

Agency and Archaeology: Past, Present, and Future Directions

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In light of the growing social scientific interest in agency theory, this paper sets out to examine and critically evaluate recent approaches to agency within archaeology. To this end, the paper briefly outlines the foundational theories of Pierre Bourdieu and Anthony Giddens before turning to discuss the central themes and issues that emerge from some of the more influential contemporary approaches to agency within archaeology. Drawing from these differing approaches, this paper seeks to establish conceptual clarity in archaeological thinking about agency through a discussion of the importance of distinguishing between intentions, consequences, meanings, and motives when seeking to understand the situated subjectivities of historical actors.

KEY WORDS: agency; social theory; practice theory; archaeological theory.

INTRODUCTION

Questions of agency, of self-determination and will, are clearly not new—from Aristotle to Adam Smith, from Rousseau to Camus, inquiries into the limits on and abilities of an individual within a society have been at the forefront of philosophical thought for centuries. Despite this long history, agency has, over the last 30 years, grown to hold a central position in the social sciences. Indeed, the focus on this relationship between structure and agent, society and individual, is at the heart of most research done in the social sciences today.

This recent focus on agency is often viewed as a panacea for the systems models and structuralist/functionalist theories that have long dominated social

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scientific research (see Dobres and Robb, 2000). In general, the birth of agency theory has reflected a desire to counter deterministic models of human action by acknowledging that people purposefully act and alter the external world through those actions. On the basis of this desire, social scientists have attempted to systematically construct and incorporate theories about the ways in which human actions are constrained, enabled, constructed, and manifest within larger social systems. At the heart of agency theory is, thus, the basic agreement that people are not uniform automatons, merely reacting to changes in the external world but, instead, that they “play a role in the formation of the social realities in which they participate” (Barfield, 1997, p. 4). Likewise, these theories focus on both “the impact of the system on practice, and the impact of practice on the system” (Ortner, 1984, p. 148). Beyond these basic agreements, there are numerous, contradictory ways in which agency theory, and associated practice theories, have been defined and utilized.

Sherry Ortner, in her seminal paper on anthropological theory since the sixties, views the concept of agentive practice as “neither a theory or a method in itself, but rather . . . a symbol, in the name of which a variety of theories and methods are being developed” (Ortner, 1984, p. 127). While perhaps useful as a symbol of an emerging theoretical orientation, Dobres and Robb, in their edited volume on agency in archaeology, suggest that there has been little explicit archaeological consideration of the basic methodological and epistemological issues surrounding the uses of agency theory, thus rendering the term “a lingua franca—an ambiguous platitude meaning everything and nothing” (2000, p. 3). Indeed, agency has alternately been equated with the individual; individually unique cognitive structures; resistance to social norms; resistance to power inequalities; the capacity for skillful social practice; freedom from structural constraints; and free will (see below). Likewise, agency has been posited as rooted in purposeful/intentional action; rational action; conscious practice; unconscious dispositions; and subjective experience (see below).

Within these disparate definitions of agency, a number of central issues have emerged. For example, each of these definitions imply certain assumptions about the creative abilities of an individual within social structures, about the knowledge any given individual can have about the “realities” of the structures within which they function, about the importance of and limits to human consciousness, and about the relationship between internal feelings or motives of an individual and external social or cultural systems possibly impinging upon those internal states. Before I review the ways in which agency theory has been utilized within anthropology and archaeology, I will first briefly turn to the foundational architects of agency theory, namely Pierre Bourdieu and Anthony Giddens. Because of the influential nature of these thinkers, I would suggest that we must grasp the basics of their theories in order to understand more recent permutations of the concept of agency.

THE FATHERS OF AGENCY THEORY

The extension of the dialogue surrounding the relationship between society and the individual, begun by Marx (1964, 1992, 1998), Weber (1978, 1992), and Durkheim (1984, 1995), can be seen in the recent work of Pierre Bourdieu and Anthony Giddens, arguably the most influential agency theorists in the social sciences today. Indeed, much of our modern understanding of the agent/structure relationship stems from our readings of these two men. Bourdieu's practice theory and Giddens' theory of structuration both outline the dialectical relationship between "agent," a bounded but not determined individual who can alter structures through practice (or praxis), and "structure," the larger, more perduring settings and conditions that result from the ongoing relationships between individuals.

Pierre Bourdieu

Practice theory was made popular by Pierre Bourdieu with his seminal work, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Bourdieu, 1977). Bourdieu frames his practice theory within terms of human domination and resistance to accepted social patterns of inequality and, like Marx, tends to focus on social asymmetry and class as a key element of the structure-agent dialectic. In his version of practice theory, Bourdieu attempts to take into account the complexities of human action by collapsing the often-dualistic nature of past social theories. For example, Bourdieu hopes to break down the material/symbolic, subjective/objective dualities that dominated Marx's and Weber's conceptualizations of human action. Bourdieu's central concept is "habitus," an individually unique schema of unconsciously internalized dispositions (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 72). These dispositions *determine* how we perceive and act in the world and are, importantly, both structured and structuring in relation to those external systems. In his reaction to the structuralist paradigm dominating French intellectual life at the time, it is often argued that Bourdieu inserted the individual back into what were otherwise overly deterministic accounts of human practice. Likewise, because Bourdieu views habitus as both structured and structuring, it is possible to see why some scholars have argued that he leaves room for individuals to intentionally affect larger social structures.

