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Introducing the First Voice

Seeking the Thread: Archaeology as Storytelling

At a dinner arranged by a friend, I listened with delight to a senior colleague, a principal authority on the oral traditions of a South American indigenous group. I had never met my dinner companion before, and had only his previous writings to frame my expectations. These were scholarly works in the best university tradition, and included editions of the major creation myths told by the indigenous group.

I listened fascinated as our senior colleague described how the goal of publishing these stories required him and his collaborators to follow the single "thread" that continued through what in actual performance was a dynamic, dialogic storytelling event. As he described it, members of the community gathered to hear the storyteller recount a familiar epic, but far from listening passively, they directed the storyteller's account through their own interventions. My colleague described people asking for specific episodes that they enjoyed, and challenging the storyteller's version, "reminding" the narrator of details he did not include, sometimes picking up the story themselves to set the record straight (compare Norrick 1997). All this dynamic ended up filtered out, in pursuit of the narrative line, the thread of a continuous, common account of the past.

Archaeology at its best is like the event of storytelling that my colleague described. Our published accounts are woefully inadequate at conveying the actual contingency and dialogue that underlies every statement we make.

That archaeological *writing* is storytelling is a commonplace observation by now, although it continues to be resisted. I would like to suggest that even archaeologists most sympathetic to this point have for the most part overlooked the storytelling that is purely internal to

our discipline and that precedes the formalization of stories in lectures, books, museum exhibitions, videos, or electronic media. Fieldwork is not a simple process of transcription of what is in the ground, a transcription that might be expected to have some stability across observers (compare Gero 1996, Hodder 1999: 66–70, 80–98). Fieldwork (like lab work and other forms of archaeological transcription) involves a negotiation of meaning, a re-presentation of some things in the present as traces of other things in the past. Again, this is archaeological commonplace. But who negotiates meaning, and with whom, and how?

In 1994, as a crew of undergraduates, graduate students, and local laborers with multiple seasons of excavation experience worked under the direction of a colleague and myself at a site in northern Honduras, strange traces of burned earth, polished clay, contrasts in texture, and minor inclusions emerged all around us. The excavators acted as sculptors, freeing an image from within the mass, in their confrontation with the low, tell-like site, which had already been extensively altered by earth-moving machinery before we arrived. My codirector and I encouraged our students to formally recognize anything they felt was distinctive in their transcriptions of the traces in the ground into two-dimensional records, and to defer concern with the final decision about whether certain differences made a difference or not. In practice, what this meant was that each move became debatable; undergraduate participants and graduate staff both engaged in questioning what they were seeing, and whether there "really" were differences. No amount of urging that any perceptible and describable change could be acknowledged could override the belief on the part of the student participants that part of their job was to discard some differences *from the beginning*. In this, I submit, our student participants were conforming to the genre of fieldwork, a genre that carries with it the notion that excavators flag meaningful "features" at a low level of interpretation, but still as the result of an interpretation. Our failure to compel an alternative procedure was not mysterious, because our students were engaged in a dialogue with much more authoritative voices than ours. They were negotiating these decisions not (primarily) with us, nor with each other, but with the history of the discipline as they heard it.

And we, of course, were doing the same. Our unique task in the division of field labor was the assessment of the differences recognized by our student participants and their rejoining in Harris matrices interpreting the depositional history of the site. The dialogic character of this process was inescapable because we are codirectors, and

thus give literal voice to different arguments: but like our students, part of what we uttered were disembodied voices from our disciplinary pasts. One day, contemplating a U-shaped, fire-hardened feature in the wall of a road-cut, I heard myself virtually chanting the list of possible identifications: "It could be the vent of a kiln, like the one I excavated at Travesía, but that one didn't slope. Didn't Doris Stone report some strange tubular features next to one of the small platforms she described at Travesía?"

These were the fragments of storytelling that would, in other circumstances, without a literal audience, simply have run through my mind. They were like in kind to the fragmentary storytelling in which our student participants engaged as they struggled to make their own decisions to recognize their own perceptions as real. And our student participants expected that one of our roles would be to arbitrate, to guide their own murmuring by connecting it to voices from the disciplinary past, like those that run constantly through my consciousness when I am at work.

