

THE CONSUMPTION OF IDEAS AND THE PRODUCTION OF BEHAVIOR:  
PAST AND PRESENT IN ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND

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This paper flows from the attempt currently under way in Annapolis, Maryland to operationalize a critical archaeology. The original focus of the paper was to be the recursive nature of material culture, the ability of objects and assemblages of objects to teach and enforce standards of behavior. I was going to link that idea to the rest of the papers in this session through a metaphorical use of the concepts "production" and "consumption" to characterize the flow of ideas and the direction of social behavior. I will still mount that argument but the balance of this paper consists of a series of observations and arguments resulting from a varied set of reactions to the paper I delivered at the recent meeting of the Society for Historical Archaeology, in Savannah (Potter 1987). This second set of arguments has to do with the intricacies of taking critical theory out of the classroom and putting it on the ground - or in

the ground, as the case may be. Therefore, this paper will be more about the production and consumption of the past than about production and consumption in the past.

One hallmark of certain versions of archaeology is a search for or a reliance on uniformitarian principles: conditions or laws or what have you that operated in the past just as they do today (Watson, LeBlanc, and Redman 1971: 49-51). The recursive quality of material culture may be one such uniformitarian principle. Simply stated, the idea is that material culture does not just reflect thought or behavior, but rather has an active capacity to shape and direct human action (Hodder 1982; Leone 1986). This does not mean that we understand all of the mechanisms by which this takes place nor does it mean that historical archaeologists should start looking for the subliminal messages encoded into the patterns on Whieldon plates. But it is fair to say that even the most dyed-in-the-wool functionalist historical archaeologist will agree that a set of creamware plates is about more than the consumption of food.

The question is, what kinds of information does a set of creamware plates contain and what kinds of behavior does such a set of plates have the capacity to teach? Shards of a set of creamware plates, analyzed in a certain fashion, can be made to tell us a great deal about principles of household spatial organization and refuse disposal (South 1977), among other

things, but there's nothing recursive in that. However, the same set of artifacts also contains information about the context of its manufacture. And it is about their manufacture that most of our artifacts likely had the most to say to their 18th-century users. But what, specifically? First, there's aesthetics but nobody would argue that archaeology is the best way to learn about 18th-century aesthetics or that art is all that one can learn from 18th-century ceramics. Then there's mind but Deetz (1977) never really argues that plates taught people how to think Georgian. Some would say that the history of technology was - and is - what 18th-century ceramics teach best. But the history of technology, as a perspective, often - at least implicitly - takes any technological change appearing to lead to today as an advancement and an unqualified good - while leaving people out of the picture. Why not see the historical archaeological record as the history of labor? The mark that any creamware plate bears most clearly is the mark of the regulated, standardized, segmented - and alienated - labor that went into its manufacture. The most radical position in all of this, articulated by Leone (n.d.) and others, is that as 18th-century middle class and working class Americans ate from inexpensive sets of creamware plates, they learned from them what E.P. Thompson (1967) calls work-discipline. That is the whole series of practices that alienated workers from the products and the value of their labor in the name of efficiency. By using creamware plates people were

sub-consciously learning concepts like individualism that helped them to be good workers. In this way mass-produced mold-made plates helped to reproduce the social relations of production responsible for their manufacture. This is a hypothesis beyond testing but taken as an assumption it has proved productive in Annapolis, particularly for the individual and joint work of Mark Leone and Paul Shackel (Leone n.d.; Shackel n.d.; Leone and Shackel n.d.a., n.d.b).

This view of material culture is powerful and threatening. It is one thing to say that there is a message (about the glory of God) in the vaulting of a Gothic cathedral or, in Annapolis, in the 17th-century town plan consisting of two main circles with radiating streets, a plan intended to focus attention on the buildings inside the circles, the Maryland State House and St. Anne's church. It is quite another thing to suggest that something that we are trained to regard as utilitarian contains messages. Yet that is just what we do in Annapolis in many of our "Archaeology in Public" site tours. And we go at least two steps further. In many tours we invite visitors to analyze taken for granted aspects of their physical environment to see what messages are contained within it (Potter and Leone 1986). And in our punchiest site tour to date, at the Main Street site in 1986, we close by suggesting to visitors that the next time they see, hear, or read a presentation of history, they should ask

themselves what that version of history is trying to get them to do (Leone, Potter, and Shackel 1987).

There is no question that this is a radical suggestion but it is radical only because in so many cases American history museums claim - or assume - that history is important without explaining why it is important. Everybody knows, so the reasoning goes. But everybody doesn't know and far too many people walk through history museums bullied into thinking that their boredom and "museum feet" are their fault and not the museum's.