Unfortunately, Bourdieu conceptualizes individual habitus as entirely determined by experiences of the external world, unique only because every individual will, over their lifetime, experience differing social conditions based almost entirely on their class affiliation (1990, p. 60). Bourdieu suggests that it is this historically unique exposure of each individual to different groups, social situations, and classes that constitute an individual's habitus and that practices are "*produced* by . . . habitus" (1977, p. 72, emphasis mine). On the basis of the view that habitus is produced by the structures of a particular social environment, Bourdieu views

habitus as the “conductorless orchestration” of human practice (1977, p. 70). In this way, habitus is defined as “a socially *constituted* system of cognitive and motivating structures . . . in which the agent’s interests are *defined*” (1977, p. 76, emphasis mine) without “consciousness or will” (1990, p. 56). Because he believes that human action is, on the whole unconscious, and that individual motives are simply the outcome of external “objective conditions,” Bourdieu suggests that social change can occur only when there is an accidental mismatching of habitus onto current social conditions (1977, p. 164; see also Garnham 1993, p. 182). Echoing Marx’s notion of false consciousness, Bourdieu suggests that the true nature of existing structural inequalities “are placed beyond the grasp of consciousness, and hence cannot be touched by voluntary, deliberate transformation, cannot even be made explicit” (1977, p. 94). Put differently, though the individual may be the level at which social change is manifest, actors “seem doomed to reproduce their world mindlessly, without its contradictions leaving any mark on their awareness” (Comaroff, 1985, p. 5). As Jeffrey Alexander argues, it is an individual’s ability to “consciously grasp in order to make independent choice . . . that Bourdieu’s theory of action, order, and field has so systematically denied” (Alexander, 1995, p. 184; see also Bohman, 1999, p. 132).

Bourdieu’s notion of doxa (the naturalized perception of existing social structures) and his insistence that there is no room for intentionality in understanding human action are based on the assumption that the habituated nature of much of human action is necessarily performed without conscious reflection and therefore beyond the purview of individual motivation (see Smith, 2001, for a critical look at Bourdieu’s view that individuals in ancient societies were more doxically bound by social structures). Yet the fact that there is a level of habituation to much human action does not mean that the actor cannot consciously reflect on or be aware of his or her own automatic responses (see Throop and Murphy, 2002). For instance, Bourdieu’s notion of body hexis (1977, p. 87) suggests that intentionality and habituated actions are mutually exclusive, thus promoting the idea that embodied responses are beyond conscious control. Bourdieu’s dismissal of the inclusion of intentionality in understanding human action on the basis that it is overly intellectualist, coupled with his focus on an individual’s “actions and works” as the “product of a *modus operandi* of which he is not the producer and has no conscious mastery” (1977, p. 79), neglects what phenomenologists have long acknowledged—that there can be no simple divide between the contents of conscious awareness, motivation, and somatic dispositions such as habitus (see Dilthey, 1989; Schutz, 1967). This is not to dismiss the somaticized and nondiscursive aspects of this equation. As I will discuss in more detail below, more recent work on doxa and the embodied nature of human practice has moved beyond the conflation of the notions of *habituation* with *unconscious/nonintentional* (see Hochschild, 1983; Mahmood, 2001; Thomas, 1996). Indeed, it is increasingly acknowledged that while “there is a degree of automaticity in all of our actions . . . the belief that there is also always

a strict delineation between habitual responses and our conscious life, or that our intentions, motives, and goals do not figure into directing our habituated responses is . . . an untenable theoretical position” from which to investigate human action (Throop and Murphy, 2002, p. 198; see also LiPuma, 1993, p. 24).

Anthony Giddens

Anthony Giddens tries to overcome this limiting notion of agency with his theory of structuration, which focuses upon both the constraining *and* enabling nature of social structures (Giddens, 1979, 1993). Unlike Bourdieu, Giddens does not view individual action as primarily determined by unconsciously internalized structures. Instead, Giddens views social practice as far more mutable and believes that there is room in every instance of practice for creativity and innovation. Giddens’ theory of structuration is based on his notion of “tacit knowledge that is skillfully applied in the enactment of courses of conduct, but which the actor is not able to formulate discursively” (1979, p. 57). By locating human practice in the goal-directed, skillful enactment of tacit knowledge, Giddens emphasizes that “human beings are neither to be treated as passive objects, nor as wholly free subjects” (1979, p. 150).

