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Social Production of the Past. Archaeology of Reactivated Matter

[A]rtefacts are the only class of historic event that occurred in the past but survive into the present. As physical materials, artefacts provide an authentic link to the past and as such can be reexperienced. It is through this reexperiencing that the world of the past, the other, is brought into contact with the present.¹

Contrary to industrial production, in scientific and humanistic production the manufacturing of efficient tools cannot be performed in manufacturing plants, specialised in tool production, but first and foremost in production processes in which these tools are employed.²

A true reification, in other words, in which the produced thing in its existence is secured once and for all, has never come to pass; it needs to be reproduced again and again in order to remain within the human world at all.³

There is a noticeable lack of analysis of the relation between the knowledge about the past functioning within specific groups (“communities of communication,” “communities of memory,” “communities of interpretation” etc.), or in the perspective of a single human,⁴ and material “relics” connected

¹ A. Jones, *Memory and material culture*, Cambridge 2007, p. 3.

² L. Kołakowski, *Wielkie i małe kompleksy humanistów*, in: *idem*, *Kultura i fetysze*, PWN, Warszawa 2009, p. 263.

³ H. Arendt, *Kondycja ludzka*, przeł. A. Łagodzka, Wydawnictwo Aletheia, Warszawa 2010, p. 166.

⁴ The emphasis on the individual in reflection on the social production of the past is an expression of a noticeable need to include a “subject perspective” in the view of this process. This stems from the need to demonstrate its contextuality and complexity. The tendency to show possibly many views of the same phenomenon (e.g. a material “relic” of (from) the past, or a place strongly (inter)related to the past) is a result of accepting the proposition that the past should appear in the present as a subjective category, whose objectivity is not guaranteed by either the state or scientific prestige any more. This assumption manifests itself, among others, in the observation P. Nora made in the context of French historiography 20 years ago, as if it abandoned (since it lost them!) its aspirations to ascribe to the past any coherent, commonly accepted meanings, thus losing its “pedagogical authority,” useful in passing on the

in various ways to the past. As much as it is not difficult to prove that material information carriers are a significant, essential and hardly negligible “raw material” of the images being conjured of the more or less remote past, that they are being incorporated into our imaginations/superstitions about the past—it is quite difficult to determine at the level of generalisations how, to what degree and extent, in which argumentative situations (interpretation contexts, test spaces) material objects initiate and predetermine imaginations about the past. It is even more difficult to answer the question why the anthropogenic matter has the kind of influence it does over the form and content of “pasts” (uttered here in plural and in parentheses for a reason, as scientific narrations of archaeologist, historians, anthropologists, sociologists etc. are only some of the many ways of perceiving and treating the past). The most enigmatic, however, seems to be the answer to questions in what way employing the material traces of the past conditions the present. This way I explain the need of reflection upon cultural transfers often assimilated by very different recipients and at different stages of persistence of the material carriers of meanings and senses.

Beginning with quite a dangerous assumption, which directs further reasoning, that artefacts belong not to the past but rather to the present, I attempt to demonstrate that any study of “the past,” which in the perspective⁵ adopted herein is seen as a study of the materiality of the present, ought to incorporate the drive towards exhibiting the trajectory of the material and conceptual permeation of the “past” into the present. I assume that investigating the possibility of transferring through objects of various kinds of information in time (also, which I find most fascinating, in the long periods of existence of cultures) should not be limited to the identification of details concerning the past reality. It is also in a position to sensitise the modern man to these features of material culture which give a unique opportunity to reach that which determines the cognitive processes and their involvement (e.g. through the sense of identity, including the longing for the past, desire for continuity, sense of bonding; attitude to life; sense of aesthetics etc.) in social contexts.⁶ A confrontation with artefacts

values; from: P. Nora, *Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire*, „Representations” 26 Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory (Spring). 1989, p. 11.

⁵“Perspective” is given a neutral meaning here. It is rather a “defined angle of vision, problem orientation, theoretical approach, *modus operandi*, which predetermines research preferences, defines the rules for constructing theoretical models of chosen aspects of reality, differentiates the aim of research investigations, and sets the limits of their validity.” (J. Baradziej, *Ethos i cywilizacja*, in: *Rozmyślania o cywilizacji*, eds.: J. Baradziej, J. Goćkowski, Kraków 1997, p. 177.)

⁶E. Domańska gives a broader discussion of these problems in, inter alia, *The Material Presence of the Past*, “History and Theory,” 45, October, 2006, pp. 337-348. See there for references as well.

makes manifest, for example, such elements of our “world-view” which elude conscious reflection, historical awareness or even memory.

Investigating modern interactions with artefacts connected to the past is an opportunity to enrich our knowledge of various attitudes towards the “strange reality”⁷ known as the past; diverse attitudes towards “historical imagination” as well as causes and circumstances of maintaining and preserving (or, conversely, effacing and destroying) the traces of the past in the present. It can be assumed indeed that that the interpretative potential of material relics of the past is not limited by anything but the passivity of its commentators.

