Interpretive Historical Archaeologies

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An Introduction by Way of an Example

In agreeing to do this chapter, I convinced myself that the task would be easier than it actually has been. I found that it was easier to recognize what made an interpretive historical archaeology than to explicitly define what made one so. As I sat at my computer, agonizing how to begin, I realized that perhaps I needed to begin with an example. It occurred to me that I regularly do a performance of interpretive historical archaeology every time I am introduced to a new person in a social setting that forces me to reveal my occupation as an archaeologist—a scenario that many of the readers will recognize. The performance begins with the inevitable question, the one question that every archaeologist is asked by new acquaintances.

"So, what's the most interesting thing you've ever found?" Most people want to hear about gold, jewelry, or exotic burial practices. Since most of the sites I work on are only 100–150 years old, and I avoid excavating human remains, I am already at a disadvantage compared to colleagues who work in exotic locales and distant times. But I always answer the same way (sometimes longer, sometimes shorter, depending on the audience and how full everyone's glasses are): "Well, probably one of the coolest things I've ever found is a toy porcelain soap dish." I usually pause, to give them the chance to think that I am a pretty poor archaeologist if that is the best I can do. Then I leap into my follow-up:

But let me explain why I think this is such a great artifact. I found the soap dish while excavating at Oakley Plantation, in Louisiana. The plantation was founded as a cotton venture in the late 1700s, and continued to be owned and managed by descendants of the same white planter family until the 1950s. The house is preserved as a state museum. I was interested in understanding the lives of African American families at the plantation. I excavated a house that had been occupied by families who worked in the planter's house as cooks and servants, first during the period of enslavement, and then after emancipation. All that was left of the house was some brick foundation piers and trash. I found the soap dish with other 1890s trash near one of the piers. It had probably been swept there as part of yard cleaning. By talking to people who had grown up on the plantation, looking at plantation documents, and census records, I learned that during this time the house was lived in by an African American woman named Silvia Freeman and her family. Freeman was a widow raising five children, while working as the cook for the Matthews family of Oakley.

The piece was lost unbroken. It was made of porcelain and had a band of gold paint decorating its edges. One edge was chipped, and a slightly different gold-colored paint had been used to repair it. I found, upon looking at materials in Oakley's house museum, that this soap dish was part of a toy porcelain set owned by the planter family. Scholars who have interviewed African American domestics from the southern United States have found that it was pretty common for planters to hand off items they no longer wanted (usually things that were damaged) to their black domestics, and archaeology showed this was a common occurrence at Oakley. The Matthews' records show that Silvia Freeman was paid $4.00 a month and usually had to borrow advances from her paychecks to support her family. If she was like most domestics, part of her resented having to accept hand-me-downs from her employers, but she probably also recognized that she needed some of them. This doesn't mean that she felt her children should settle for damaged, secondhand

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> toys. Also under her house I found a broken bottle embossed "Shing's Gold Paint." The residue inside the bottle matched the color of the repaired area on the soap dish. The repair job was done in the Freeman house. She probably also got the paint from the planter's house—the Matthews women were into the pastime of painting porcelain plates that was popular in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

So, let us just try to imagine this for a minute. Here is Silvia Freeman. She works 12 hour days for the planters. She gets back to her 12-by-15-foot house at the end of the day, the sun is down, and she only has gas lamps for light. She has fed the children, maybe has tucked some of them into bed. She sits there, squinting in the dim light, and carefully tries to repair this tiny little toy for her daughters. (At this part of the story, I usually cup my hand and mimic painting at an imaginary artifact cradled there.) She is tired, maybe the paint is a little old, starting to get clumpy. The repair is not perfect, but it looks better. What makes this artifact exciting, to me, is that once understood in its social historical context, we can see it to be a little material embodiment of someone's love for a child.

At this point, if my listener has not dozed off, or excused themselves (and this is a great way to drive off folks you do not really want to talk with), they usually say something to the affect of, "Huh, that is interesting, I didn't know you could figure out that kind of stuff from archaeology. It's kind of like the [American] television series *CSI*."

> But I'm still not done.
>
> But wait, there's a little more to the story. Remember how I told you we found the soap dish intact? It wasn't thrown out because it was broken; it ended up in the archaeological record because *someone lost it*. This little act of parental devotion was dropped or forgotten in the yard by an oblivious child, and swept unnoticed into the trash pile under the house, where we found it a hundred years later.

If my listener has had any experience with parenting or children, they now snort, laugh or smile knowingly. No matter what their color or their socioeconomic class, I have made a human connection for them with Silvia Freeman's life. It is a connection that transcends race, class, gender, and time—the listener and Silvia Freeman are joined by their common humanity through a little toy soap dish.