Like the retelling of the oral histories of South American peoples by the senior folklorist in my opening anecdote, archaeological work begins with storytelling, and the clamor of a multitude of voices goes into the final consistent thread we trace. Contemporary normative expectations of archaeological genres erase the dialogic production of knowledge in favor of images of hierarchically structured authority. These hierarchies lead not only to local, current authorities – field directors, lab directors, authors, and senior authors – but to the weight of what has traditionally been thought and "known". Archaeology as storytelling is intertextual, and like other forms of intertextual narrative, it has always been collaborative and dialogic.

Archaeology: Writing and Language

James Deetz (1988a: 15–20), following Walter Taylor (1948: 34–5), has drawn attention to an ambiguity of the term "archaeology," which subsumes two different sets of practices. On one hand, the word conjures up images of the fieldworker (less commonly, lab worker) discovering the material traces of past societies. In this sense, archaeology is the capturing of data by uniquely qualified leaders of campaigns (chapter 2). But archaeology is also the covering term for "the writing of contexts from the material culture of past actuality" (Deetz 1988: 18). Deetz, and Taylor before him, sought to draw much-needed attention to the duality of the meaning of "archaeology" in order to

insist that the writing of archaeology was as integral to the production of archaeological knowledge as encounters in the field (see also Deetz 1989, Baker, Taylor, and Thomas 1990, Sinclair 1989).

While endorsing the importance of such self-consciousness, I also suggest in the pages that follow that the use of a single term for both aspects of archaeological knowledge construction reveals something fundamental about the inseparability of these different practices for the discipline. Writing pervades archaeology, from the creation of field notes and other records of research observations to the creation of informal and formal presentations. Archaeology is continually being scripted and rescripted from previous fragments, both in these writing practices and in its other embodied activities. The acts of recognition through which we identify particular material traces as evidence to be recorded, prior to their inscription, are bound up in the dialogic production of narrative. Via this process an archaeologist engages, more or less consciously, in dialogues with the prior utterances of other archaeological subjects (chapter 3). The representation in written texts of the constant dialogic transactions that actually constitute archaeology as a field (discipline) should not obscure the fact that each text is simply a material form for one segment of the ongoing narrative crafting of disciplinary objects and disciplinary subjects (chapter 4). The production and circulation of physical texts is in part a material means to mark out the boundaries of archaeology as a field (of discourse). Increasingly, archaeological practitioners have been forced to recognize the permeability of these boundaries and the ways archaeological dialogues echo beyond them (chapter 5).

The dual sense of "archaeology," then, requires simultaneous consideration of all the embodied acts through which archaeological knowledge is constructed, including the writing of archaeological texts. In the pages that follow, I suggest that the conceptual vocabulary and approach of Mikhail Bakhtin can help clarify questions of how and why multiple-voiced stories created in the act of archaeology are simplified in the writing of archaeological texts, and why it matters that archaeologists attempt to recapture the multi-voicedness of the experience of constructing archaeological knowledge (chapter 6).

Michael Holquist (1990: 14–15) characterizes the binding element in the highly complex and diverse work of Mikhail Bakhtin as "a pragmatically oriented theory of knowledge; . . . one of several modern epistemologies that seek to grasp human behavior through the use humans make of language. Bakhtin's distinctive place among these is specified by the dialogic concept of language he proposes as

fundamental." Dialogue is the concept Bakhtin employs when speaking of the formation of the self, which occurs only through engagement with an other (Todorov 1984: 29–34, Holquist 1990: 21–33). Through the concept of "answerability" Bakhtin (1993) presents dialogue as essentially ethical. Bakhtin developed his concept of dialogue most completely in his studies of the novel (Bakhtin 1981, 1984). These works are not unrelated to the project of understanding the creation of narratives in archaeology, a point I will return to below. But Bakhtin also explored the implications of dialogue for the human sciences, discussions which directly underwrite the use I make of his work in this book.