Similar to Weber’s notion that individual motivation is based on “a complex of subjective meaning which seems to the actor himself or to the observer an adequate ground for the conduct in question” (Weber, 1978, p. 11), Giddens believes that instead of a conductorless orchestration of human practice, every individual knows how to act based on a “practical consciousness.” Practical consciousness is defined as “non-discursive, but not unconscious, knowledge of social institutions,” which allows individuals to reflexively monitor their conduct (1979, p. 24). Giddens goes on to argue that while “[m]ost forms of practical consciousness could not be ‘held in mind’ during the course of social activities . . . there are no cognitive barriers separating discursive and practical consciousness” (1991, p. 36) and thus, “even the most enduring of habits . . . involves continual and detailed reflexive attention” (1993, p. 6). In this way, though Giddens believes that there is a habituated level to the majority of everyday action, he also maintains that individuals can consciously access and reflect upon the content and meaning of those habituated actions. Giddens thus breaks down the “habitual equals unconscious” equation by envisioning individuals as (potentially) more active in the shaping (or structuring) of the world within which they function. These agentive subjects are functioning within social structures that are, according to Giddens, nothing more than commonly “reproduced practices” that are so regularly replicated they seem natural and permanent (1993). In other words, “structures only exist as the reproduced conduct of situated actors with definite intentions and interests” (1993, p. 134). This conceptualization of structure as the result of ongoing social relationships and interactions

leaves room for change over time in those structures as individual practices are altered.

While Giddens has clearly moved beyond many of the shortcomings of Bourdieu's conceptualization of habitus, Giddens still falls slightly short in his detailed accounting of intentionality. Although he sets up his theory of structuration as an attempt to incorporate the large body of existing philosophical literature dealing with "purposes, reasons, and motives of action" (1979, p. 2), in his practical applications of structuration theory Giddens often leaves little room for the complex motivations and desires of the individual (see Giddens, 1991). In fact Giddens explicitly states that structuration theory refers "not to the intentions people have in doing things but to their capacity of doing these things" (1984, p. 9). In this way, clearly building on Parson's model of the social patterning of human practices (Parson, 1937), he presents a theory of agency that is founded almost exclusively upon knowledge and skillful enactment of actions meant to maintain a "security-of being" (1993, p. 124). While he does not assert that agents can have a perfect knowledge of their social world, with his focus on "mutual knowledge" Giddens is critical of theorists who "have tended greatly to exaggerate the impact of dominant symbol systems or ideologies upon those in subordinate classes" (1979, p. 72). With his dismissal of the potentially oppressive nature of an ideology, Giddens tends to focus on stability and shared knowledge, rather than conflict and the alteration of structure.

Giddens, like Bourdieu, also promotes a somewhat simplistic and universalized view of the premodern past as a time when "individuals (and humanity as a whole) were more powerless than they are in modern settings" (1991, p. 192). Likewise, his focus on a practical, reflexive monitoring of conduct downplays (1) Weber's insight that not all action is predicated upon "rational" knowledge of how to act (Weber, 1978), and (2) Marx's insight that not all members of a society, living within a structure, share access to the same knowledge (Marx, 1964). According to Stjepan Mestrovic, while Giddens' theory of structuration presents agents as "skilled and knowledgeable," this theory continues to overlook "the irrational forces at work in the psyche, the boundedness of knowledge that agents possess, and, above all, the strict limits of where and how agents may behave like agents" (Mestrovic, 1998, p. 23; see also Johnson, 2000a). Despite these shortcomings, through an extension of Giddens' theory to include the messy and emotive aspects of human intentionality as well as the ideological nature of some symbolic systems, structuration theory has acted as a broad foundation upon which much of modern agency theory has been built.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO AGENCY

While I am clearly critical of certain aspects of structuration and practice theory, there can be no doubt that these theoretical perspectives have stimulated

new directions in social theory and have motivated a new wave of antideterministic research in the social sciences. Within archaeology, the inclusion of the notion of agency has clearly expanded the analytical abilities of archaeology to address previously ignored aspects of the past. As Ortner argues, it is not “whether it is a good idea to try to develop some kind of practice-theoretical archaeology, but . . . what kinds of analytical and interpretive strategies would make it feasible” (2001, p. 272).

Although the basic principles of the structure–agent dialectic may act as a theoretical foundation, the details of agency theory as currently used by archaeologists are varied and often contradictory. For example, agency is alternately viewed as the result of agents acting upon “situationally rational” perceptions (Cowgill, 2000), as a force defined entirely in terms of its consequences (Barrett, 2000), as a historically contingent, intersubjective phenomenon concerned with possibilities and limits on choice (Clark, 2000), and as a way to understand conscious, creative activities of individuals within limits established by social structures (Saitta, 1994). Within these theoretical variations, there is differential focus placed upon intentions versus consequences, knowledgeable actors versus ideological dupes, and individuals as creatively constructed versus individuals as culturally determined.

In the following section, I will critically review some of these varied archaeological approaches to agency as presented in recent literature explicitly addressing the problem of agency in archaeological theory. Although this is not a comprehensive review of all archaeological attempts to utilize an agency approach, I do believe that the theorists outlined below are representative of many of the most influential approaches to agency within the field. The five most common approaches include a focus on collective agency (Shanks and Tilley, 1987), individual intentionality (Hodder, 2000), a rational actor approach (Bell, 1992), unintended consequences of social struggle (Pauketat, 2001), and practical rationality as manifest within social struggle (Joyce, 2000a).

Collective Agency: Michael Shanks and Christopher Tilley

Shanks and Tilley were among the first archaeologists to explicitly elaborate an agency approach within archaeology (see also Hodder, 1986). Following Giddens, they suggest that “individuals are competent and knowledgeable while at the same time their action is situated within unacknowledged conditions and has unintended consequences” (1987, p. 116). They go on to suggest that “to state that the subject is positioned does not require that he or she becomes a mere component or prop” (1987, p. 123).