In essence, this is what interpretive historical archaeology is about—using a variety of lines of evidence to create a new historical narrative that has resonance with our experiences of contemporary society. It is about making the past accessible, relevant, and thought provoking. While I may haunt dinner parties and undergraduate anthropology association meetings with my interpretive ramblings, the most effective of us spread the "archaeological word" in venues as diverse as popular books, Web sites, public lectures, television and radio shows, and through newspaper interviews.

There is another point to briefly consider about this interpretation: I can use these same data to construct several alternate interpretations that would be equally supported by the evidence. I like this version most because it best tells that story and creates the impact that I want to communicate about this particular site. I have consciously selected one form of emplotment (White, 1975) over another. Such an admission would have been impossible for me to make in my younger days, when like Fox Mulder (the fictional U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation agent played by David Duchovny on the 1993–2002 American television series *The X-Files* who believes in unidentified flying objects and a government conspiracy to hide or deny the truth of their existence), I thought that there was one archaeological "TRUTH" out there. The ability to embrace, or at least acknowledge, ambiguity is a hallmark of interpretive historical archaeology. Please note that this acceptance does not make the results of interpretive historical archaeology less real than other archaeological results, just more realistic. With that in mind, let me now explain in more detail what I have come to see as interpretive historical archaeology.

Defining Interpretive Historical Archaeology

I would suggest that interpretive historical archaeology represents the theoretical and methodological outcome of the debates and controversies that have shaped the discipline over the last 30, but particularly, the last 10 years. What then are the characteristics of an "interpretive historical archaeology"? There

was no recognized movement to create a school of interpretive historical archaeology; instead, there were, and are, a number of practitioners from a range of theoretical perspectives who share a commitment to constructing archaeological interpretations that are empirically rigorous, historically situated, and socially relevant.

Feminism, Marxism, post-structuralism, critical race theory, postcolonial studies, and social identity theorizing from sociology and psychology are only a few of the intellectual influences shaping scholars producing interpretive historical archaeo logies. Despite the range of theoretical influences, interpretive historical archaeologies share an emphasis on interdisciplinary approaches and a commitment to integrating a broad range of nonarchaeological lines of evidence. The past is not conveniently partitioned into disciplinary compartments—interpretive historical archaeologies likewise work to subvert traditional disciplinary boundaries—not content to produce flat and one-dimensional archaeological nar-ratives.

The historical situatedness of an interpretive historical archaeology is twofold—the archaeologist acknowledges both the social historical contexts in which the materials and people they study lived and the historical contexts in which he or she is crafting archaeological interpretations. In such a way, the archaeologist acknowledges the role that he or she plays in shaping the interpretations of the data.

Interpretive historical archaeologies are strongly empirical works. To successfully contextualize archaeological materials requires a strong understanding of the artifactual data and a mastery of a broad swath of social history. By its nature, then, interpretive historical archaeology is interdisciplinary—dependent upon the methods and theories of anthropology and other social sciences, and the established historiographies of scholars who work on similar issues through documents, oral history, architecture, and material culture. While historical archaeologists 30 years ago might have debated whether their practice was best aligned with history or anthropology (see Schuyler [1978] for a sampling of this early literature), interpretive historical archaeologists would question whether such disciplinary boundaries are in fact meaningful.

Interpretive historical archaeology does not represent a subdiscipline of historical archaeology so much as it defines the current cutting intellectual and theoretical state of the discipline. Understanding how interpretive historical archaeology has come to be requires a brief consideration of the theoretical debates that have come before.

Historical Perspective

As the discipline of historical archaeology was still developing, one of the raging intellectual debates that mobilized practitioners was the question of whether the field was inherently historical or inherently anthropological (e.g., Fontana, 1965; Harrington, 1955; Schuyler, 1970). These debates were not merely a question of naming, but had profound implications for how the discipline would move forward both methodologically and theoretically. In many cases, the factions were making similar kinds of arguments. For instance, both groups of scholars backed the notion that archaeology could fill the gaps of the historical record, so to speak, filling in those missing pages that documents could not.