In "Toward a Methodology for the Human Sciences," Bakhtin (1986: 161) writes:

> The exact sciences constitute a monologic form of knowledge: the intellect contemplates a *thing* and expounds upon it. There is only one subject here – cognizing (contemplating) and speaking (expounding). In opposition to the subject there is only a *voiceless thing*. Any object of knowledge (including [a human being]) can be perceived and cognized as a thing. But a subject as such cannot be perceived and studied as a thing, for as a subject it cannot, while remaining a subject, become voiceless, and consequently, cognition of it can only be *dialogic*.

Dialogue here has a particular meaning: "double-voicedness" (see Bakhtin 1981: 434, 1984: 185–6):

> No living word relates to its object in a *singular* way: between the word and its object, between the word and the speaking subject, there exists an elastic environment of other, alien words about the same object, the same theme. . . . Any concrete discourse (utterance) finds the object at which it was directed already as it were overlain with qualifications, open to dispute, charged with value, already enveloped in an obscuring mist – or, on the contrary, by the "light" of alien words that have already been spoken about it. It is entangled, shot through with shared thoughts, points of view, alien value judgements and accents. (Bakhtin 1981: 276)

Todorov (1984: 49–56) argues that Bakhtin's notion of discourse as dialogue or double-voicedness is based on seeing language as a relation between, at a minimum, three parties: the speaker, the listener to whom the utterance is addressed, and an other or others who have already used the words employed and in the process endowed them with the quality of double-voicedness, of already having been made meaningful. Bakhtin's dialogue requires a society of speakers and the

listeners they address in expectation of receiving a response, which always evaluates, critiques, confirms, contests, or reinflects the received utterance.

The dialogic model consequently requires the assumption of a complex model of communication and meaning-making which, I suggest, is particularly appropriate for contemporary archaeology. In particular, it offers an alternative to the either/or of structural abstraction or individualism. In "Discourse in the Novel" Bakhtin (1981: 269–80) proposes his notion of double-voicedness in direct contrast to structuralist and formalist linguistic theory, which he indicts for conceiving of language only at either the level of a whole system or of an individual producing monologic utterances. Instead, he argues that it is imperative to understand that language derives meaning in utterances which are dialogic, taking place between speaking subjects and addressed, and thus potentially answering, subjects:

> The word [discourse] (or in general any sign) is interindividual. . . . The word [discourse] cannot be assigned to a single speaker. The author (speaker) has his own inalienable right to the word [discourse], but the listener also has his rights, and those whose voices are heard in the word before the author comes upon it also have their rights. . . . The word [discourse] is a drama in which three characters participate. (Bakhtin 1986: 121–2; alternatives in brackets after Todorov 1984: 52)

Todorov (1984: 94–112) insists particularly on the importance in Bakhtin's thought of the dialogic other, who is necessary for the completion of the self and the creation of meaning in texts. Dialogue is opposed to monologism:

> Monologism, at its extreme, denies the existence outside itself of another consciousness with equal rights and responsibilities, another *I* with equal rights (*thou*). With a monologic approach (in its extreme or pure form) *another person* remains wholly and merely an *object* of consciousness, and not another consciousness. No response is expected from it that could change everything in the world of my consciousness. Monologue is finalized and deaf to the other's response, does not expect it and does not acknowledge in it any *decisive* force. Monologue manages without the other, and therefore to some degree materializes [objectivizes] all reality. Monologue pretends to be the *ultimate word*. It closes down the represented world and represented persons. (Bakhtin 1984: 292–3; alternatives in brackets after Todorov 1984: 107)

A dialogic perspective, consequently, is especially apt for the attempt to represent some degree of autonomy of human subjects in

the texts created in the human sciences (Bakhtin 1986: 103–31). It is also a useful way to place specific texts in their disciplinary context and acknowledge their lack of closure:

> The transcription of thinking in the human sciences is always the transcription of a special kind of dialogue: the complex interrelations between the *text* (the object of study and reflection) and the created, framing *context* (questioning, refuting, and so forth) in which the scholar's cognizing and evaluating thought takes place. This is the meeting of two texts – of the ready-made and the reactive text being created – and, consequently, the meeting of two subjects and two authors. (Bakhtin 1986: 106–7)

The "ready-made" texts of the human sciences are explicitly defined as including "any coherent complex of signs," including performed gestures (Bakhtin 1986: 103, 106), a point to which we will return.