This brings me to the crux of this paper, "Archaeology in Public", an attempt to operationalize an archaeology informed by critical theory in Annapolis. Critical theory is an anti-positivist political philosophy based on the idea that all knowledge is knowledge for a purpose. Knowledge is used and can be used against people and classes of people (Geuss 1981). Critical archaeology, as formulated and conducted in Annapolis involves paying serious attention to the local social context in which archaeology takes place. Its goal is to put on display the archaeologically examined roots of taken-for-granted aspects of contemporary life to demonstrate to people today that many structures and constraints of modern life only seem inevitable but are actually negotiable, challengeable, and subject to change. All of this is important because these givens often serve unstated contemporary interests. The point of any critical

theory - critical archaeology included - is enfranchisement achieved through enlightenment that may serve as the basis for liberation through an expansion of individual choice (Leone, Potter, and Shackel 1987).

It is easy to understand how this rhetoric may sound dangerous so it is worth noting, at this point, that in no critical archaeology with which I am familiar is there any specifically articulated agenda for social action or change. Even with that stipulation, there are several ways that archaeological interpretations based on critical theory often end up sounding more threatening than they are intended to be. An example will be helpful here.

The tour we gave in Annapolis during the summer of 1986 began by discussing the segmentation aspect of the Georgian Order, as explored archaeologically. From there it moved to a discussion of several different separations, between diners at a table, between work space and domestic space, and between work time and leisure time. From this idea, the tour said, came the idea of vacations and then tourism both of which are important to Annapolis today because the city's economy depends so heavily on day-trippers and vacationers. In light of the needs of a city of 32,000 people to protect its resources from its estimated 1,000,000 visitors per year, the tour discussed the utility of historical presentations of a frequent 18th-century visitor,



George Washington, who is often discussed in ways that make him appear to fit perfectly the city's much-publicized profile of the "quality tourist" (Norris 1925; McKeldin 1957; Anderson 1984). The tour's suggestion was that Washington is portrayed as a "model tourist" to help guide contemporary visitor behavior - even though Washington never could have been a tourist in the modern sense because the category did not exist until well after his death. (Leone, Potter, and Shackel 1987)

We did not attempt to force this interpretation down anybody's throat; our intention was simply to present it as plausible and to introduce visitors to the idea of the contemporary use of history. Many visitors found the interpretation interesting and a few rejected it. From the standpoint of an interpretive paradigm that attempts to enfranchise visitors with some control over their own consumption of ideas about the past, a visitor who rejects our interpretation probably represents a bigger success than one who agrees with us. The problem comes when people see the tour as saying things that it does not intend and two primary realms in which this happens are accuracy and agency.

Accuracy is not necessarily a major issue in the use of history. Washington is made to appear a model tourist because many interpretations focus on the social and domestic aspects of his visits to the city. We do not claim that the historians whose interpretations inspired ours were wrong or lied, only that

they, like any historians, selected and highlighted certain aspects of the past and paid less attention to others. Such selection of an unavoidable part of doing history (Wallace 1986a: 159) and my only point is that such selections often serve some contemporary interest. In the same vein, "correcting" a version of history does not make it any less likely to be used for contemporary purposes; to the best of our knowledge the specific George Washington data used to construct the "model tourist" picture is all accurate. "Accurate" versions of the past can be used every bit as well as deliberately inaccurate ones. Therefore, one cannot refute a critical analysis simply by correcting its historical facts.

Second, the issue of agency is a lively one. It is not our point at all that some historian writing a guidebook for Annapolis in 1965 intentionally misrepresented what he or she knew to be the truth about Annapolis history in order to help local residents dominate outsiders. A critical analysis need not be accusatory. Michael Wallace, an incisive radical critic of Colonial Williamsburg says, in his article "Visiting the Past:"

'I will try to demonstrate that, from the mid 19th century onward, most history museums were constructed by members of dominant classes and embodied interpretations that supported their sponsors' privileged positions. I do not contend that those who established museums were Machiavellian plotters; the museum builders simply embedded in their efforts versions of history that were commonplaces of their class's culture." (Wallace 1986b: 137)



It is the general effect of a version of history and not the specific intention behind it that is usually important and that general effect is not often obvious but instead is discovered by "reading" versions of history for the sub-surface messages they contain, often in their structure more than in their content. Any scientist or historian works in a social context and that context often exerts an influence on the research product. The historian can be unconscious of this influence and the results so produced often work subtly rather than blatantly on their audience (Leone 1983; Gero 1985).