For the historically inclined in the debate, this meant that archaeology offered an alternative type of chronicle of the past—with chronicle being history written with a focus on the ordering of events. Ivor Noël Hume's work on the Martin's Hundred massacre of the early 1600s (Noël Hume, 1982) is an excellent example of the kinds of compelling narratives that could be created through this approach. More recently, a number of battlefield archaeological projects, including such well-known sites as Wounded Knee (Scott et al., 1989) and the Cheyenne Massacre (McDonald et al., 1991), have had similar kinds of forensic historical archaeology conducted in order to suggest alternative narratives and clarify battlefield accounts. Similarly, the Ludlow Collective's work at the Ludlow Massacre site seeks to challenge managements' accounts of how labor organized and resisted against strikebreakers (The Ludlow Collective, 2001; also see Saitta, 2007). A similar kind of project is planned to draw attention to the Colfax Massacre site in Louisiana, where hundreds, and perhaps thousands, of African Americans

were slain as part of white supremacist actions surrounding the 1876 presidential election. Not only has this kind of work led scholars and the public to rethink histories that were thought to be well known and documented, but these projects have also created important opportunities for collaboration with indigenous peoples and descendant groups.

While the scholars associated with these projects may be themselves anthropologists, these projects are, however, historical projects, in that they are concerned ultimately with understanding pivotal events through an archaeological gaze, and the "event" is the purview of the historian.

Anthropologically inclined archaeologists saw the potentials of the archaeological record in another light. Social groups, disenfranchised by the creators of the archival record, had equal footing in the archaeological record as those who oppressed them. As such, archaeology was the most democratic of evidence about the past. This intellectual focus on the democratic nature of archaeological data was perhaps bolstered by the coinciding of the discipline's growth with the preparations for the United States' Bicentennial celebrations. After all, how better to learn about the history of the democratic republic better than through the lens of a democratic evidentiary base. While the historically based route focused on archaeology as a means of illuminating under- or undocumented events, the anthropological research, developed within the context of American anthropological archaeology, was primarily concerned with issues of process—how do cultures respond in circumstances of contact; what is the nature of culture change; how do ethnic groups form; how do colonial exchange networks develop? These were the kinds of questions that anthropologically oriented work focused on addressing (e.g., Deagan, 1983; Deetz, 1977; Schuyler, 1980).

Perhaps it should be apparent that really at play were issues of scale as much as discipline—How does one define "events" within archaeological deposits created by a number of generations over broader expanses of time? How does one study culture change from a short-term occupation? Certain kinds of occupations, by the nature of their creation, use, and abandonment, were better suited for answering certain research questions, while other sites were better suited to addressing other kinds of questions. What made historical archaeological sites different from those being studied by prehistorians was that the addition of documentary evidence made it possible to identify sites associated with particular historical events. Interpretive historical archaeology represents a recognition that archaeological sites provide insights into different scales of being to different degrees of resolution and that there is the potential within the cumulative archaeological record to explore all social, geographical, and temporal scales of the recent past. Yet this is not the only way that interpretive historical archaeology resolves the supposed history–anthropology divide.

Much early historical archaeological work also suffered from an innocent view of the nature of archaeological and documentary data, perceiving them to be independent sources of information that could be easily compared and contrasted, that contained complementary data, despite the efforts of some archaeologists to urge rigorous and sophisticated use of documents (e.g., Beaudry, 1988). The written word is privileged as authoritative and somehow more "true" than other ways of knowing, and many historical archaeologists have fallen prey to the notion that the documents on a particular site should lead the way. It certainly did not help that our prehistorian colleagues pooh-poohed documents as unnecessary crutches to interpretation. Attempts to make historical archaeology more scientific (e.g., South, 1977) only demonstrated that documents provided the kinds of textured nuance and complexity that would undermine attempts to create generalizable, law-like statements about past cultures. Meanwhile, Mark Leone (1981, 1982) was focusing his efforts on understanding more about the nature of the relationship between documents and artifacts and how the politics of the present shaped the presentation of the past.

The discovery of the African Burial Ground in New York City, and the range of issues it raised about archaeological ethics, authority, and overall purpose, served as an event that ultimately challenged historical archaeologists to reconsider what they were doing and for whom. Historical archaeology was not alone in this respect, as American anthropological archaeologists were simultaneously faced with meeting the requirements of the Native American Graves and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) of 1990.

In the early 1990s, American archaeology needed a paradigm shift. A growing number of voices, both American and British, were willing to provide alternative ways of approaching the past, and the shift in circumstances found the audience for their work growing. Feminists (Gero and Conkey, 1991; Seifert, 1991) and Marxists (Leone et al., 1987) have suggested ways that archaeologists could decenter their gender, class, and racialized positions in productive ways. More importantly, many prehistorians were calling for archaeologists to recognize that the unique historical pasts that were shared by groups of people ultimately shaped the ways that they acted and saw the world—people were historically embedded in their lifeways, and an understanding of history mattered (Hodder, 1991).