Dialogue is the overarching concept that pervades Bakhtin's work. It is so central and multiple in its meanings (Morson and Emerson 1990: 49–52) that it is apt to slip through our fingers. The means through which dialogue is realized are, in contrast, somewhat easier to define and identify in practice. Key concepts are heteroglossia and polyphony. All words, all speech, all utterances, come to hand already endowed with the "light" of use in other contexts. Heteroglossia, the term used to translate the Russian word employed by Bakhtin (1981: 428), refers to the presence in "any single national language" of multiple speech types, "social dialects, characteristic group behavior, professional jargons, generic languages, languages of generations and age groups, tendentious languages, languages of the authorities, of various circles and of passing fashions, languages that serve the specific sociopolitical purposes of the day, even of the hour," an "internal stratification" specific to a particular place and time (Bakhtin 1981: 262–3). This stratification of any single language is intentionally employed in performance, and in transcription in texts, to convey meaning, and is integral to the communicative event represented by an oral or written utterance (Bakhtin 1981: 288–96). Contemporary archaeology is experiencing particularly intense heteroglossia, with its multiple scientific dialects juxtaposed to the highly charged common-language meanings of words (particularly words like history, culture, race, and origin) and the resignification of both technical and common-language words in heteroglossic use within different communities to which archaeology is meaningful.

One of the goals of the chapters that follow is to identify and illustrate the stratification of the languages of archaeology in con-

temporary practice. Another is to examine how various authors have responded to the recognition of archaeological heteroglossia in their own production of new texts. Particularly interesting in this regard are self-conscious attempts by some archaeologists to engage others across the stratification of language (for example, Bender 1998). Bakhtin (1984) coined the term "polyphony" for the representation of multiple distinct languages (heteroglossia) with equal integrity, in his study of Dostoevsky's novels. Within archaeology, experiments with similar aims have more commonly used the term "multivocality" (see the comments by Ruth Tringham in Bender 1998: 86–7; compare Hodder 1999: 159–61, 173, 183, 195). Multivocality will be retained here as the term for the archaeological practice whose goal is to achieve Bakhtin's polyphony.

The differentiation of heteroglossia and polyphony in Bakhtin's work underlines the necessity to examine whether multivocality in archaeology truly incorporates significant degrees of difference in language, or simply represents multiple instances of the same language assigned to multiple versions of the author. Polyphonic narratives are marked by the autonomy and strength of the voices, which are represented as engaged in open-ended dialogue where ultimate values are in play but necessarily cannot be finalized. If the multiple voices in a polyphonic text are not at least potentially capable of achieving a degree of autonomy that engages their difference in dialogue, then in place of polyphony the text offers only an image of repeated monologues. The goal of multivocality in archaeology has been to achieve polyphony, but this has not always been the outcome (Pluciennik 1999: 667).

The distinction between heteroglossia and polyphony is also crucial to the project of recovering the already existing multiplicity of languages that even the most univocal archaeological texts incorporate. Archaeology does not operate in isolation from other heteroglossic languages, and it has always worked to embed its own specific dialects in dialogue with other prestige and common languages. The language of positivist science that Americanist archaeology borrowed in the 1960s is only one very obvious example of this kind of engagement (Binford 1968, Fritz and Plog 1970; see Wylie in press: Chs 3–4). The programmatic texts which called for hypothesis-testing and the construction of general covering laws, while in no obvious way polyphonic, were intensely heteroglossic: the words employed had already been given meaning and value in other narratives, and their reproduction as indirect and direct cited speech in archaeological texts engaged their users in other dialogues. The use

of conceptual terms from outside archaeology by post-processual authors like Shanks and Tilley (1987) can be seen as a repetition of the introduction of a new external language into archaeology.