Artefacts are the Only Class of “Historical Events” which Having Happened Before Endure until the Present Times

Undertaking to characterise the influence which our physical and intellectual intercourse with the material remains of the past has on the quality and significance of our interactions with the past, we cannot the physical properties of material culture. The archaeological perspective provides insight not only into the physical characteristics of material culture but also into the processes, often lasting millions of years, which shaped it; thence the idea to use SECOND DEGREE archaeology (still a working perspective) to describe the socially conditioned reality being produced with material carriers

⁷ K. Zamorski is one of those who notice that references to representations based on the semiophorisation of genuine objects from the past play an increasingly important role in the formation of our imaginations of the past, even at the intentional level (*idem, Dziwna rzeczywistość. Wprowadzenie do ontologii historii*, Kraków 2008, p. 298). Also, the reference to the conception of K. Pomian, who gave the name of “semiophores” to objects considered in a given community to be “carriers of meanings,” produced or exhibited in such a way that they attract glances to the exclusion of any other function or retaining their utility function — distinctively expresses the crucial role of archaeology in construction of the historicity of man (*idem, Historia. Nauka wobec pamięci*, Lublin 2006, pp. 98-102). It is worth to mention that the particular “power” of the field being discussed here consists of its capability to slow down the fall of matter from the level of something useful to the level of something insufficient, maladjusted, which does not simply result in a lack of utility but rather it highlights the need of existence of the item as a whole. Whereas on the top of the ground, and a little below, remains, traces and fragments of human temporalities are found from currently past ages. They are interwoven, however, into the motions of life of people which more or less genuinely “reify” them, i.e. give the meaning to their present “life”/being. They are subjected to thought, described and, as a result, constantly redefined. As K. Zamorski aptly remarks: “the increasingly more complete and better presentation of the relics of material culture is of increasingly greater importance to our historicity, which expresses itself through, among other things, joining the human with the space-time and solving the problem of the boundary between the present and the past by blurring it” (*idem, op. cit.*, pp. 276-306)

of meanings connected with the past. The methodology of archaeology *sensu stricto* has an enormous potential for a unique perspective not only into the physical properties of “material culture” but also into the millions of years long activation processes of the potential of matter (e.g. cognitive, aesthetic, identity developing, ludic potential). Matter may be considered most important for the understanding of causes and ways of using it in the age-long practice of recalling, commemorating and referring to the past.⁸ Thence a name for the perspective I propose: second degree archaeology. I do not consider it a dogma, however, and might just as well, thinking the same thoughts, call it history of the second (consecutive) presence of “the past,” anthropology of the secondary or of the secondary (circulation of the) past (secondary assignation of meanings to matter), or archaeology of reactivated matter. In fact, the material properties of the traces of the past are considered starting points for their further (re)conceptualisation.

The perspective proposed here, respecting the specific character of archaeological findings due to the so-called first reality (i.e. the complexity of post-depositional processes, such as the questions of decomposition and physical degradation of matter they consist of), would operate primarily within the framework of the so-called second reality,⁹ based on utterances and opinions, beliefs, attitudes, and dispositions established by and manifesting themselves through these utterances, as well as the views of the world which control them. This reality is a “cognitive construct” and as such is not a spatial-physical phenomenon but a “functional-semiotic, relational and systemic” and, obviously, cultural one, though “it is based on the biological system of organisms and the social system of interactions and actions and is inconceivable without these systems.”¹⁰

⁸ Material remains help in talking about a fact, quite commonly overlooked and only briefly mentioned here, that the even the most remote past also commemorated “its” past. It can be assumed then that cognitive actions consistent with the norms of scientific proceeding and with the professional rules of archaeologists contribute to recognition of various “communities of memory,” including those which existed in the past. The question of perception of the past in the past from the perspective of archaeology has been discussed, among other works, in: *Negotiating the Past in the Past: Identity, Memory and Landscape in archaeological research*, (ed.) N. Yoffee, Tucson, 2007; *Archaeologies of Remembrance: Death and Memory in Past Societies*, (ed.) H. Williams, Plenum 2003. R. Bradley, *The Past in Prehistoric Societies*, London—New York 2002.

⁹ The terms “first reality” and “second reality” were suggested and defined by M. Fleischer. See: *idem*, *Podstawy konstruktywistycznej i systemowej teorii komunikacji*, in: *Język w komunikacji*, vol. 1, ed. G. Habrajska, Łódź 2001, pp. 83-104. The term “third reality” was coined during one of the “Rozmowy o komunikacji” (“Communication Talks”) discussions, originated by prof. dr hab. A. Awdiejew and prof. dr hab. G. Habrajska.

¹⁰ M. Fleischer, *Teoria kultury i komunikacji. Systemowe i ewolucyjne podstawy*, Wrocław 2002, p. 324.