Until the 1990s, historical archaeology had also been a rather parochial field of study, most commonly associated with Americanist practice. American archaeologists were happy to go to other countries and practice their craft abroad, but rarely did the ideas of local scholars shape their research questions or practices. While we may quibble about whether the title "historical archaeology" is really an appropriate one, it is now possible to find local archaeologists working on (and publishing about) sites dating to the not-so-deep past on just about every continent (e.g., Buchli and Lucas, 2001). In particular, the intellectual discourse of the discipline is no longer dominated by Americans, but is increasingly more international—albeit its geography still largely conforms to the boundaries of the British Empire and Commonwealth. Interpretive historical archaeology represents the theoretical and methodological attempts to address the range of intellectual and political issues that were raised in historical archaeology in the early 1990s.

Defining Interpretive Archaeology

First, it is necessary to explain how "interpretive historical archaeology" differs from "interpretive archaeology" as defined by Hodder. Ian Hodder (1991) proposed the term "interpretive archaeology" as a clarification and elaboration of his intellectual vision for the goals of a contextual or postprocessual archaeology. Hodder (1991:5) outlined three goals of an interpretive archaeology. First, interpretive archaeology was to be rooted in a guarded objectivity (data formed within a dialectical relation) that allowed subaltern groups to use the archaeological record in empowering ways. Second, interpretive archaeology should retain an internal hermeneutic interpretive component. Third, interpretive archaeology would include a reflexive consideration of the production of archaeological knowledge that would lead to critically engaged, multivocal dialogues.

In delineating an "interpretive archaeology," Hodder was describing an approach to the past, as I have already discussed, that had already been developing in, and is now well established in, American historical archaeologies (Ascher and Fairbanks, 1971; Beaudry, 1988; Deetz, 1977; Leone et al., 1987), and increasingly in archaeologies of the recent past globally (e.g., Byrne, 2003; Lucas, 2004; Tarlow and West, 1999). Many historical archaeologists consider their work to be interpretive and describe it as such (e.g., Beaudry, 1996; Praetzellis and Praetzellis, 2001; Yamin, 2002; Yentsch, 1994), but other historical archaeologists doing what I would consider interpretive historical archaeologies may not initially think of themselves in this way (e.g., Gilchrist, 2000; Johnson, 2005; Mullins, 1999). The term provides a useful descriptor for a theoretically diverse set of archaeologies that nonetheless share certain intellectual approaches and goals. Therefore, it is useful to co-opt and slightly redefine Hodder's term.

Interpretive historical archaeologies, while to a degree influenced by Hodder's contextual work (particularly in England, where interest in the late historical period is more recent), developed as a result of two primary factors: first, the discipline has long been concerned with using textual evidence in productive interpretive ways; and second, research has focused on the microscalar levels of society—households and small communities—to understand the diversity of social experiences comprising the past.

While many interpretive historical archaeologies are microscalar in scope, looking at how individuals and groups of individuals use material culture as they navigate through their respective sociocultural and historical contexts (Mullins, 1999; Praetzellis and Praetzellis, 2001; Wood, 2004), these approaches

can be used to consider broader geographic and chronological spans (e.g., Beaudry, 2006; Claney, 2004; De Cunzo, 2004; Ferguson, 1992; Leone, 2005; Lightfoot, 2005). Even those studies based on the household level attempt to draw on understandings of broad social, political, and economic movements to situate their archaeological findings (e.g., Mullins, 1999; Praetzellis and Praetzellis, 2001; Wilkie, 2003). Therefore, interpretive historical archaeologies should be seen as intrinsically multiscalar. In all cases, however, interpretive historical archaeologies seek to illuminate the textures and nuances in society rather than seeking to create blanket characterizations of the past.

Interpretive historical archaeologies seek to challenge perceptions of hegemony, not replicate it. Through its emphasis on the small and the local, interpretive historical archaeologies seek to explore the lived experiences of socioeconomically, racially, ethnically, and sexually diverse persons and communities. In such a way it is possible to provide narratives that counter interpretations that reify hegemonic ideologies.

I suggest that the four elements that define an interpretive historical archaeology are as follows:

1. Practitioners of interpretive historical archaeologies recognize that the actors represented in the archaeological record were shaped by, and in turn, shaped, the broader social historical contexts in which they lived. To put this more bluntly, history matters. Interpretive historical archaeologies are contextual archaeologies.
2. In interpretive historical archaeologies, documents (including literary and artistic sources), oral histories, architecture, material culture, and archaeological remains are all significant elements of the universe of evidence used to inform us about past social lives. Each of these bodies of evidence is affected by distinct and unique life histories and curation and preservation processes. Used together, these evidentiary lines offer the greatest potential for creating holistic historical narratives and interpretations. By their nature, interpretive historical archaeologies are empirically rigorous—that is, they are data driven.
3. Archaeological interpretations made by practitioners of interpretive historical archaeologies are situated in the present and shaped by the subject positions of the archaeologist in discourse with contemporary descendant communities.
4. Practitioners of interpretive historical archaeologies are committed to making archaeological information accessible—through a range of publication media and modes.