The new heteroglossia distinctive of post-processual archaeology was well understood by critics as marking out an oppositional community based on the ability to speak a specific dialect. Yoffee and Sherratt's (1993: 5–6) characterization of this move as "mining" other fields can perhaps be viewed as an embodiment of a desire for a separate archaeological "national" language (in Bakhtin's terms) in which meaning would be independent of other languages. But while the heteroglossia of the self-conscious programmatic writing of processual and post-processual archaeologists may be overtly obvious, heteroglossia is inescapable so long as the words we use circulate in and out of society at large. "The author (speaker) has his own inalienable right to the word, but the listener also has his rights, and those whose voices are heard in the word before the author comes upon it also have their rights" (Bakhtin 1986: 121).

Archaeology: Dialogue–Narrative–Text

Bakhtin's theoretical vocabulary has been widely used in literary studies to examine fictional texts, as well as in the analysis of the texts created by social or natural scientists to represent their understandings of the nonfictional phenomena they study (see Billig 1993, Hill 1995, Mandelker 1995, Mannheim and Tedlock 1995, McDermott and Tylbor 1995, Tannen 1995, Trawick 1988, Weiss 1990). If, following Hayden White (1987: 44–46), we allow that the boundary between fictional texts and historiographic texts is less impermeable than sometimes proposed, it is possible to use the experience of literary critics with Bakhtinian concepts as a guide to their utility in examining archaeological narrative (see also Price 1999: 19–34). To do so requires some beginning discrimination of narrative from discourse, dialogue, and text.

> In the most general terms, to narrate is to tell a story . . . narration of any kind involves the recounting and shaping of events . . . narration has an essential temporal dimension . . . narrative imposes structure; it connects as well as records . . . Finally, for every narrative, there is a narrator, real or implied or both. Stories don't just exist, they are told, and not just told but told from some perspective or other. Already we have four basic dimensions of all narrative: time, structure, voice, and point of view. (Lamarque 1990: 131)

White (1987: 2) espouses a relatively restricted definition of narrative, as a story with a beginning, middle, and end, in support of his general argument that historical narratives in this strict sense are always products of, and arguments for, some threatened social order. Some aspects of his discussion of these concomitants of historical narratives are particularly useful for a consideration of archaeological texts, and will return in the dialogues that follow. Most useful is his distinction between historical narratives (stories) and narrativizing (telling), based on the work of Gérard Genette (1980, 1988). White cites a discussion by Genette of Emile Benveniste's contrast between *histoire* and *discours*, in which Genette argued that *histoire* is distinguished by "the exclusive use of the third person and of such forms as the preterite and the pluperfect," through which the "objectivity of narrative is defined by the absence of all reference to the narrator" (White 1987: 2–3). Thus for White, the historical narrative is specifically that of an apparently objective speaker recounting what happened: beginning, middle, and end.

While useful for White's purposes, this particular formulation is almost the reverse of Genette's general model of narrative, which is fundamental to the present study. Genette (1988: 13–14) distinguishes between story (narrated events), narrative (the oral or written discourse that tells events), and narration (the act of telling events). He specifically repudiates his own collapse of Benveniste's *histoire* into narrative (*récit*). Genette emphasizes the inseparability of the three terms he employs – story, narrative, and narration – in specific contrast to the Russian Formalist dichotomy story/plot (Propp 1968), which has been the touchstone for pioneering studies of narrative in physical anthropology (Landau 1991) and archaeology (Pluciennik 1999). Genette (1988: 14–15) suggests that in historical narrative "the actual order is obviously *story* (the completed events), *narrating* (the narrative act of the historian), *narrative.*" That "obviously" is immediately challenged: "But has a pure fiction ever existed? And a pure nonfiction? The answer in both cases is obviously negative" (Genette 1988: 15). Genette proceeds to distinguish between clearly fictional and nonfictional narratives, not in terms of grammatical voice or tense, but in terms of substantiation *by an auditor/reader*: "the typically modal query 'How does the author know that?' does not have the same meaning in fiction as in nonfiction. In nonfiction, the historian must provide evidence and documents . . ." (Genette 1988: 15).