Therefore it is impossible to ignore in the suggested approach numerous inspirations,¹¹ and particularly observations included in the conception of “second degree history,”¹² being introduced on different planes of cognition. This proposition of practising history, which the French historian Pierre Nora¹³ called *histoire au second degré*, is an interesting addition to the traditional historiography. Thence the idea to treat in a similar way the signs of the secondary exploitation of what is the domain of archaeology, i.e. material traces of the past and archaeological knowledge. As far as the principal problems of second degree history are utterances manifesting themselves as “cognitive-constructive messages,”¹⁴ second degree archaeology investigates, in particular, into the specificity of the PHYSICALLY GIVEN MEANS OF COMMUNICATION and their relation to the present. To generalise and simplify, it can be assumed that as far as the domain of “second degree history” is inquiry into the human collective memories and the roles of memory in the processes which constitute collective identities, in case of second degree archaeology it is the inquiry into the memory, agency, doubtfulness of matter, focusing on their perception as possible MEANS OF COMMUNICATION (i.e. “physical data” or “communication bases”) functioning for different reasons and in different ways but both then and now.

So, if P. Nora, being a historian, illustrates the essence of the difference between “second degree history” and classical historiography as the “fundamental difference between a specific description of the Lascaux cave paintings and their analysis based on the speech, delivered by Mitterrand to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the discovery of the wall

¹¹ Works I found useful in marking out the problem orientation of the phenomena reflected upon: Don Ihde’s inspiring, though somewhat vague, conception of “material hermeneutics” and a very promising, from my point of view, field of research into the broadly understood means of transmission, i.e. Régis Debray’s “mediology.” While on the question of methods and their constant verification during field research (limited so far to participant observation, interviews, and records of the so-called biographies of things), I found indispensable the contents of works by C. Geertz, M. Herzfeld, P. Bourdieu, W.J. Burszta, and A. Mencwel.

¹² This conception has recently been presented to the Polish reader in an interesting way by K. Kończal in her article *Bliskie spotkania z historią drugiego stopnia*, in: *Pamięć zbiorowa jako czynnik integracji i źródło konfliktów*, red. A. Szpociński, Warszawa 2009, pp. 207-226.

¹³ P. Nora seems rather to inspire a certain form of research than to elaborate on the most important definitions of the categories he suggests, such as *histoire au second degré* and *lieux de mémoire*; he considers as the latter all material and ideal particles of meaning, transformed by a human will or an effort of time into a symbolic part of heritage remembered by a given community.

¹⁴ These terms will be explained in more depth later in this sketch; I introduce them following M. Fleischer, *Teoria kultury i komunikacji*, pp. 323-330.

paintings”¹⁵—then a prospective researcher of “second degree” archaeology will analyse the inseparable from natural environment physical properties of the Lascaux cave with the whole “subject environment” it contains, which determines its previous and current specificity. It would be a step to moving beyond the limiting oppositions of “subject/object,” “personal/impersonal,” “individual/common,” which are difficult to escape, because: “We are still too dependent on the philosophy of the subject to be able to reconcile *cogito* with coexistence, and so to accept that we are not alone on board (to do what we do and be who we are).”¹⁶

Therefore, in order to define the rules of construction for the theoretical models of the chosen aspects of material reality, and especially that to which it gives rise in complex social systems, it was instrumental to refer to Michael Fleischer’s conception of “reasonable constructivism.” He postulates, seeking a constructivist answer to the question of empiricity of the sciences of socially conditioned reality, to take into consideration three kinds of objects—phenomena actually—constituted by three kinds of time and space: (a) physical phenomena (but in the chosen perspective the objects of attention will remain only those which were connected to the anthropogenic dimension); (b) objects conditioned by perception; (c) communication phenomena subordinated to their times and spaces.¹⁷ As I assume this distinction, convenient for the research undertaken, allows on one hand to indicate the essence and relevance of the interaction of many factors and human individuals who shape our relations not only with material remains of the previous times but to the past as such, on the other hand to avoid various kinds of reductions. M. Fleischer observes, among other things, that “at the (a), i.e. physical level, there are no objects per se since objects can be given only for someone who either perceives or communicates.” Whereas the “perceptionally conditioned” (b) type “objects” (the limitless gamut of which contains both artefacts acquired through archaeological methods and tangible carriers of information about the past created through references to historical imagination) can in no way be reduced exclusively to the physical world. They come into being within its framework, however, and undergo processes (physical included), yet perceived in a different way each time they make subsequent achievements of subsequent systems, for which and by which they are transformed, subjected to selection and appropriate conventions.

What seems to be fundamental to the perspective adopted here and almost entirely ignored in archaeological writings dedicated to material

¹⁵ P. Nora, *Das Abenteuer „Lieux de memoire,”* [in:] Nation und Emotion. Deutschland und Frankreich im Vergleich, 19. und 20. Jahrhundert, red. F. Etienne, Göttingen, 1995, p. 86.

¹⁶ R. Debray, *Wprowadzenie do mediologii*, przeł. A. Kapciak, Oficyna Naukowa, Warszawa, 2010, p. 113.