These points deserve some further examination and discussion. There may be archaeologists whose work embodies one or more of these characteristics, but I would argue that truly interpretive historical archaeologies involve all four elements.

History Matters

Practitioners of interpretive historical archaeology, because of their use of documentary sources and primary focus on small communities, acknowledge the role of the actor as having some ability to consciously participate in social discourses and to manipulate material culture to suit their unique and particular needs. Actors are products of particular time periods and specific historical contexts, but within these contexts they act as knowledgeable agents. As a result, interpretive historical archaeologists seek to understand the rough rather than smooth edges of history—looking at discord, disharmony, and difference as much as considering harmony and cooperation. Interpretive historical archaeologies consider untidiness in the past.

This intellectual commitment is particularly well illustrated in Praetzellis and Praetzellis's (2001:645) comparative consideration of how households of different social and economic standing in nineteenth-century California differentially used the material language of Victorian "gentility" to pursue their own political, social, and ethnic agendas at different times and in particular places. The Praetzellises compare materials that were known to have served as important "information goods" in Victorian society—ceramics, from African American, Chinese, Californio, and brothel households in nineteenth-century California. They argue that these materials possessed powerful and conventional meanings that were understood throughout California during this period, and that in a racially,

economically, and politically diverse social setting, persons used other's knowledge of these meanings as cultural capital. Their discussion of the goods of Don Mariana Guadalupe Vallejo and Yee Ah Tye deserves further consideration as particularly elegant examples of interpretive historical archaeologies.

Vallejo had been one of the largest landholders in Mexican California—a status he was quickly stripped of (as he was stripped of his landholdings) when the Americans took control of California. Even so, Vallejo actively worked to integrate within the new society and manipulated material culture to signal his openness to American rule. Praetzellis and Praetzellis (2001) observed that Vallejo lived in an adobe structure that bore the external appearance of a New England home, which is a strange combination in an area that had a deep and rich vernacular architectural heritage. While his former countrymen provisioned their tables with majolica soup plates, Vallejo opted exclusively for ceramics manufactured by the British potter, Spode, in a range of patterns that were familiar to and popular with the American elite that he invited as guests to his home. The Praetzellises note that this decision was a means for Vallejo to wear his political views on his table, so to speak.

Even more intriguing is the authors' interpretation of materials from the home of Yee Ah Tye, a Chinese man who came to represent the Sze Yup Association of Chinese business men in San Francisco and Sacramento. Excavations of the burned workers' housing of the Sze Yup Association in Sacramento provided insights into how men like Yee Ah Tye may have been involved in what was known as "impression management." Documentary evidence about Yee Ah Tye's life indicates that he seems to have adopted a number of American ways—in his child-rearing methods and home life, in his business dealings, and in his language use.

The Chinese were viewed with great suspicion in early American California. Their perceived cultural exoticness was especially seen as a barrier to their success in making business transactions with members of the white California elite. As a representative of the Chinese business association, Yee Ah Tye would have been the public face of all those merchants of the association. Such men entertained the leaders of the white community in their homes, and a historical account of such a meal at Yee Ah Tye's documented that guests were surprised (and disappointed) to find themselves at this event served European-style dishes on American-style ceramics. Yee Ah Tye recognized through the manipulation of gentility he could demonstrate his non-foreignness. Excavations of the Young Wo agent's quarters in Sacramento recovered an assemblage that was mainly composed of European and American ceramics, with few Chinese porcelains, suggesting that agents may have regularly employed this tactic of strategic gentility. Intriguingly, the Praetzellises observe that excavations of a Chinese mining camp supplied by Yee Ah Tye recovered almost exclusively Chinese porcelains. While actively using Victorian gentility to his advantage, they suggest that the merchant may have also been actively cutting off the social mobility of these Chinese workers.

This work recognizes the cultural and social structures that shaped people's experiences, but does not deny their ability to manipulate or play upon these structures to their own advantages. In particular, the case studies illustrate that within ethnic groups that are often presented in narratives as monolithic and homogenous, there are competing strategies and agendas at play that are observable through material culture.