Accuracy and agency are the two major kinds of theoretical misinterpretation of a public presentation based on critical theory and beyond them there is a whole basket full of practical concerns at three different levels.

At the most immediate level, there is visitor reaction. All we want is to be listened to and either accepted or rejected, on an intellectual basis. This sounds easy enough but in our early rehearsals for the Main Street tour we had some trouble delivering the tour in a way that did not sound offensive and offending a visitor is very different from presenting an interpretation with which a visitor can agree or disagree civilly. The tour was hard to deliver because unlike most historical interpretation, it was in some sense about the people hearing it. It was a tour about tourism given to tourists and telling a visitor to the city that the city needs to control visitor behavior is uncomfortable and

difficult to do gracefully (Bradley 1987). All I can say is that such difficulties, which are almost inherent to any truly critical interpretation, should be solved by finding ways to say the hard stuff rather than by taking the hard stuff out. (This a good point at which to note that the number of folks offended by our tours was probably far smaller than the number who loved it because they were so entrapped by the dominant ideology that in their own minds they our tour into a celebration of progress and modern life - something it was hardly intended to be. This nut is a much tougher one to crack.)

At another level is the question of the broader local meaning of the critical analysis presented by "Archaeology in Public." "Archaeology in Annapolis" is co-sponsored by Historic Annapolis, Inc., a private local preservation organization. HAI sponsors a wide range of research activities and does so from the positivist position that copious research and a commitment to accuracy validates the organization's preservation activities. HAI clearly has an agenda beyond that of "Archaeology in Annapolis;" it has interests and it has serious local opponents (Potter n.d.). Given that, it is reasonable to ask what use does HAI have for a critical analysis. Or, one could ask, how much close scrutiny and self-reflection is HAI willing to bear in light of the fact that almost any criticism of the organization could be used against it? The response is two-fold. First, HAI

has been remarkably willing to support the work of "Archaeology in Public," even in full realization of its possible dangers (Hoepfner, Leone, and Potter n.d.). Second, there is the fact that while close scrutiny is risky, looking critically at something does not mean automatically rejecting it (Meltzer 1981). Any critical theorist examining Colonial Williamsburg would find that C.W. promotes contemporary patriotism. However, few of these critics would disagree with placing a high value of loyalty to country. It is patriotism disguised as something else, namely objective history, that is the real concern and the hard questions have to do with determining the ultimate beneficiaries of the patriotism inspired by places like Colonial Williamsburg. Our use of critical theory in Annapolis does not mean that we cannot understand the interests of our institutional hosts nor does it preclude us from showing them a generous measure of gratitude. It should not tarnish the radical credentials of "Archaeology in Annapolis" to acknowledge the significance, the accomplishments, and the contributions of the preservation movement led for three and one half decades by Historic Annapolis.

This does not, however, fully resolve the the question of the place of a critical analysis in the midst of a preservation organization nor does it begin to address the larger question of the place of critical archaeology in the institutional structure of American archaeology in general.

The National Endowment for the Humanities deems ineligible for support. "projects directed at persuading an audience to a particular political, philosophical, religious, or ideological point of view or [projects] that advocate a particular program of social action or change" (NEH 1984:9). Just where does this leave critical theory? Several strategies are possible. One simply could be sophistic, sneaky, or downright dishonest with funding agencies. One could do a critical analysis that denies its intellectual heritage, Marxism without the "M word," or "the ism that dares not speak its name" (see Spriggs 1984 on Hodder 1982a, 1982b and Leone 1982). One could do a critical analysis without, say, a class analysis in it, which is where things currently stand in Annapolis. Or one could hope for and even work to help bring about an alternate funding structure for archaeology, distancing the discipline from the interests of the ruling class, as has been suggested by Brian Durrans (1987). Russell Handsman has called those of us who use critical theory gorilla archaeologists (Handsman 1987) and we may well be, but there's no kind of gorilla I know of that doesn't need a banana every now and then.

The position we find ourselves in in Annapolis is rather interesting. Scholarly commentators on the project say that we're not critical enough, citing correctly the lack of a true class analysis in what we have done so far (Blakey 1987; Durrans

1987; Paynter 1987). Some local parties have found our work too threatening - or too critical. This position betwixt and between will become less unique as more archaeologists create and implement more critical archaeologies. I hate to sound like Joe Positivist saying that once we track down that last elusive piece of data we will know the Truth with a capital T, but the best course of action, out of those I just mentioned, will become more apparent as more experiments with the critical perspective are undertaken.

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