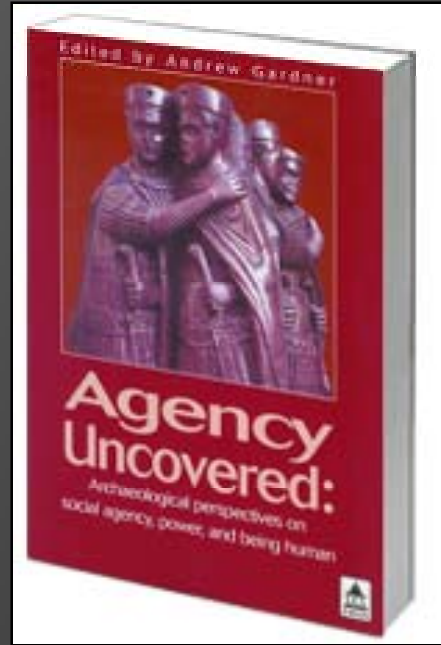


# Interpreting Space and Place: An Introduction to Archaeological GIS

## Lecture 04

### Postmodernism, Agency and Processual-Plus in Archaeology



# Interpreting Space and Place: An Introduction to Archaeological GIS

## Lecture 04

### Knapp 1996 – Archaeology without Gravity

This article is an attempt to find the middle ground between extreme views of postmodernism that treat reality from a social constructivist point of view

Knapp defines two strands of postmodernism:

- 1) Critical – true knowledge (objective) does not exist
- 2) Moderate – concerned with questioning authority

States that one of archaeology's central goals is to understand the past, not to explain it

In conclusion, the creation of polysemous (multiple meanings) space that talks about non-White, non-European and non-Male aspects of the past

# Interpreting Space and Place: An Introduction to Archaeological GIS

## Lecture 04

Dobres and Robb 2000

Agency used by archaeologists everywhere in the 1990s, but what does it mean?

### Agency vs. Structure

Parson – methodological determinism; the rational actor in a structured world reacting to a top-down pressure

1970s – actors become “socially embedded, imperfect, and often impractical people”; concerned with the interaction between actors and the social structures they react to and in turn form

Agency might be better conceptualized as a focus within practice theory

Giddens – ‘structuration’; the interaction between people and structures, specifically how actors create structures unconsciously (as a result of unintended actions)

Bourdieu – ‘habitus’; how the daily routines of people structure society

By the 1980s, this concern with the interaction between social structures and individuals was moving to the center of social theory

# Interpreting Space and Place: An Introduction to Archaeological GIS

## Lecture 04

Dobres and Robb 2000

Similar movements in History was occurring inside the Annales school

Bruadel – long-term structures (e.g. Church), medium-term cycles (e.g. new popes), and short-term events (e.g. wars)

- 1) how do structures outlive their creators
- 2) how do short-term events contribute to long-term structures

## Agency in Archaeology

1962 – Binford's "*Archaeology as Anthropology*" could have focused on agency, but such concerns were associated with looking for individuals

1970s – research into gender begins utilizing issues that would eventually be seen as agency-oriented

1980s – the postprocessual archaeologies began to integrate agency, this included the Marxists, structuralists (obviously), symbolists (think cognitive), and feminists

1990s – the four areas of agency in archaeology

# Interpreting Space and Place: An Introduction to Archaeological GIS

## Lecture 04

Dobres and Robb 2000

1990s – the four areas of agency in archaeology

- 1) Gender – ancient gender dynamics and the gendered practice of archaeology
- 2) the role that material culture plays in mediating between structures and agents
- 3) the use of other theoretical bridges (e.g. phenomenology)
- 4) the study of emerging inequality and actors desire for power/prestige

So, what exactly is agency???

- 1) material conditions of social life
- 2) constraining and enabling influence of structures, habituation, and beliefs
- 3) importance of agent-based actions and motivations
- 4) dialectic of structure and agency

# Interpreting Space and Place: An Introduction to Archaeological GIS

## Lecture 04

Dobres and Robb 2000

Two ways of approaching agency in archaeology

- 1) eclectic – agency operates in many ways and difference is more interesting
- 2) restricted – project specific definition (see page 9 for examples)

These authors are not concerned with selecting a specific definition, but simply stating the need to make sure that a clear statement is included by archaeologists who claim to work with agency

Ways of doing this...

- 1) agency as intentional or the disconnect between desire and actual outcome
- 2) scale: individual, community, groups, multiple agencies
- 3) agency as conscious or unconscious social change
- 4) the interplay between things and identity
- 5) how can we use agency to stop ourselves projecting ourselves onto the past

Ultimately, archaeology needs to create its own version of agency

# Interpreting Space and Place: An Introduction to Archaeological GIS

Lecture 04

Wylie 2002

Wylie is the leading philosopher of archaeology, and as such is often called upon to give us an outside perspective of our discipline

This article is specifically aimed at examining the differences between Processual and Postprocessual archaeology (and is actually an earlier article)

She outlines the self-defined identities of these paradigms and proceeds to analyze them (New Archaeology = objective; postprocessual = non-objective)

She successfully identifies three major points that both traditions share

- 1) data and evidence are not speaking subjects
- 2) importance of linkages between archaeological interpretation
- 3) interpretation should not be circular

However, the strongest link between the two is

**Mitigated Objectivism**

Ultimately, whatever position or methodology you chose, its the diversity of such approaches that makes archaeology a strong, self-sufficient discipline

# Interpreting Space and Place: An Introduction to Archaeological GIS

## Lecture 04

Hegmon 2003 – setting egos aside

Two main goals:

- 1) re-visit recent theoretical currents
- 2) the elucidation of a processual-plus perspective

She looks at the three self-defined perspectives of *evolutionary ecology*, *behavioral archaeology*, and *Darwinian archaeology* (this last approach remains most insular and has the least number of supporters)

## Processual-Plus

- archaeologists rarely attached to theories with dogmatic fervor
- increasing numbers of archaeologists looking at gender, agency, etc.
- importance of material culture as a field of inquiry in its own right
- broadly agreed upon opinion that no one group owns the past
- generally, archaeologists accept broad postprocessual ideas
- but methodologies remain firmly within structured, scientific practices