Evidentiary Lines

James Deetz, one of the founders of historical archaeology, once said that historical archaeology is an expensive way of learning something we already know (Deetz, 1996:32). Deetz made his statement as a joking challenge to his colleagues to go further with their interpretations. What then, does archaeology offer to us that we do not already know from other sources?

Some people have conceptualized texts as providing an essentially true, but incomplete, chronological narrative of the past. Archaeological information, for these researchers, can sometimes be used to fill in gaps in the text-driven narrative. Still others see the archaeological and textual records as providing complementary stories of the past. In their approach, historical archaeology should focus its studies on instances when textual and archaeological

narratives contradict one another. In other words, when the archaeology says one thing and texts another, that is when it is interesting to look at.

Of late, archaeologists have become anxious over the juxtaposition of texts and artifacts as separate bodies of evidence. Two authors who have explicitly addressed this issue are Martin Hall (2000) and John Moreland (2001). Hall (2000:16) observes that the separation of material culture from documents is an artificial one created by modern disciplinary boundaries, not intrinsic differences between the kinds of data: "Both artifacts and literary texts make use of images; those who read their meaning did not respect the disciplinary boundaries of the practitioners who would one day seek to understand their minds." Hall (2000:16) employs the concept of "transcripts" in his interpretive work that recognizes that documents and artifacts are the products of the same cultural context.

Moreland (2001:110–111) has critiqued historical archaeologies as falling into two camps: those who are too quick to embrace the authority of documents and those who are too quick to dismiss their reliability. In both cases, he argues, archaeologists miss the role of writing as a tool of oppression and power. Moreland (2001:119) proposes that archaeologists need to see "the Object, the Voice and the Word" as a tool that past societies used to create systems of power.

Practitioners of an interpretive historical archaeology see the documentary and archaeological record as inherently intertwined and inseparable in archaeological interpretations and narratives. Mary Beaudry speaks for many interpretive historical archaeologists as she eloquently describes how these lines of evidence are used together to create archaeological narratives in her recent work:

> My approach is broadly interpretive, and my aim is to move past the ostensibly simple first steps of artifact identification and dating and even beyond "engendering" artifacts by bringing multiple lines of evidence to bear on the interpretation of the material culture of sewing and needlework in the "active voice." An interpretive approach acknowledges that material culture is not just something people create but an integral component of our personalities and our social lives, deeply implicated in how we construct social relationships (Beaudry, 2006:7).

While many historical archaeologists deal with the simple binary of documents versus artifacts, in actuality, the realm of potential sources of knowing about the past is much broader. Standing architecture, nonarchaeological material culture (as curated in museum and archival collections), and any range of oral traditions, from songs, riddles and jokes, tall-tales to formally and informally collected oral histories, are important windows into past lives. A term that best describes interpretive historical archaeology is one that was once used to describe the four-field approach to anthropology: holistic. Interpretive historical archaeologies demand a holistic consideration of traces of the past.

A realm of documents that are only just now drawing archaeological attention are literary works of fiction. There has been remarkably little consideration of contemporary literary and performing arts in our discussions of social context, with the notable exception of Alasdair Brooks's (1999) and Gavin Lucas's (2003) studies of literary themes portrayed on transfer-printed ceramics, and a limited body of work within African American archaeology (Mullins, 1999; Wilkie, 2000, 2003). In defining literary works, I am referring here to novels, poems, plays, and operas, etc. Archaeologists have been very good at using textual genres such as autobiographies, travel accounts, and proscriptive literature, but for the most part, we have not ventured into literary texts. I suspect there are several reasons for this, foremost being the baggage of our discipline's "scientific" heritage. We tend to emphasize the use of documents that we see as more reliable, factual, or truthful.

Recently, Bridget Heneghan (2003) has provided a brilliant analysis of how teawares and ceramics are used in Harriet Jacob's ex-slave narrative, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, to demonstrate to white readers the gentility and propriety of Jacobs. Heneghan convincingly argues that Jacobs was aware of the symbolic role of ceramics in communicating domesticity and motherhood to white audiences and actively manipulated those meanings to generate greater sympathy for her plight.

If we are to accept Hall and Moreland's points that the artifacts we excavate are products of the same "lifeworlds" as the texts we interrogate, then it logically follows that all and any texts created by a society could be considered by archaeologists as potentially relevant to their work. There are, of course, difficulties with using period texts. Great

works of literature are like any of the other artifacts we study, and they can be imbued with new meanings by new generations. This is the basis of literary criticism. If we are to use literary texts, we must beware of decontextualizing our understandings of them from the lifeworlds that their authors and consumers inhabited (see Wood, 1990). Such is always a danger when reading any text. I would suggest that an archaeological approach to period literature must treat it as a product of a particular social historical context and consider ways it is reused and reinvented by multiple consumers in different times and places.

