


Interpreting Space and Place: An Introduction to Archaeological GIS

Lecture 03  
Today's Topic: Post-Processual and Interpretive Archaeology



The image shows two book covers side-by-side. The left cover is 'Interpretive Archaeology: A Reader' edited by Julian Thomas, featuring a green and white abstract design of leaves and branches. The right cover is 'Reader in Archaeological Theory: Post-Processual and Cognitive Archaeologies' by David S. Whitley, featuring a red and white abstract design with a circular motif.

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Interpreting Space and Place: An Introduction to Archaeological GIS

Contextual Archaeology  
Barrett 1987

This 'article' had two major points:

- 1) begin replying to Hodder's call for a contextual archaeology
- 2) critique Hodder's call to privilege the individual within archaeology

Contextual Archaeology – situating archaeological sites and artifacts within the related webs/networks that such things would have occupied in the past

Barrett's main critique: privileging the individual is just as de-contextualizing as privileging any other form of evidence

Is perhaps the first author to begin highlighting similarities between processual and postprocessual approaches within archaeology

- both are attempts to interpret the archaeological record

In addition, Hodder's project uses data gained through processual means

- this is the first step towards Hegmon and Wylie (Thursday's lecture)

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Post-Processual Archaeology  
Shanks and Hodder 1998

Post-processual archaeology – critiques processual archaeology for its reliance on 'objective' science as well as the nature of what is knowable to archaeologists and has tended to remain polarized (either this or that)

These authors believe, as do many others, that such a polarization is damaging

Summarize Interpretive Archaeologies as:

- interpreter's role is highlighted
- a material practice in the present (hence, present concerns inform the past)
- meaning is paramount
- archaeology is an ongoing, refining process; no one correct account of the past
- interpretations should make room for multivocality
- expect a plurality of interpretations
- interpretation is creative, but can also be critical

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Post-Processual Archaeology  
Shanks and Hodder 1998  
The Act of Interpretation

Meaning – interpretation is looking for meaning  
Dialogue – a reciprocity of understanding  
Uncertainty – a conscious gap between known and unknown  
Making Connections – the role of structural relationships  
Judgement – interpretation involves choices; some thing left out...  
Performance – interpretation is a type of dance, that changes over time  
Critique – one interpretation is automatically at odds with others (true?)  
Ubiquity – interpretation is omnipresent and often implicit (danger)  
Role of Hermeneutics – the back-and-forth process of refining interpretation

Four Levels of Hermeneutics: (understanding)

- 1) relations between past and present
- 2) other cultures
- 3) contemporary society
- 4) the community of archaeologists (and archaeologies)

Does archaeology have an obligation to cultures it studies??? self-reflexivity

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Post-Processual Archaeology  
Thomas 2000 – edited volume on Interpretive Archaeology  
New Archaeology could be viewed as a unitary project, while this book is about the diversity currently contained within archaeological theory

Epistemology – methodology? where are the new ways for testing for knowledge, if methodology should come from social theory what do we do when we look for things that are untestable (e.g. gender, race)

Interpretation – the move away from hypothesis-testing to hermeneutics

Relativism – Shanks and Tilley used epistemological relativism to undermine the New Archaeology's mode of investigation as capitalistic; while they were immediately critiqued for that stance, remember their later work where they affirm a certain level of critical reasoning (1998)

Political Commitment – we have a role to play in the modern world and we need to be responsible; this has ontological, epistemological, and methodological implications

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Difference and Alterity – what are the dangers of exoticising the past  
Hodder's call to contextual archaeology generally regarded as productive

Ideology – in the past and in our own present and how this interacts; two types

- 1) pragmatic – class relations create different experiences
- 2) epistemological view – false consciousness, untruths that are naturalized

The individual – can we ever truly understand the past at this scale

Postmodernity – the creation of worldwide metanarratives and that relation to archaeology's attempt at the creation of long term histories (modernity); however we know that there is no single narrative that can encompass the entire world – the effects of the communication revolution; how has the modern world affected the practice of archaeology (many interpretive archaeologists believe this has been systemic and foundational without our conscious knowledge of it)

Just like postmodernity, there is no single overarching interpretive archaeology

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Project One

What's the Difference between 'Soft' and 'Hard' Science?

Goal: use a simple interview approach to determine if researchers in the social and hard utilize fundamentally different epistemological frameworks

Methodology:

- 1) select four individuals – two from the Anthropology, Gender, and Women's Studies department or another humanities department and two from a hard science (e.g. chemistry, physics, geology)
- 2) give each of the four individuals the same questionnaire and have them fill it out

Due Date: 28 July 2008  
Please return my pens and pencils

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