To implement an agency approach, Shanks and Tilley attempt to explain recent British and Swedish beer bottle designs and beer advertisements based on an investigation of the social meanings attributed to beer consumption in England and Sweden (1987, p. 173). They argue that bottle and advertisement design is

“connected with the need of companies to create difference and, therefore, meaning for a consumer market” (1987, p. 236). They suggest that in both England and Sweden the beer bottle designs and advertisements attempt to “create” alternative social meanings for the working class in relation to their beer consumption.

Although they explicitly criticize any “dependence on function as an explanatory concept” (1987, p. 118), Shanks and Tilley ultimately attribute the difference in design content and complexity to the differential function that Swedish versus British beer cans and beer ads are intended to perform on their consumers. Despite the inclusion of an interpretation of “meaning” as part of their argument, Johnson argues that Shanks and Tilley’s reliance on the (ideological) function of beer cans and advertisements still presents the working class as cultural dupes that do not in any way appear to be “an active group” (Johnson, 2000a, p. 214). Indeed, Shanks and Tilley state that “all social actions are determined actions” (1987, p. 124). In this way, as Johnson suggests, Shanks and Tilley follow Bourdieu in their “insistence that all social action is over determined by structures” (2000a, p. 214). Importantly, the fact that Shanks and Tilley’s discussion of agency relies on social meaning as currently understood by living participants points to a problematic reliance on information not usually available to archaeologists. I would question the extent to which such an analysis could have been done archaeologically without a more detailed knowledge of the actual material/everyday practices involved in beer drinking in contrast to the ideological interpretations of the meaning of beer drinking as promoted by beer companies.

Despite these problems, Shanks and Tilley represent a move within archaeology toward an inclusion of collective action in notions of agency. Based on intrasocial variation, this approach is utilized by many archaeologists who seek to understand how class or gender systems affect the collective decision-making or identity constructions of different social groups, particularly in relation to resistance to structural inequalities (see also McGuire, 1992; Saitta, 1994; Sassaman, 2000; Shackel, 2000).

Individual Intentionality: Ian Hodder

Approaching agency from a different angle, Ian Hodder argues that we should view agency through the “lived lives” of individuals. While Hodder (1986) has previously argued for an approach to agency theory through shared meanings and practices, he now suggests that this past focus wrongfully foregrounded indeterminacy by presenting an all too ahistorical and generic individual as “a theoretical prop to the emphasis on intentionality” (2000, p. 22). To correct this, Hodder argues that we should seek to uncover “individual lived lives” in order to view agency in “terms of individual forward-looking intentionality and creativity” (2000, p. 23). In other words, Hodder suggests that it is through an examination of individual lives in light of historically significant “dimensions of experience,” that we can access and legitimately evaluate past human agentic actions (2000, p. 25).

To do this, Hodder looks at the life of “the Ice Man” and at an individual burial from Catalhoyuk in order to “capture the way [macroprocesses] are understood and dealt with (including the contradictions) in the practices and concepts of individual experiences” (2000, p. 31). In his discussion of the Ice Man, Hodder shows how an in-depth look at the struggles and lifestyle of this individual, through his participation in trade and social networks and through his creative attempts to survive everyday life within the context of large-scale social movements, can outline some of the unique and nonunique aspects of the Ice Man’s life. This, he argues, also provides us with a mediated glimpse at the workings of long-term structures as manifest at the individual level.

Importantly, this approach requires that these unique “microprocesses” be tied to the structural macroprocesses within which they are situated. If “a study of agency cannot be separated from a study of structure” (Johnson, 2000a, p. 225), a focus only on the individual would neglect half of the structure/agent equation (see also Johnson 2000b, p. 213). Methodologically, this focus on a specific individual is potentially problematic in that it relegates agency approaches to extremely limited archaeological data. Seeking any one individual from the past usually entails either a reliance on archaeologically observable leaders, negating the attempt to move beyond top-down, big-man centric models of social change, a reliance on additional sources of data such as archival documents, or a reliance on unusual flukes of preservation, negating a great deal of archaeological data currently available.

This focus on individual intentionality is somewhat unique within archaeology as most scholars instead focus on more collective, shared practices or on a more “generic” individual. Johnson (2000b) has extended Hodder’s basic argument in building from a focus on individual intentionality toward a more general contextualization of those intentions. As Johnson’s work indicates, this type of analysis has far greater potential when archival or ethnohistoric data can also be incorporated. Despite its methodological limitations, this approach, when combined with a more broad, structural approach, seems highly promising (see also Meskell, 2002).

The Rational Actor: James Bell

Bell (1992) directly equates agency theory with methodological individualism. According to Bell, collective actions and shared institutions are best interpreted as the products of the decisions and actions of individuals and “the ideas and decisions of individuals explain change” (1992, p. 39). Bell basically argues that unpredictable changes in social structure are almost always unintended and that much of what occurs lies beyond individual intentionality. Bell also argues that because “there are normally a wide variety of ideas and motives amongst individuals,” (1992, p. 39), it is very difficult to archaeologically access knowledge about those motives. According to Bell, “if the agency of humans is significant

in the structure and transformations of human institutions, and yet knowledge of their ideas and motives can only be fragmentary, then individualistic tools for investigating human institutions would seem poor or at best" (1992, p. 40).