¹⁷ M. Fleischer, *Konstrukcja rzeczywistości*, Oficyna Wydawnicza ATUT, Wrocław 2002, p. 22.

culture, are the so-called COMMUNICATIONAL OBJECTS (signs), which emerge at the social system level as part of communication and through communication, on the basis of objects conditioned by perception (c):

What is new in these objects is their semanticity, and thereby their transmittability. These objects, so cognitive-communicational constructs, show meanings and are constituted and constructed by speaking and other sign actions. Therefore, either at the perceptually conditioned level or the social level, there exists—in relation to the same section of the physical world of the same properties—never a single object but always many.¹⁸

Thus regardless of the specificity of matter per se, our knowledge about the materiality of the remains of the past does not always permit to isolate physical and anthropogenic results of its persistence. Equally uncertain, especially in case of items involved in prolonged persistence, is the distinguishing of senses and meanings attributed to items by many “cultural systems” in which they were or are involved. The accumulation of cultural processes in matter often proceeds in a way which makes abstracting and/or verbalising them significantly difficult. It should not, however, discourage anyone from, for instance, cognitive actions. K. Pomian dressed their purposefulness in these beautiful words:

A dated object, though it does not cease to be there, also belongs to a specific past, to the age it comes from. It belongs there in the sense that it carries the mark of this age, which is a part of its identity, as it sometimes bears also marks of changing fates it suffered in its history. Along with a date ascribed to it, an item gains therefore a dual temporal affiliation. It becomes a materialisation of persistence.¹⁹

It is also worth stressing here that “[t]he relative durability of artefacts helps to articulate a sense of different qualities of temporal existence and experience.”²⁰ The “past time” is usually objectivised and treated as “history” when it takes the form of durable artefacts, yet in the context of “ephemeral objects” it rises to the rank of objectivity.

Manufacturing of Efficient Tools in Scientific and Humanistic Production

Supposing that each objects “comes into being” in some “circumstances of perceptual time and space” one should assume that “every human

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 24.

¹⁹ K. Pomian, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

²⁰ A. Jones, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

perceives, interprets—most likely somewhat differently that which we designate, for example, as a cave.” Everyone “understands this notion, most likely, as something slightly different.” Fleischer observes that, in order to eliminate the phrase “most likely” from the previous sentence, we need communication:

... to negotiate first that which we think (afterwards) that we perceive in the same way, so that we may (effectively) assume that we communicate about the same, about one world, which can only be as it is and not different. Once we finally feel so, we are satisfied with what is—this fiction. It is enough for us because it functions.²¹

Since things “exist” always for a human, Identical or Different, never for themselves, the “difference of things in themselves” does not exist. What exists is the possibility of talking about them and their changeability (i.e. the changeability of senses attributed to them, among other things) in time. The anthropocentricity in perception of things is, in my opinion, inevitable and even the totality of their specificity, or the fact that denying the possibility of encountering objects is just impossible, do not change this. And yet, “things” seem to conceptually “elude” the human.

Fortunately, the historical sciences, which is typical for all the social sciences, are characterised with an enormous conceptual and methodological variety. Thence the multitude of perspectives, trends, schools, and attitudes applied to social phenomena, often quite diverse in terms of philosophical and world-view approach. Thence the tendency I always have to sketch a perspective, even if not entirely revealing, then opening, hopefully constructive and a little different from those already known, cognitive spaces for reflection on the subject of historicity of material culture and the OUTLINE OF HUMAN EXPERIENCE it contains.

By confronting the statement that it is “because of our intention that our historical heritage is being organised in an act of preparation for this very intention”²² with the assumption that material carriers of meaning offer some rather unique help in our efforts to ABSORB THE PROPOSALS OF THE WORLD—I attempt to investigate if archaeology can contribute to a better understanding of our (contemporary) intentions and relations—both interpersonal, and those with the “past” and the surrounding “matter,” as well as those whose activity does not just restore some awareness or recollection of the lost past but supplies “data” to the changing memory of the “past,” the

²¹ M. Fleischer, *Konstrukcja rzeczywistości*, p. 24.

²² L. Kołakowski, *Rozumienie historyczne i zrozumiałość zdarzenia historycznego*, in: *idem*, *Kultura i fetysze*, p. 224.

meaning of which is determined individually and collectively, tentatively and permanently, overtly and covertly through the present and in the present.²³

If it is possible to take up the idea of “sensible history,”²⁴ it is worth to establish a somewhat broader perspective on what, how, and why we should consider as “constituents of human history.” Leszek Kořakowski observes that the whole nature perceived by man should be included in history (movements of stars, solar eclipses, geological changes and atmospheric events, the flora and fauna of the world).²⁵ While adopting a significantly more modest perspective here, I would like to indicate the need to bring to attention those material carriers of meanings towards which various intentions were directed in order to understand them. And I find most interesting not the contents of narrations these “objects” triggered but the circumstances in which these studies could come into being and roles these objects played in the social process of the production of the past in the present.