This formulation recalls Bakhtin's (1993: 1–2, 8–19) comments about the relation between always-ongoing Being-as-Event and its representations, in which representation cannot be set free from

events. The closed nature of historical narrative, as White defines it, and as conceived of in most historiographic writing, is intensely problematic to the extent that the narrative claims to be an accurate or truthful account (in Bakhtin's 1993: 4–5 terms, "veridical"). One advantage of the Bakhtinian conceptual approach adopted here is that it insists that relative truthfulness does matter, through the concept of *answerability* (Bakhtin 1993: 2–428–9). The Russian word used can also be translated as *responsibility*, implying both the demand that dialogue makes for a response, and the ethical weight of making a response (Holquist 1990: 152–5, Morson and Emerson 1990: 25–7). Over Bakhtin's career, his concerns moved from discussions more consistent with the translation "responsibility" to those concerned with the demand for a reply, but even in these latter, more literary formulations, the concept of responsibility for *making* a reply and for the *nature* of that reply was retained (Morson and Emerson 1990: 76).

Bakhtin rejected extreme relativist and determinist positions concerning history as literally irresponsible, and demanded that history be considered as both open, or unfinalizable, and still partly ordered (Morson and Emerson 1990: 43–9). I will consider implications of this insistence on the underdetermined nature of each moment for the creation of archaeological narratives in later chapters. For now, it is most important to note that use of Bakhtin's framework requires that archaeologists treat the choice of specific stories about the past as having real consequences for which we are responsible, because our narratives are addressed dialogically to another whose reaction we intend to provoke. A similar point is made by White (1987: 26–57), who argues that historical narratives, as they transform events into story, do so in a way that is given meaning through deliberate evocation of evaluative responses colored by experience of specific generic literary forms. "The historical narrative does not, as narrative, dispel false beliefs about the past, human life, the nature of the community, and so on; what it does is test the capacity of a culture's fictions to endow real events with the kinds of meaning that literature displays" (White 1987: 45).

White's concept of the historical narrative is obviously useful in beginning to raise issues archaeology must also address. Equally relevant is work on narrative by Roland Barthes, to which White (1987: 1–2, 35, 37–8, 42–3) refers. Barthes (1977c) provided a fully-developed structuralist methodology for the analysis of narratives in written texts, including historical texts (Barthes 1981), that proposed crucial relationships between the writer and reader. For Barthes, the meaning in narrative texts was immanent but not closed; the writer's work

shaped a potential which the reader invoked by acts of recognition. The reader's experience and knowledge threaded through the text, promoting its understanding as a story. Bakhtin argued that structuralist and semiotic accounts that reduced communication to encoding and decoding meanings were fundamentally flawed (Morson and Emerson 1990: 50–1, 57–8). To the extent that we can take Barthes to be describing a manner of engagement through texts that produced meaning, rather than a methodology based on "decoding" finalized meanings encoded in texts by authors, his work is compatible with that of Bakhtin, who can be considered to be advocating a practice- or performance-based form of semiotics (Jefferson 1989, Danow 1991: 10, 34–5).

The texts Barthes examined conform generally to White's definition of a narrative as having a beginning, middle, and end. They do so not solely because they were constructed in that form by their author, but because the reader completes the story through his or her reading; a narrative ends because the reader provides it a provisional finality. A similar provisional finalization, conceived of as one of many possible finalities, all constrained by the text and so in no way subject to an absolute relativism, was called for in Bakhtin's discussions of the responsibility of acting in the world (Morson and Emerson 1990: 70–1). Texts or utterances were, or should be, absolutely unfinalizable, from the dialogic perspective, because they always call for a response. At the same time, each person is required to make unique, unrepeatable responses that *are* finalized, through the concrete context within which they take place. Each utterance opens up broad possibilities of response; each response made from and in a specific historical place is a unique and unrepeatable event. Utterances are parts of ongoing dialogue; acts are unique local events through which someone claims responsibility for understanding and answering an utterance. Barthes describes acts through which provisional meanings immanent in texts are finalized, but none of the acts he describes should be seen as anything other than specific situated instances of narration. There are no grounds to privilege one reading beforehand (Olsen 1990; compare Owoc 1989).