On the basis of the poor tools available to interpret motive, Bell suggests that agency approaches can best be utilized only in those realms of human activity where the ideas and motives are widely shared (1992, p. 41). In contrast to Hodder, Bell argues that agency can only be effectively used "to analyze the rudimentary economic behavior of individuals [because] all individuals need to make decisions about obtaining food and shelter" (1992, p. 41). In other words, Bell suggests that agency theory must focus on prehistoric activities that were the same for most individuals under given conditions (1992, p. 48). In this way, though he attempts to avoid universalistic assumptions about rationality, Bell ultimately ends up relying on a normative principle of rationality (see Callinicos, 1988, p. 13).

An archaeologically important extension of a rational actor approach can be seen in the "self-aggrandizer" or "prestige" models of social complexification that envision individuals acting in rational, calculated ways in order to improve their social position (see Clark and Blake, 1994; Earle, and Preucel, 1987; Flannery, 1999; Spencer, 1993). This permutation of the rational actor model importantly incorporates notions of social prestige and symbolic power, moving beyond a focus only on economic or subsistence concerns. This movement also acknowledges that different individuals will have different access to the ability to appropriate and accumulate social power.

Unintended Consequences of Social Struggle: Timothy Pauketat

Timothy Pauketat argues that emerging from the application of a practice approach to archaeology, there has been a shift in "the locus of social change and, consequently, in what constitutes a satisfactory explanation" (2001, p. 74; 2000). According to Pauketat, an agency perspective is based on the belief that "People's actions and representations—'practices'—are generative" and that "practices are historical processes" (2001, p. 74). In contradiction to Bell, he also argues that agency should not simply be equated with methodological individualism that overlooks "the central importance of the process of structuration, the continuous creation of the conditions that govern practice, as opposed to particular agents" (2001, p. 79).

To elaborate the interpretive possibilities of an agency approach, Pauketat offers two alternate explanations, one behavioral and one practice based, of a shift in pottery technology in the central Mississippi valley in order to pursue "how change occurred—that is, how meanings or traditions were constructed and transmitted" (2001, p. 87). In his practice-based explanation, Pauketat focuses on a "premier 'event' (the founding of a political capital at Cahokia) in which social

space was structured” and its relation to a shift in ceramic technology (a concurrent regional spread of shell-tempered pottery) in order to emphasize that microscale changes cannot be divorced from macroscale processes and vice-versa (2001, p. 83). According to Pauketat, a behavioral explanation of the widespread adoption of crushed mussel shell temper after the rise of Cahokia focuses on the essentialist notion that people will gradually adopt superior technologies as they are exposed to them. In contrast, Pauketat suggests that this approach misplaces the locus of social change which should instead be located in practice “set in the context of a continually redefined and revalued tradition” (2001, p. 86). In this way, Pauketat interprets the macroscale changes in pottery technology as the result of “traditions appropriated within fields of social action to produce or resist central cultural orders” (2001, p. 87). Following Marshal Sahlins (Sahlins, 1981), Pauketat focuses on tradition as the medium of change and concentrates on the often-unintended consequences of individual attempts to enact traditional categories as the force behind that change.

For such an explanation to be effective, Pauketat suggests that an agency approach requires the interpretation of a large body of data and in general should focus on a search for proximate, not ultimate causes of social reproduction and change. As he suggests, historical process “must be understood through detailed and large-scale studies of who did what when and how” (2001, p. 86). This focus on proximate cause within a large body of data “[s]hifts the locus of explanation away from the invisible causes that will never be known to the actual structuring events in which all peoples’ actions and representations were brought to bear” (2001, p. 86). Pauketat concludes that “[a]nswers to the ultimate why questions will be found only through the cumulative, painstaking, data rich, multi-scalar studies of proximate causation” (2001, p. 87).

While I find much compelling in Pauketat’s approach, I take issue with his view that “practices are, quite literally, embodiment of people’s habitus or dispositions” (2001, p. 80). Relying on Bourdieu, Pauketat argues that dispositions are “inculcated into one’s experiences vis-a-vis doxic referents in fields of action and representation ranging from relatively private, daily routines to colossal political rituals and mass media” (2001, p. 80). These doxic referents are the “‘non-discursive,’ unreflexive knowledge that forms the basis of dispositions and guides peoples actions” (Pauketat, 2000, p. 115). This is, unfortunately, returning to a focus on the unconscious basis of action, thus negating a conscious actor approach. On the basis of this notion of nondiscursive knowledge, Pauketat suggests that meaning is not an essential aspect of an archaeological search for agency because meaning resides only in the “moment of interaction” and because “people act often without any conscious understanding of what their actions mean” (2000, p. 116). In his assertion that we do not necessarily need to even consider meaning in our interpretations (2001, p. 87), it seems that Pauketat neglects one of the most promising aspects of an agency approach.