²³ I develop this thread in my article *Archeologiczny „palimpsest” jako specyficzna postać interakcji teraźniejszości z...*, in: *Współczesne oblicza przeszłości*, red. D. Minta-Tworzowska, A. Marciniak, M. Pawłeta, Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, Poznań 2010, p. 113-130, where I try to demonstrate that every object the unicity of which is significant enough to treat it as an „archaeological relic” either gets caught in the gears of a precise intellectual machine or slips away from the field of professional activities. In the unpredictability space of life in the here and now, material remains entangle themselves or are included into numerous stories and are constantly redefined, which makes them present. The placement of material remains of the past in the plane of their “historicity” (and not history) sheds doubt on the possibility of generalisation of the interactions between the present and the past and encourages reflection on the signs of individualised (privatised) “experiencing” of contact with the traces of the past. Therefore the recognition of the social potential of archaeology requires insight not only into the research activities of legitimate representatives of the field but also into the causes and effects of the “interpretational imperative” among those people from outside of archaeology who initiate contact with material remains of (from) the past. This includes, among others: 1/ extra-institutional interest in the material traces of the contemporary past; 2/ relations between attitudes of the active and passive type towards the material carriers of knowledge about the past, and 3/ a confrontation with non-professional and undisciplined activities involving material remains, on the verge of archaeology. Also the investigation whether, and possibly how, archaeologists can shape the nature and consequences of the “interpretational archetype” requires some orientation in the “social landscape” of how the archaeological relics currently function and of knowledge about them. Such a research perspective belongs to the humanities, which look not for objectivity but for solidarity and therefore try to understand how people build their worlds and how they reinforce them, how they try to convince others they are telling the truth and how they defend their truth.

²⁴ “History ... becomes sensible—with that imposed sensibility of which we are authors ourselves, knowing that we are and yet seeing in it a quality of the very human world” (L. Kořakowski, *Rozumienie historyczne*, p. 225).

²⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 218-224.

Following the observations of Paul Ricoeur about the “hermeneutic function of distance,” which is a prerequisite for “understanding”—I apply his remarks on text (its structure, sense, and references) to a discussion of anthropogenic matter, which I consider synonymous with the notion of “work” proposed by Ricoeur.²⁶ And the work, which “designates” its recipients (Ricoeur’s “readers”) and creates its “subjective addressee,” is not only a thing, object, artefact but everything which happens around it and through it: “If the individual work cannot be grasped theoretically, it can be recognized as the singularity of a process, a construction, in response to a determinate situation.”²⁷

The very complexity of the situations in which the work happens (and which happen to it) makes the material traces connected to the past extraordinarily tempting in an interpretational way, as “handy:”

The primary objects of historical research are here, before our eyes, scattered in the environment or gathered in archives, museums, libraries, or even not recognised yet as such. Before they reveal themselves to us as coming from this age or that, they are contemporary to us simply because they are present. It is a fundamental circumstance which we tend to forget too often, as if the past allowed itself to be grasped differently than through objects lying within view and reach ...²⁸

This immanent PRESENCE of objects motivates us, in our contacts with the material traces, not only to talk about them (about what they are for us, how we perceive and use them) but also to make/intensify attempts to “give voice to them.” The constantly perfected technical and technological capabilities to find and underline the STATEMENTS OF MATERIAL TRACES will, theoretically

²⁶ P. Ricoeur, *Hermeneutyczna funkcja dystansu*, in: *idem*, *Język, tekst, interpretacja*. Wybór pism, przeł. K. Rozner, P. Graff, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warszawa 1989, p. 244: “Ultimately, what I appropriate is a proposed world. The latter is no *behind* the text, as a hidden intention would be, but *in front of* it, as that which the work unfolds, discovers, reveals. Henceforth, to understand is *to understand oneself in front of the text*. It is not a question of imposing upon the text our finite capacity for understanding, but of exposing ourselves to the text and receiving from it an enlarged self, which would be the proposed existence corresponding in the most suitable way to the world proposed. So understanding is quite different from a constitution of which the subject would possess the key.” Borrowing Ricoeur’s thoughts, hopefully without distorting the meaning, it can be assumed that the “I” of the recipient (archaeologist, historian, restorer, gatherer, collector, fence, museum curator, educator etc.) is constituted by the “matter of the work.” It stimulates an intention to confirm or verify the inspiring hermeneutist’s thesis that the “appropriation,” attained through the negation of the “otherness” and “distance” of the work, should happen through a metamorphosis of the “ego,” its “distanciation” from itself.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 244, 234.

²⁸ K. Pomian, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

speaking, “visualise that which has so far been invisible.”²⁹ Although this adoration of thorough analysis and detailed description may carry a risk of relapse into thoughtless empiricism, albeit in a vulgarised form, we should not be afraid of this threat and rather focus on that that “there is no new subjectivity without new memory-helping tools (*aide-mémoire*).”³⁰

The source of this optimism is that in humanities, like in social sciences, apart from the DESCRIPTIVE DIMENSION, common to all sciences—their AXIOLOGICAL DIMENSION is much more clearly developed and significant than in other sciences. The specificity of this dimension supports the view that the need to know matter is egalitarian in principle, even at the stage of appropriating the knowledge gained by others:

In case of humanities, it looks more dramatic in the axiological dimension than in other, such as mathematical, kinds of cognition. For though not everybody makes claims to participate in mathematical creations, everybody would like, because of his very human nature, to take part in the world of values.³¹

Perhaps the arguments mentioned above should be accepted as one of the premises to assign the “normative” character to social sciences, as those which “draw certain rules or principles of conduct” and those which are “always involved in the current disputes and struggles of political, ideological, and philosophical nature.”³² The otherwise utopian pursuit of a justification for

²⁹ The issues related to obtaining contents which have been unavailable before, through the use of advanced technological analysis and modern instruments, are broadly discussed by Don Ihde in his publications. Outlining of his programme of “material hermeneutics” he refers in a practical way to arguments belonging to the fields of inquiry of archaeologists, historians, sociologists of knowledge, experts in cultural studies, anthropologists, as well as physicists, chemists and technologists, see: D. Ihde, *Expanding Hermeneutics: Visualism in Science*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 1999.