Interpretive historical archaeologists face the heavy intellectual burden of needing to be responsible to the primary and secondary historical literature and its historiography, as well as the vast literature of archaeology. The results of interpretive historical archaeology practice are something not easily categorized as history or anthropology, but perhaps are best seen as true historical anthropology, where scholars like John and Jean Comaroff (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1992) advocate for the use of material traces to create historical ethnographic narratives, though scholars who follow their advice most often rely upon material cultural remains, not archaeological ones (e.g., Ferme, 2001; Thomas, 1991). An interpretive historical archaeological narrative is one that integrates evidence in such a way that the cohesion of the interpretation cannot withstand the removal of any particular strand of evidence.

Because of the large range of sources that need to be considered in an interpretive historical archaeology, these works, although typically humanistic in their focus, are empirically rich and data driven. Mary Beaudry's recent book, *Findings: The Material Culture of Needlework and Sewing* (2006), is an excellent example of a richly detailed and evidence-rich interpretive historical archaeology. To understand the meanings and communicative power of needlework and sewing to the women engaged in it from the Middle Ages to the Industrial Revolution, Beaudry takes a broadly comparative approach to archaeological data, drawing upon evidence from Great Britain, North America, and Australia. The life histories of the artifacts—from production to deposition—are detailed through careful historical research into a range of records including personal papers and period publications. Curated material culture from the Winterthur Museum, and several museums and collections in England, was drawn upon to study complete examples of archaeological finds; to study objects related to needlework and sewing that do not preserve in the archaeological record; and to study the finished products of women's labor in these arenas that still exist. Through an interplay of these archaeological, documentary, and material culture sources, Beaudry not only successfully illuminates the social and economic importance of needlework and sewing but also convincingly demonstrates how archaeologists have neglected a vast category of artifactual materials.

Situated Interpretations

Interpretive historical archaeologies are self-reflexive and politically engaged. Practitioners seek to render visible the process of knowledge production and interpretation, and through interpretation, provide insights into structural inequalities that shape our contemporary experiences. This commitment to using archaeology as a tool for political enlightenment is not new in the discipline but has roots in the early works of Mark Leone (1981, 1982) and has blossomed following the discovery of the African Burial Ground, which spurred greater discussion in the discipline regarding the responsibilities of archaeologists to descendent communities (e.g., McDavid and Babson, 1997).

Maria Franklin (2001), in her study of African American foodways at Rich Neck Plantation, Virginia, demonstrates how remains as seemingly innocuous as animal bones are racially and politically charged artifacts. She very effectively begins her paper by recounting an event that caused controversy on the PGA Tour (organization that operates the main professional golf tours in the United States). Fuzzy Zoeller made a clearly racist remark on the occasion of championship golfer Tiger Wood's first Master's win, which entitled him to pick the menu at the banquet the following year. To the CNN broadcasting network, Franklin reminds us, Zoeller stated, "That little boy is driving well and he's putting well. He's doing everything it

takes to win. So, you know what you guys do when he gets in here? You pat him on the back and say, 'congratulations' and 'enjoy it' and tell him not to serve fried chicken next year. Got it? Or collard greens or whatever the hell they serve" (Franklin, 2001:88).

In this brief anecdote, Franklin reminds the reader how food becomes a powerful means to communicate racism and inequality. Thus demonstrating that food stereotypes related to African Americans remain entrenched in contemporary American society, Franklin uses the faunal remains associated with enslaved peoples' households at Rich Neck to look at how foodways were a way of constructing a sense of African American community among enslaved people. These same foods were also used by Euroamericans, who often consumed meals prepared for them by enslaved people, to draw boundaries between what it was to be white versus black. Franklin explores how this contradiction continues in contemporary society, where certain African American foods are used to perpetuate stereotypes at the same time they are appropriated by southern whites as part of regional pride.

While Franklin's article is an example of politically engaged work directed toward educating fellow archaeologists, she and others are among a growing number of scholars who have organized archaeological projects that have been explicitly designed to increase public awareness of race and power structures in contemporary society.