Practical Rationality and Social Struggle: Arthur Joyce

Turning to a more Giddensian approach, Arthur Joyce defines agency as the “actions of individual social actors embedded within a broader socio-cultural and ecological setting” (Joyce, 2000a, p. 73). Moving beyond Bourdieu, Joyce suggests that we must consider not only internalized structures, but also “human psychology and how personality develops in *interaction* with the structural environment” (2000a, p. 72 emphasis mine). Like Pauketat, Joyce views an agency approach as an analytical tool, allowing us to reinterpret data from a new, more effective and accurate perspective. With this in mind, Joyce presents a new interpretation of the founding of Monte Alban that counters existing interpolity competition models by focusing on the “intrasocietal dynamics of change” (2000a, p. 71). This interpretation importantly includes notions of power inequalities and resistance in his discussion of the change generated within Monte Alban.

Joyce presents a persuasive and interesting model of the rise of Monte Alban based on the ongoing negotiations for access to and control over the “sacred” between rising elites and nonelites. After outlining some of the existing structural elements relating to the human relationship to the sacred in Oaxaca immediately preceding the rise of Monte Alban, he elaborates how those structures were altered as elite strategies were forced to respond to and counteract nonelite resistance to increasing elite control over the sacred. This focus on commoner resistance shows that there was a social negotiation between the commoners and the elite at Monte Alban, thus negating any top-down, elite-focused explanations of social change.

Although focused on knowledgeable social agents, Joyce’s main interest is in explaining how social change is the unintended consequence of a struggle for and resistance against the accumulation of social power. Despite the focus on unintended consequence, Joyce does acknowledge the importance of local meaning and situated decision-making. This focus on negotiation and practical rationality harkens back to Giddens in the assumption of a practically skilled and knowledgeable actor performing goal-oriented actions (see also Cowgill, 2000). Relying on a more contextualized notion of rationality, this approach overcomes many of the limits of a pure rational actor model while also allowing us to attribute goal-oriented, meaningfully motivated actions to past agents (see also Barrett, 2001).

CENTRAL ISSUES AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

As can be observed above, there are multiple theoretical and methodological ways in which agency theory is explicitly being applied within archaeology. Building from these various approaches, there are a number of basic issues surrounding agency theory that can be outlined and evaluated. I argue that there are three central, interrelated issues at the heart of these differing agency approaches including questions about the proper unit of analysis, a focus on resistance and

rationality, and the tension between intentionality versus consequence. Particularly in relation to archaeology, these issues of debate point to a number of problems and possibilities for an agency approach.

What is the Unit of Analysis? Structure and the Individual

Because agency theory attempts to incorporate an understanding of the role agents play in the construction and maintenance of larger social structures, when employing agency theory, the unit of analysis is often assumed to be at the level of the individual. Yet, because of the inclusion of a structural element within agency theory, the individual is also often viewed as an insufficient unit of analysis. In other words, the focus on the individual as the locus of social change, in combination with the assertion that we can only explore the generic individual (Bell, 1992, p. 42), leads to difficult methodological issues, especially if an agency approach is intended to address resistance to larger shared structures (see Johnson, 2000b). A focus on the generic individual, leaves room only for investigations of activity that is the same for most individuals (Bell, 1992, p. 48), thus denying the existence of creative and unique practices outside or against structuring structures (see Chapman, 2000). Likewise, a focus solely on the lived lives of specific individuals cannot effectively illuminate the ongoing relations between structure and agent. Methodologically, if we seek to locate change at the level of the individual and yet we can only look at widely shared actions, where do we locate the unit of analysis? Put differently, if we are looking for agency within widely shared and repeated practices, how is that different from structure and how do we locate agency within those repeated practices?

At a more theoretical level, the nature of “the individual” as a unit of analysis is particularly problematic when we consider cross-cultural ethnographic data indicating that our western notion of individuality does not necessarily apply to other cultures (Geertz, 1974; Shweder and Bourne, 1982; cf. Spiro, 1993). As Johnson argues, “the category of the individual or person is not a straightforward concept. Notions of what constitutes individuality, the ‘category of person,’ vary widely across time and space . . . and no commonsensical, cross-cultural definition can be put forward” (2000b, p. 213). Because of this, the very construct of structure versus agent in the context of discourses of individuality may not hold up as we seek to understand the actions and intentions of those agents. For example, all too often in discussions of agency, what is considered to be individual is equated with internal feelings, emotions, and desires. This “common sense” notion of individuality is rendered problematic when we acknowledge that the boundary between internal feeling states and external structures are, even in our own cultures, far more malleable, fluid, and flexible than we often envision.

For example, Arlie Hochschild’s writings on emotion work clearly indicate that we must be very careful as we attempt to work out the relationship between

the individual and the structures within which they live (Hochschild, 1983). On the one hand, Hochschild outlines the emotion work that must be done by airline stewardesses as they deal with the requirement that they be cheerful and sympathetic at all times (1983). Emotion, according to Hochschild, must often be aligned with broader cultural expectations. Here, the inner life of feeling is constrained by social structures and, therefore, blurs the widely accepted boundary between an individual's emotions and larger social structures (see also Hollan, 1992).

On the other hand, according to Hochschild (1983), these women can *purposefully* work to alter their own emotional states through "emotion work," indicating that, even within this inner realm of emotions, there can be selective and purposeful incorporation of or resistance to specific social structures. Similarly, Saba Mahmood, in her discussion of Muslim women, presents a number of examples of emotion work and how some Egyptian women, who, despite their desires to do so, were not feeling culturally appropriate feelings of shame. These women were able to internalize, through purposeful emotion work, culturally consonant and authentic feelings (Mahmood, 2001).