³⁰ R. Debray, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

³¹ Meanwhile, „there is an insensitivity, dullness and blindness of the axiological insight, which does not allow to comprehend even an existentially important fragment.” Even in 1930s, N. Hartman noticed: “In science nothing is given. Although the good it produces lie in the view of everyone, not every sight is able to see them. This vision is what is given. What everybody can do is to enforce it. It is a hard law. It makes the spiritual good impossible to transfer to those who are unable to possess it. This law also excludes such a man from the community of those who partake in this good.” (Quoted after: M. Grabowski, *op. cit.*, p. 84.)

³² J. Such, *Problemy klasyfikacji nauk*, in: *Nauki pogranicza*, (ed.) E. Zielonacka-Lis, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Instytutu Filozofii UAM, Poznań 1998, p. 45. In the context of that article, the perspective introduced here can be assigned the characteristics of an “integrative science,” i.e. one which comes into being at the boundary of previously existing and not necessarily related sciences (as in the case of “contact sciences”—the term coined by J. Such), believed so far to be quite remote. A fusion of various aspects, previously conceived separately, in its own object of research offers an opportunity to research connections between phenomena of different levels, previously studied as separate. J. Such lists in the number of integrative

the normativity of any human sciences is based on, among other things, the weak anthropic principle, which determines a prolific method for studying the world history. This principle, whose starting point is the acceptance of the human existence as the fundamental fact, encourages posing questions about “what kind of restrictions are imposed on (which conditions must be met by) the observer/researcher if the world is as the modern science describes it? What the subject of cognition cannot be in the view of scientific knowledge? Which types of the subjects of cognition does science exclude?”³³

There is still something lacking, though, in the discovering of connections between people and things, their mutual “entanglements.” Choosing “methodological reism”³⁴ as one’s cognitive bearing turns out to be helpful. It allows the questions about the materiality of the carriers of meanings and memory, only a part of which belong to the field of research of archaeology, history of material culture, anthropology of things etc., to be considered as controlling questions. Even that is conditioned, however, by the “anthropic principle.” Although it has been expanded with the assumption of the immanence of the connection between man and items/material carriers of culture,³⁵ the fact that “there is no creating of values ... which would not be”³⁶ is still being overlooked.

Should we accept that—as Andrew Jones has it—“[t]he relative durability of artefacts helps to articulate a sense of different qualities of temporal existence and experience”³⁷ of both individuals and human groups, we may assume that objects involved in specific social practices in the past and in the present hold a great potential.

sciences, beside cybernetics and synergetics, also information theory, communication theory, general systems theory, and science studies (comprehensive metascience) (*ibidem*, p. 46).

³³ E. Zielonacka-Lis, *Wstęp*, in: *Nauki pogranicza*, (ed.) E. Zielonacka-Lis, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Instytutu Filozofii UAM, Poznań 1998, p. 7.

³⁴ In which, according to T. Kotarbiński’s classic understanding, every rational expression should relate to a specific thing.

³⁵ This in turn, should the perspective be limited to sciences of the past, allows to pose such questions as: Which conditions must be met (what are the limitations of) a thing/material carrier of information so that the past world should appear as modern science describes it? What a thing “bearing witness of the past” can (not) be in the face of scientific knowledge? What kinds of relations with the material traces of the past (statements about them, displayed tendencies to experience them, circumstances of their alienation or destruction) does science prefer/cuddle and what kinds of relations does it exclude as hardly or not at all constructive for “studying the past”? Finally, to which conclusions may lead the identification of similarities and differences in the treatment of the “reality” (which I understand to be a result of communication, i.e. a construct) bearing witness of “the past” by the participants of the social life?

³⁶ R. Debray, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

³⁷ A. Jones, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

A True Reification, in Other Words, in Which the Produced Thing is Secured Once and for All...

The opportunity for generalisation in the inquiry into the interactions between the man and the objects from the past ends once we realise that our interactions with the material world are organised and understood only in relation to our own timespans. This is first and foremost affected by the awareness of, on one hand, the egotism of the anthropocentric point of view, and on the other hand, of the change of “pace” of the relations between people and objects. A seemingly interesting proposal was made by Dany Miller, who, having noticed significant connections between people, their identity, and the materiality of artefacts, suggests that the determinants of the human interaction with the material remains of the past can be considered elements of a certain continuum, which bears witness to the rationality of connections between humans and objects.³⁸ The author identifies three perspectives: The first is the perspective of “longevity,” which is related to the extensive experience of the humankind and the placement of an individual in broad historical patterns. In the temporal frame, artefacts become carriers, in this perspective, through which individuals try to transcend the frames of their temporal limitations. The second perspective is characterised by an “equivalence” of persons and items, and artefacts can serve within it as a commentary to the life stories of individuals. The third perspective identified is that of “transience”; artefacts are considered there to be more “ephemeral” in comparison to humans and the emphasis is on the manner how people adapt on the spot to the ever changing character of things. This distinction works perfectly in arranging the network of meanings imposed onto specific material items in the present and allows us “by the long detour of the signs of humanity deposited in cultural works”³⁹ not only to understand ourselves but also to notice, among others, the mediatory functions of “works”/objects in our understanding of them.