Accessibility

A final distinguishing feature of interpretive historical archaeology is its practitioner's commitment to making their works accessible to a wide range of scholarly and vocational publics. This public engagement can take many forms, be it the creation of large synthetic databases that make data widely accessible and available, such as that of the Digital Archaeological Archive of Comparative Slavery (www.daacs.org), the creation of Web sites geared toward the public, projects that involve community collaboration, the creation of videos, or books published for nonspecialist audiences (e.g., Cantwell and Wall, 2001; De Cunzo and Jameson, 2005). The Society for Historical Archaeology has endorsed this goal through the creation of the James Deetz Award, which honors the extremely accessible yet scholarly work of James Deetz (e.g., 1977; Deetz and Deetz, 2000) by acknowledging authors whose works strive to reach a broad reading public.

In particular, a distinctive form of narrative presentation has developed in historical archaeology, which draws upon the use of literary flourishes (e.g., Costello, 2000; Ferguson, 1992; Praetzellis and Praetzellis, 1998; Wilkie, 2003). Interpretive historical archaeology has the strongest tradition of pushing the creative envelope in its writing. Not all realms of archaeological investigation require or deserve book-length attention, but interpretive historical archaeology is a field whose evidence is so rich and complex that much of its scholarship demands book-length treatment. Yet the practices of the discipline are such that creativity in the book format is often stifled by an adherence to the deep-seated structures of the site report and dissertation.

Unfortunately, some of the more avant-garde writers have felt the need to apologize for some of their creativity, such as some authors responsible for the outstanding work that has been done in the genre of "storytelling" in historical archaeology. This mode of writing incorporates narrative fiction into archaeological interpretations. This work has been characterized by some—even those who write it—as playful practice rather than serious scholarship (e.g., Praetzellis and Praetzellis, 1998). I would argue that instead of merely playful practice, these works have made theoretically sound observations of data and archaeological practice in profound ways (also see Majewski, 2003).

Not everyone agrees with me. Charles Orser writes, "Interpretive archaeology is much like postmodern literature that constantly and sometimes confusingly glides between past and present and from scene to scene. Archaeology conceived as storytelling has the potential to increase public awareness of archaeology, but it also contains hidden dangers. Is it possible that archaeological tale-spinning could have a negative impact on the discipline by showing non-archaeologists that exacting archaeological research is largely boring?" (Orser, 2001:9). He goes on to claim that most people would prefer to read *Gone with the Wind* rather than

an archaeological site report. My question is, why do we assume that rigorous empirical work can only be properly presented in a site report format?

In his 1975 book, *Metahistory*, Hayden White made the argument that historians, no matter how scrupulous in their evidentiary practices, rely upon modes of thought that are not empirical. They adopt distinctive forms of argument and employ different types of emplotment in creating historical narratives. He argues that most histories fall into one of four tropes, "Romance," "Tragedy," "Comedy," and "Satire," and went on to categorize the history of historical writing according to the popularity of certain tropes. For our purposes, White's work, while still contested by some historians, is useful to consider because he argues for a self-critical and reflective approach to the writing of history. While Hayden's work has implications for reading history, it also has implications for the way we write history. I would suggest that we consciously reflect upon the kinds of emplotment that may be unconsciously shaping our works, but also, that we consciously use this to our advantage when writing ... that archaeologists embrace that they are at all times storytellers. In a recent review of historical archaeological writing, Rosemary Joyce (2006:48) has found that

> Writing by historical archaeologists shows far more explicit engagement with problems of narrative and representation than most such work in other traditions of archaeology. Part of the reason for this difference may be a greater sense of the real historically situated persons whose lives and actions writers attempt to represent, created by the ability of historical archaeologists to engage with their subjects through documents as well as other forms of material culture. Another source of that sensibility undoubtedly is the routine engagement of historical archaeologists with living human beings who are often descendants of those whose life histories archaeology intersects.

Joyce goes on to hypothesize that historical archaeology's attention to the contradictions between words and things forces historical archaeologists to "live with the knowledge that there is no single story that can adequately account for the phenomena they study. This predisposes them to prefer accounts that deal meaningfully with all the richness of the material at hand, rather than explanation which reduce that richness to a few main points that may have broader explanatory power" (Joyce, 2006:49). While Joyce's discussion focuses upon historical archaeological writing at large, it is worth noting that all of the authors she discusses are recognizable as interpretive historical archaeologists.

Conclusions

In closing, interpretive historical archaeologies are those studies that attempt to create historically situated narratives about the past using archaeological, documentary, material cultural, and oral historical lines of evidence. Interpretive historical archaeologists recognize the tremendous potential of archaeological knowledge to contribute to modern social dialogues and to shed light on modern social circumstances. Interpretive historical archaeologists are committed to making their work accessible to many audiences, in the academy and beyond, through a variety of media. This form of archaeological approach and reasoning, while certainly influenced by the postprocessual movement, has its own unique history within the debates and concerns of historical archaeological practice.

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