Hochschild's and Mahmood's work indicates that the assumption of a clear boundary between the individual and society is overly simplistic. Indeed, this ability for individuals to purposefully internalize and purposefully alter their deepest feelings about, for instance, body boundaries, morality, or basic happiness, indicates that we cannot simply locate agency at the level of the individual without exploring the dynamic interplay between "inner" lives of thought/feeling and the "outer" sociocultural structures within which they are articulated. That individuals can consciously emphasize or deemphasize which structures they internalize points to a key shortcoming of Bourdieu's notion of habitus. Instead of viewing an individual's habitus as constructed only through the unintentional internalization of different external structures based on exposure to different social categories or classes (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 60), we see how consciously felt goals and desires can in fact affect an individual's embodied, habituated practice.

This difficulty in incorporating "the individual" into our substantive studies does not mean that archaeology should, as Randall McGuire contends, focus only on the actions and consciousness of social groups at the expense of any interest in the "abstract idea of individuals" (McGuire, 1992, p. 134). Rather, this means seeking archaeological theories that acknowledge the complex and historical nature of social relationships within the context of local experience by exploring the subjective, inner worlds of individuals (Meskell, 2001, p. 188). As social phenomenologists Alfred Schutz and Thomas Luckmann argue, "[h]istorical research is indeed seldom directly interested in the conscious life of the historical subject. But it should not be forgotten that historical sources . . . always allow a backwards reference of such kind, since they presuppose and pass on experiences of social reality on the part of the sign-posting subject" (Schutz and Thomas, 1995, pp. 89–90). Seeking access to the historically complex world of the "sign-posting subject"

will involve a further exploration of the integral relationship between power and identity construction, maintenance, and fluidity as well as the ways in which material culture can be utilized in expressions of power and identity.

Because there is such complex interaction between individual subjectivities and the social structures created through the actions of those individuals, there must be an expansion of our understanding of the complex and often historically unique interplay between ideological discourses and the multiple contextually situated reactions and interactions enacted within and outside of those discourses (see Funari et al., 1999). Likewise, we must problematize McGuire's call to focus only on the action and social consciousness of social groups (McGuire, 1992) as we acknowledge that social categories such as class and ethnicity cross cut each other and are not independently constructed (see Wilkie and Bartoy, 2000, p. 751; see also Meskell, 2002).

There are some promising avenues that are beginning to point to ways in which it may be possible to gain insight into the structures of past human experience and consciousness which could lead to theoretical models able to encompass the complexities of individual subjectivity within more archaeologically observable social structures. Recent archaeological interest in ethnicity and identity construction (see Jones, 1997, 2000; Meskell, 2001), phenomenology (see Bradley, 1998; Gosden, 1994; Thomas, 1996), neurocognitive research (see Mithen, 1996; Renfrew and Zubrow, 1994), and the embodied nature of individual subjectivities (see Joyce, 2000b; Kus, 1992; Meskell, 2002; Rautman, 2000; Tarlow, 1999) point to promising new ways in which we can begin to access the conscious life of historical subjects within archaeology. Outside of archaeology, recent work in neurophenomenology on ritual and religion (Laughlin et al., 1990) and in psychocultural anthropology on the relationships between the individual and culture (Hollan, 2000; Obeyesekere, 1981; Strauss and Quinn, 1997) could give archaeology some basis for grounding our hermeneutical analyses, albeit mitigated, of the ways in which people might have interpreted their lifeworlds of the past. Although not a panacea to the problems that Hochschild's and Mahmood's work foreground, these approaches are footholds archaeology could use to complexify the models we use in our understandings of how people might have been interpreting, experiencing, and thus acting within their world. Through these analytical tools, we may begin to move beyond a focus on the agent, actor, or individual as the pivot of agency and, instead, envision "indissoluble formations of structurally embedded agency and intention-filled structures" (Ortner, 1996, p. 12).

Resistance and Rationality

Drawing heavily upon Giddens, some theorists approach agency from what is called a rational actor model or methodological individualism (Bell, 1992). This approach views human action as goal oriented and rationally calculated (Ortner,

1984, p. 150). Even those who step outside of the rational actor model to discuss situational rationality rely on assumptions about the universal reasoning ability of humans (Cowgill, 2000). This is not necessarily a shortcoming since any attempt to understand the motives and meanings behind agentic practices requires some level of empathetic or universalistic approach (see Obeyesekere, 1992).

Although attempting to counteract notions of “false consciousness,” this Giddensian approach tends to ignore the fact that not all individuals will have access to the same knowledge about and understanding of the implications of existing social structures. While the assumption of some sort of shared, cross-cultural humanness is clearly necessary for any social scientific endeavor to be useful, the rational actor model, exemplified by optimal foraging theory and recent microeconomic approaches (see Earle and Preucel, 1987; Hawkes, 1991; Hayden, 2001; Mithen, 1988), has received a great deal of criticism because it tends to exclude any consideration of emotions such as need, fear, or desire that “must surely be a part of motivation” (Ortner, 1984, p. 151; see also Cowgill, 1993; Foley, 1985; Webster, 1996). Rational actor approaches assume a universal logic behind individual motives, neglecting the unique and creative aspects of human action often based on nonrational or situationally rational practices. In other words, this “attempt to construct a theory on solely cognitive grounds and to leave out people’s histories, habits, customs, [and] feelings is insufficient for understanding human behavior and social process” (Mestrovic, 1998, p. 25).