Thence the perspective suggested here is based on indicating and cognitively exploiting such phenomena/constructs/“messages”⁴⁰ which

³⁸ D. Miller, *Artefacts and the Meaning of Things*, [in:] Companion Encyclopedia of Anthropology, (ed.) T. Ingold, London 1994, pp. 409-415.

³⁹ P. Ricoeur, *op. cit.*, p. 243.

⁴⁰ These messages are present in at least two forms: as INDIVIDUAL MESSAGES produced by individuals in an act of individual concretization, which, for the science of culture, (1) are interesting because of the mechanism of their construction and production, (2) as culturally relevant “collective messages,” i.e. as units present in the cultural space which interact in it, the knowledge of which, as one of the factors of affiliation to a specific manifestation of culture, is essential, the combination, condition, and meaning of which for the specific

would be unthinkable without any material carriers/transmitters. I assume that if the material traces (perceived/understood as traces of the past and as anthropogenic in nature) become entangled in, among others, various referential systems and, if they show susceptibility to social interaction and are reactivated at some point because of it, they may be considered significant both in the analysis of “argumentative discourse”⁴¹ of the sciences of the past and in the extent where they become interesting as statements to modern individuals and social groups.

Activities related to material culture fit the broad frameworks of various “referential structures.” This issue is raised by Christopher Gosden, among others, who noticed that actions in which remains of the past are involved, although directed towards the past, are oriented towards the future.⁴² It may be fair to assume that all “material practices” (the physical discovery of finds, as well as their classification, cognitive interpretation, even thoughtless interaction, etc.) form a particular “temporal structure” which does not fit either in the frame of the present, the past or the future but is contained in a “palimpsest” of superimposed and complementing each other, and sometimes nullifying, temporalities. This temporal kink may (though it does not have to) guarantee an ennoblement of things through their subsequent reactivation leading to their “true reification.”⁴³

Concluding Remarks

To generalise, it could be said that inquiring into the causes and effects of different kinds of reactivating matter associated, among others, with the past allows to show the entanglement of this very matter in the contemporary culture entangled in broadly understood matter: “What we have got on the surface are remains, traces, fragments of time, which we are incessantly

manifestation of culture is not controllable individually or changeable. Collective messages (and other constructs) are given, are socialised the way they are, and control the bearing of the specific manifestation of culture (Fleischer, *Konstrukcja rzeczywistości*, p. 324). This distinction should be considered dynamic, however. In the historical process, that which is individual may be interpreted as normative and the other way round. Therefore the motion to cognitively celebrate ideography seems legitimate.

⁴¹ I understand this term as proposed by W. Wrzosek (*idem, O myśleniu historycznym*, Oficyna Wydawnicza Epigram, Bydgoszcz 2009).

⁴² Ch. Gosden, *Social Being and Time*, Oxford 1994, pp. 15-17, 124.

⁴³ H. Arendt, *op. cit.*, p. 166.

involving in all our lives and which we are constantly adapting to new circumstances.”⁴⁴

In the context of this observation it is hard to deny the accuracy of the opinion that even “archaeologists work on what is left of the past; we do not discover the past. We set up relationships with what remains.”⁴⁵

In this sense archaeology is and will be a source of knowledge, meanings and senses for the “second degree history.” Still, archaeology has some additional potential, so to say (as well as tools, methods, trial spaces), to inquire into the peculiar “memory of matter”/“material memory”/“materialised memory.”

Objects in which time was recorded, or more precisely—material units in which a memory of some moment in time was recorded, are characterised by Laurent Olivier as *objets—mémoire*.⁴⁶ It is fair to assume, I think, that “archaeological” memory consists, with equal significance, of both the memory about objects and the memory of objects, the latter in constant interaction with human memory.

To summarise, a researcher pursuing second degree archaeology would not be occupied with the placement of artefacts in the process of justification and would not strengthen the cognitive status of archaeology by doing so. He would rather ask about that which is not always noticeable by itself, i.e. among others:

- 1) ABOUT THE REASONS WHY THE “PRESENCE” OF MATTER IS SIGNIFICANT (HOW, THROUGH WHAT AND WHY THIS SIGNIFICANCE MANIFESTS ITSELF) IN THE ARGUMENTATIVE DISCOURSES OF THE SCIENCES OF THE FUTURE;
- 2) ABOUT THE INFLUENCE THE THINGS FROM THE PAST DISCOVERED AND SITUATED IN THE PRESENT HAVE ON THEIR RECIPIENTS AND ON “THEMSELVES” (E.G. IF THERE IS A PROBLEM OF NEUTRALISATION OR AMPLIFICATION OF MESSAGES READ “FROM” VARIOUS THINGS);
- 3) ABOUT THE LOT AND STATUS OF THE MATERIAL REMAINS OF THE PAST IN THE SOCIAL IMAGINARIUM; AND INDIRECTLY ABOUT THE MEANINGS OF THE “PAST” IN THE PRESENT, ABOUT THE SOCIAL

⁴⁴ L. Olivier, *Le sombre abîme du temps: mémoire et archéologie*, Paris 2008, s. 86, 100.