Barthes (1977b, 1977d) adds an important dimension to an understanding of archaeological narratives not provided by any of Bakhtin's writings in his consideration of visual representations. Archaeological utterances are often composed of symbolic forms other than words. Photographs and drawings cannot meaningfully be described as having a beginning, middle, and end; instead they present themselves as tableaux, frozen or pregnant moments (Barthes 1977b: 73).

Simultaneity replaces linearity and the viewer's active role in constructing narratives is potentially much more obvious than when text alone is at issue. Barthes demonstrates that the resources brought to bear in constructing narratives from visual images are drawn from the previous experience of the viewer. Because individual experience is diverse, what Bakhtin would call the context of each dialogic moment of narrative production is open: all images are polysemous; they imply, underlying their signifiers, a 'floating chain' of signifieds, the reader able to choose some and ignore others" (Barthes 1977d: 38–9). In Bakhtin's terms, the viewer of an image responds to the call for an answer on the part of the voice embodied in the image. In Barthes's terms, this response takes the form of creating a narrative in which the image is one moment. For Bakhtin, the context of response by any viewer will be unique, and so will the provisional finalization provided by a particular narrative.

Both Barthes and Bakhtin are concerned with the way that open-ended construction of meaning avoids complete singularity. For Barthes (1972), the predictability of response is something deliberately shaped, a nexus of the exercise of power, as for example by political regimes or capitalist enterprises. For Bakhtin, the repeatable shape of a response stems from the heteroglossia of the forms that carry meaning, which have already accumulated meanings that inflect their reading. For both, the possibility that recipients of utterances (verbal or visual) will provide responses similar to those expected by the speaker is a reflection of shared experience, shared context, and shared knowledge. Understanding simultaneously shapes a community and relies on an already existing sharing, although in neither case is this sharing an identity. For Bakhtin, in fact, the condition required for communication is nonidentity.

Otherness and Archaeological Authors

Bakhtin was concerned with exploring the ambiguous position of the author, as someone charged with creating a provisionally finalized work. Morson and Emerson (1990: 179–86) suggest that Bakhtin was concerned with the ethical dimensions of authoring as part of the formation of the self. Fundamental to this concern was a rejection of traditional subject–object dualism, in favor of a relational process through which the self and other were mutually constituted. This relational process is founded on perception of the self as triadic: I-for-myself, I-for-others ("outsideness"), and the-other-for-me

("otherness"). An awareness of irresolvable difference between oneself and another is required for there to be an awareness of an authentic self.

For archaeological authors, perhaps the most crucial implication of Bakhtin's arguments in this regard is his insistence that we cannot place ourselves in the position of the other (compare Thomas 1990). Bakhtin critiques various forms of attempted pretense of otherness as irresponsible aestheticization of other subjects, transforming them into mere mirrors for our self, "pretender-doubles" or "soul-slaves." He equally condemns the conversion of the self into a representation of a larger whole, sacrificing the irreducible experience of subjectivity for the power of speaking for others. Morson and Emerson (1990: 183) write that for Bakhtin theories "based on collapsing many consciousnesses into a single abstract generalizable consciousness miss the whole point" of authoring; "for Bakhtin, whatever serves to 'fuse' serves to impoverish because it destroys outsideness and otherness." Because he is concerned with precisely the tension between the work authors do and the degree to which they can, in that work, absorb other subjects, Bakhtin's approach provides a uniquely useful way to think about the challenges of contemporary archaeological writing. His work has the potential to help support evaluation of different archaeological narratives according to new criteria, based neither on asserted authority nor on unbelievable claims of certainty, criteria that are compatible both with a call for multiple perspectives and with a desire to evaluate the effects of different stories in the world.

These arguments will return in the following pages. First, however, we will need to explore further the narrative production of archaeological knowledge. Archaeology is a storytelling discipline from its inception in the field or lab. Its linear written texts can only be understood as part of ongoing dialogues that began aurally and experientially. The starting point for those dialogues, and the point to which archaeology recurs in practice and rhetorically, is the field, the site of discovery. But what, precisely, is the field in archaeology?