, designed and packaged into a commodity within this 'black box'. Here it is decided whether the book will be published, and then, by the way it is priced, packaged and advertised, who will read it and who will be able to afford it. Yet all this remains invisible to the consumer. A book is very much the product of many authors rather than just that of the single author whose name appears on the cover.

One way round this is for archaeologists to take control of the presentation of their own material, as this journal has tried to do over the last ten years, and as I am currently doing with Julian Thomas in publishing *Writing the Past in the Present* (Baker and Thomas 1990). While this may mean a decrease in the superficial aesthetic quality of our products, it maintains all-important editorial control for authors, making it possible to incorporate features aimed at opening authorship in a way which many publishers would never allow (*ibid.*). With the proliferation of desktop publishing equipment such work is becoming much more feasible.

Explosion of Technology = Explosion of Democracy?

Perhaps, then, we are moving from the age of the handed-down chronicle to the age of hands-on chronicles. A major feature of the media in the 1980s has been an explosion in the availability of cheap production equipment such as desktop publishing systems, video cameras, word processors and tape recorders. This has meant that many more people can record their own 'chronicles' in an ever-increasing variety of ways -- no wedding today is complete with-

out its video! Tape recorders have produced a whole new impetus in oral history work, transferring the subject from the exclusive realm of academics, to, for example, young people on MSC schemes studying the past of their own communities, such as Springburn in North Glasgow (Hutchinson and O'Neill 1989) and Bradford (Bradford Heritage Recording Unit 1987). In a similar way, video recorders have opened a new dimension in ethnoarchaeological field-work (Pratrap 1987). In museums, the impact of such developments has been felt as more space must now be given to temporary exhibitions produced by different groups in the community, as in the case of Springburn (O'Neill 1990). In this case, the museum's role was that of enabler, providing a camera and technical advice for teenagers to shoot and mount their own exhibition on growing up in Springburn -- which photographs were taken was wholly decided by the teenagers. This growth of grass roots producers presents on the one hand a threat to the traditional media's monopoly of power, but on the other a great opportunity for the rejuvenation of the traditional media through the incorporation of non-professional material into their output.

A model for such work could be provided by HTV's series *The Dragon Has Two Tongues: a history of the Welsh*. In this series, two commentators of conflicting views discussed the history of Wales, each providing a different soundtrack to the same piece of film. The programme was so successful that discussion groups were spontaneously formed in pubs and clubs all round Wales to address the issues raised. This debate also led to the publication of the book *When was Wales* (Williams 1990), written by one of the programme's two presenters. In this way, archaeology and the media are moving away from the age of *Chronicle* and into the age of chronicles.

Out of Consumers, Producers

Finally, in leaving the consumerist "I shop therefore I am" 1980s behind us, I propose a new criterion of assessment or 'Performance Indicator' with which to satisfy the all-pervasive need for accountability and justification of resource use by reference to tangible results. Rather than purely aiming to attract the highest number of consumers, a museum, television programme, publisher or heritage centre should aim to turn as many as possible of the consumers of its presentation into producers of history (Schoenberger 1985, 10). This is to be understood in two ways.

First, that visitors, viewers or readers should be encouraged to undertake their own archaeological research and recording to produce a reply to the original exhibition, programme or book. Rather than being the passive consumers catered for at Jorvik (Addyman 1990), people should be encouraged to see the media event as merely the opening of a dialogue rather than an absolute statement in itself. This departure has several implications for the media: authorship must become transparent, the authority of statements must be relativised, and the

means of reply made clear.

Second, it is expected that consumers will not just produce further information about the past but will actively take part in contemporary 'history making' activities, such as campaigns and demonstrations. Through their research the historicity of the present and therefore the potential of changing contemporary circumstances can become apparent. This is why Schoenberger's Active Museum of Berlin is not only active in studying the Nazi past but is also active against neo-Nazis in the present (Baker 1989).

As a 'performance indicator' this criterion is particularly useful for the public sector (including the BBC with its charter commitment to "public service broadcasting") since by forging links with local groups like archaeology and local history societies it can provide a long-term service as well as building up a historically aware lobby to support its interests. In contrast, heritage centres, which are heavily reliant on foreign tourists, and centred on the consumption of goods rather than knowledge, are not capable of providing long-term back-up to provide consumers with the time or resources to produce their own heritage.

In assessing the archaeological media it is important to examine the producers as well as the consumers of these events. As part of this, authorship must be made as transparent as possible, so as to give scope for consumers of programmes, books or exhibitions to use the ever-increasing opportunities offered by new technology to formulate their own replies to the present media producers. The way ahead for the archaeological media of the 1990s should be to make producers out of consumers.

Notes

1. My full-time job is as Senior Editor for the educational publishers Oliver and Boyd in Harlow, Essex.
2. This paper was originally presented in the *Archaeology and the Media* session organised by Alex West at the annual conference of the Theoretical Archaeology Group held in Newcastle Upon Tyne, December 1989.

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"GO AND BUILD AN IRON AGE HOUSE THEY SAID" -- THE GRIMSBY PROJECT

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In 1986 it was suggested that a small Iron Age settlement at Grimsby, South Humberside should be reconstructed on its original site. This settlement was occupied during the first century BC and is notable for the presence of extensive evidence for bronze metallurgy. The scheme was adopted by Great Grimsby Borough Council who with Humberside County Council and the local Community Programme Agency of the Manpower Services Commission formed a partnership to finance and develop the project. The writer, then Assistant Curator at the local museum, the Welholme Galleries, was asked to act as project co-ordinator. This article considers some of the problems that were faced in trying to bring the idea to fruition.

The first step was to define the type of reconstruction to be produced. Reconstruction experiments have been divided up by Coles (1979, 36-9) into three levels -- simulation, testing and function analysis; at each level the degree of scientific rigour is increased. To be a true scientific experiment the reconstruction would have to utilise appropriate Iron Age technology. For example the enclosure ditch would have to be hand dug and ancient replicas rather than modern steel tools used to shape the house timbers. To hand dig a ditch over 125m in length would have taken too much time out of a very tight schedule, when a quicker alternative, the modern earth-moving machine was available. The use of authentic replica tools would have involved their manufacture and the necessary blacksmith's skills were not available to the project. Hence total authenticity was not attainable because of restricted resources and it soon became apparent that the Grimsby project would have to fit into the lowest level -- simulation. In a simulation a copy is made of an original artifact with attention paid only to its visual appearance for display purposes. The materials used may vary from the original, the technology employed in making the copy can be modern, and the copy itself is not tested for its function or purpose. Simulations such as those undertaken by Brian Hobley at The Lunt Roman Fort near Coventry in 1974 have had a considerable impact on the way that archaeological sites are presented to the public (Hobley & Rylatt 1975, 151-5). Hobley argued that "excavation and finds are not an end in themselves, but ... require three-dimensional interpretation before they can be directly related to the true purpose of archaeology: that of reconstructing the past by its material remains." He had found that visitors to the excavation had been unable to recognise the traces of buildings and other structures in the ground. The public needed a full size simulation in order to understand the archaeological remains. At Grimsby it was decided that a major objective would be to raise public awareness of archaeology.

At an early stage the important question of who would visit the Iron Age settlement was addressed. It was recognised that there were few tourist attractions in the Grimsby-Cleethorpes area and that the settlement could increase the number of visitors to the two towns. Unfortu-