⁴⁵ M. Shanks, *Digital Media, Agile Design, and the Politics of Archaeological Authorship*, [in:] *Archaeology and the Media*, [eds.] T. Clack, M. Brittain, Walnut Creek 2007, p. 273.

⁴⁶ L. Olivier, *op. cit.*, pp. 198–201. Should archaeology be considered not as a form of history but of memory, it would inquire not (only) into the individual memory or the collective memory but the “material memory”: “La matière archéologique est une mémoire matérielle et la mémoire est une propriété de tout ce qui naît, croît et disparaît : comme tout ce qui vit et meurt, l’existence de la matière archéologique est tendue entre l’éphémère et la répétition. Nos existances sont provisoires, comme le sont nos créations matérielles.” (*Ibid.*, p. 59.)

STATUS OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE AND ARCHAEOLOGY AS A DISCIPLINE, ABOUT THE CAUSES AND EFFECTS OF PURSUING IT IN THIS WAY AND NOT ANOTHER;

- 4) ABOUT THE MANIFESTATIONS AND EFFECTS OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE “PAST” AS A SOCIAL HISTORICAL CONSTRUCTION AND THINGS PERCEIVED AND GIVEN SENSE IN THE PRESENT WORLD;
- 5) ABOUT IF/HOW TRANSMISSIONS OF DIFFERENT TYPES (ACADEMIC, POPULARISING, ETC.) MIGHT CONTRIBUTE TO ENNOBLEMENT, TO APPRECIATION/PROTECTION OF THE MATERIAL REMAINS OF THE PAST, CONSIDERING THEIR SIMULTANEOUS FRAGILITY AND DURABILITY.

In order that the answers to the posed question could be considered as giving insight into the social status of the knowledge about the past, and thus into the condition of the present, they should be, in my opinion, systematically enlarged with observations (difficult from the perspective of archaeologist and historian because strongly rooted in sociology, mediology, ethnology) of the space of non-academic “exploitation” of the material traces of the past. Avoiding this domain would weaken, I cannot tell yet how severely, the suggested perspective of second degree archaeology because of the fact that the “past” is here and now, is everywhere. Its material remains fill the world with their presence, so that it is just at hand, even if not always handy.

I leave unresolved, at this stage, the dilemma if the archaeology of reactivated matter/ “second degree” archaeology should take into consideration elements of the “third reality,” composed of radically transformed and often self-contradictory opinions on the matter taken into account here. I would like to emphasise, however, that even if this “third reality” is unstable and incidental⁴⁷ and its objects disappear quite often and quickly from, for instance, mass media and social awareness, the perspective of examining them is tempting. For it seems that it is through linguistic, visual, performative etc. approaches to material cultural objects, which undergo extra-scientific valuation and as such only rarely appear in archaeological discourse—that it is possible to understand more fully the interactions between humans and objects.

The considerations presented above can be situated in the space called “archaeological inquiry” only with difficulty. They may, however, find their place in the space of “second degree history.” They may also prove important for the understanding of social beliefs and superstitions concerning the “past” and help in determining communicative and social competences of

⁴⁷ See: A. Awdziejew, *Konstruowanie trzeciej rzeczywistości*, [w:] *Mechanizmy perswazji i manipulacji. Zagadnienia ogólne*, ed. G. Habrajska, Łask 2007, pp. 95-104.

archaeologists, among others. Now, what can we do with such knowledge? It may enrich and problematize our awareness of particular forms of (the lack of) interest in the past/pasts, among others in the modern cultural system. It may also be helpful in justifying the reasons to practicing humanities, which would be interested in human views and why they are propagated.⁴⁸ I assume it to be insomuch significant that:

... the lack of self-knowledge concerning one's own place on earth cannot be replaced by anything, and it is tantamount to the lack of internal inspiration to one's own creation, which is then threatened by that professional sterilisation, which brings more destructive outcomes to humanities than to any other area of social life.⁴⁹

The projected result of the perspective outlined above is the revalorisation of the complex nature of the material traces of the past, as well as the ability to perceive the varied ways to appropriate them, (ab)use them, functionalise them, and make them attractive in the process of production of the past for the society and by the society.

⁴⁸ M.P. Markowski, who authored this thesis, argues that thinking about the scientificity of the humanities is deadly to them and it would be best if the humanities stopped thinking about it at all. Into the message of so-understood "humanities," he vigorously includes the need to "understand other people: their needs, their passions, their conceptual systems, their language," claiming that "it is possible to be a humanist not believing at all that humanities are a science." (M.P. Markowski, *Inne światy. Inne prawdy*, „Znak,” 2009, no. 653, pp. 80-91)

⁴⁹ L. Kołakowski, *Kultura i fetysze*, PWN, Warszawa 2009, p. 261.

