ARCHAEOLOGY IN THE MAKING — BIOGRAPHIES

Biography: Interrogations, Observations, Studies – "BIOS" – is a seminar workshop running this year at Stanford Humanities Center and organized by Anne Duray and Thea De Armond – [Link]

Yesterday I shared some thoughts on my collection, with Bill Rathje and Chris Witmore, of conversations with archaeologists – the book Archaeology in the Making [link]

Link to the slides on Slideshare – Archaeology in the making

In telling of their lives and careers in archaeology, in their archaeological autobiographies, this group of archaeologists, brought together opportunistically simply because they were in Stanford when we could share some time for a conversation, prompted us to rethink the way a discipline like archaeology works. The standard accounts we receive in text books and academic programs foreground great thinkers and practitioners, paradigm shifts from “culture history” to “processual archaeology”, for example, methods, techniques and theory, new discoveries. What we heard instead were human stories of experiences in the academy and beyond.

I picked up all this just last weekend at the Society for American Archaeology meetings in San Francisco, in my comments for the session celebrating Ruth Tringham’s archaeology [Link].

Yesterday I posed again the question raised by these archaeological autobiographies – what does this mean for the way we do archaeology? – this disconnection between what we experience and the way the discipline accounts for itself.

My answer is that we need to attend to the political economy of discipline, and see the way we practice and perform our archaeology as deeply implicated in the management of institutions and agencies – when, typically, management is seen as a

neutral and technical matter.

Moving on from my observations at the SAAs about the relevance of performance practice to this question, I outlined how design thinking is a way of managing archaeological projects and lives, and is profoundly sensitive to the politics of the personal.

And, as Peter Miller suggested in his recent article in the Chronicle of Higher Education [Link] – design thinking is closely allied to the project of a critical Liberal Arts.

Next – I want to take up some of the thinking of critical management practice, as in the work of Martin Parker (see his “Against Management” [Link] and “Alternative Business” [Link].