BINFORD – TELLING STORIES WITH THE PAST

The new book Creative Pragmatics for Active Learning in STEM Education (edited with Connie Svabo, Tamara Carleton, Chungfang Zhou) prompted a memory today.

The title indicates the collection is about STEM (science, technology, engineering, math) education. And so it is. But this is not a book about regular science education. We come at the topic by asking – Just what is science and how does it work? Our answers have a lot to do with creativity in the humanities and arts, as well as in the pragmatics of running scientific projects.

The book makes the case for pedagogy that unites competencies in arts, humanities and sciences through project-based problem-oriented learning – active learning-engaged-with-things. Not delivering bodies of knowledge, but processes, experiences of constant and iterative learning. We call the package creative pragmatics. Our

argument is backed by research and case studies in student-centered active learning. We draw on sociology of knowledge, critical theory and science studies, insights into how science actually works to understand a complex contemporary world of uncertainty and precarity.

What is my particular angle on this? Building and sharing *archaeological* knowledge. What should archaeologists be doing – now and for the future? What role for science? What role for the humanities? And how to we share competencies in archaeological knowledge building with future generations of archaeologists.

The prompted memory. It was probably in 2002 that Lew Binford came to visit Bill Rathje and me in Stanford to discuss the question –

What is archaeology really about?

Lew gave a talk, met with students. We held a long discussion, recorded the key parts, transcribed them, and published an edited version in our book *Archaeology in the Making* (edited Bill Rathje, Chris Witmore and myself, 2013) [Link].

Some of those who shared the two days with us might have expected a confrontation around the character of science. Lew had long been identified as a leading figure in new and processual archaeology, since the 1960s caricatured as archaeology that follows the methodology of scientific inquiry, associated with the likes of hypothetico-deductive method. The same caricatured understanding of our discipline holds that my work is in a relativist anti-science post-processual paradigm.

In discussion it was Bill's pragmatism – his focus on getting archaeology done, adapting and managing with eclectic intellectual foraging, his capacity to seek bridges rather than divides – that meant we didn't feel the need to debate these abstractions and labels that had been applied to us – science and anti-science. Lew came straight to the point – the best archaeology, and, yes, let's call it science, is about constructing good cases, good arguments, good narratives.

Lew, Bill, and I agreed about the primacy of what can be called the *rhetoric* of science, with rhetoric conceived broadly as designIng and crafting arguments and cases. Skills and competencies, processes of crafting knowledge, material scaffolding for bodies of knowledge – these are the focus of the collection Creative Pragmatics.

Lew thought competency in constructing reasoned argument had been in decline since the 60s, such that the project of processual archaeology might be considered a failure. I have similar concerns about rhetorical competency in the humanities.

This common ground of archaeological argument and rhetoric is *between* the archaeological past and present.

A regular archaeological, and historiographical, concern is to narrate the past, to tell of what happened. What Lew and I shared in that conversation 20 years ago quite changes how we might conceive of such narrative –

Archaeologists tell stories *with* the past, not *of* the past.

Lew Binford

Bill Rathje