An example of this pervasive assumption of certain shared human motives can be seen in the common equation of agency with resistance that presumes a universal human desire to resist those aspects of social relationships that are currently viewed as oppressive. For example, both Bourdieu and Giddens explicitly present their theories as responses to modern forms of systemic class inequality and this interest in resistance to inequality permeates archaeological approaches to agency. Within archaeology, many scholars equate agency with resistance on some level. For these scholars, agency is defined as any action that does not conform to normative tradition/structure and even the most mundane and everyday action can be imbued with a sense of resistance to those who hope to maintain a status quo of social inequality. This impulse to search for agency in the form of resistance in everyday action reflects the growing focus within the social sciences on resistance and struggle as enacted by disenfranchised or oppressed individuals, particularly as seen in feminist, postcolonial and subaltern anthropological studies (see Goddard, 2000; Pruyn, 1990; Scott, 1985). Ultimately this movement hopes to “render meaningful the practice of everyday life vis-à-vis the construct of [conscious] resistance” (Kliger, 1996, p. 150).

Mahmood (2001) looks at this reliance on the concept of resistance in relation to feminist discourse on female agency in the context of Egyptian Muslims. According to Mahmood, traditional accounts of female agency are equated with resistance to male domination. Agency is thus understood “as the capacity to realize one’s own interests against the weight of custom, tradition, transcendental will,

or other obstacles,” therefore positioning “women’s agency as consubstantial with resistance to relations of domination” (2001, p. 206). In other words, this equation of agency and resistance implicitly sets up an assumed context of comprehensive structural inequality with agentive action of the oppressed occurring only in reaction to their domination. When we equate working against patriarchy or colonial hegemony with agency, we have succumbed to what Abu-Lughod (1986) has called the “romance of resistance,” thus rendering the term vacuous in relation to the human ability to have complex, messy, and sometimes contradictory motivations for their own desires and actions (see Ahearn, 2001, for an excellent discussion of the linguistic implications of this problematic equation of agency with resistance). Indeed, the focus solely on agency as resistance has become a rhetorical tool through which we neglect specific motives at the expense of assumed ones (Brown, 1996, p. 731). The assumption that resistance to any inequality is the enactment of human agency leaves room for true individual creativity and desire only in terms of how a particular structure is resisted. I would argue that this idea of agency is as limiting and dismissive of human creativity, originality, and uniqueness in individual’s desires and motivations as the theoretical positions agency theory hoped to balance out.

In response to this limited definition of agency, Gero (2000) suggests that we must move agency approaches away from a simple search for resistance and instead, we should focus on all types of practices including strategic accommodation and acquiescence. Because people’s goals are to some extent both cross-culturally predictable as well as elaborated according to “unique and historically specific logics and values” (Brumfiel, 2000, p. 249), it is not enough to rely exclusively upon an abstract universal logic; yet it is also problematic to assume entirely unique goals. Instead of equating agency with resistance (Giddens, 1979), any model that incorporates the complex implications of agency would necessitate looking beyond rational actor theories, such as the assumption of a “rational desire” to resist social inequality, to incorporate the lived, nonrational aspects of human behavior, including emotion and historical baggage (see Mestrovic, 1998, p. 25), through an understanding of both universally constructed interests as well as cultural and individual values and logics that undoubtedly contribute to individual subjectivities. In other words, for any given project, we must develop a more nuanced understanding of the ongoing hermeneutic between the shared nature of being human (through evolutionary, cross-cultural psychological, neurophenomenological, and cognitive research) and of the unique historical contexts within which individuals construct identities and goals.

Intentions Versus Consequences

I concur with Dobres and Robb that “the biggest divide among agency enthusiasts is between those who stress agency as the intentional actions of agents and

those who stressed its non discursive qualities” (2000, p. 10). For example, Giddens suggests that “[I]ntentions are only constituted within the reflexive monitoring of action, which however in turn only operates in conjunction with unacknowledged conditions and outcomes of action,” thus arguing that intentions can be understood only as a subset of the outcomes of practice (1979, p. 41). Although Giddens does look at decision-making processes, he also argues that “intentionality is a routine feature of human conduct, and does not imply that actors have definite goals consciously held in mind during the course of their activities” (1979, p. 56). It seems that those scholars who focus almost exclusively on the unintended consequences of agentive practices lead to a conceptualization of agents that can overcome structural constraints only through accidental/nonintended action. At the same time, Dobres and Robb argue that “those who believe that agency is about intentionality also tend to argue that the material world is created and manipulated by more or less freely acting individuals” (2000, p. 12). Clearly defining the concepts of consequence, intention, motivation, practice, ideology, and habitus is a necessary step in parsing out the complex relationships between structures that are already constituted, but also never completely constituted (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 453; see also Ahearn, 2001).

Addressing these issues, Pauketat suggests that we need to disconnect the idea of strategy from the idea of intentionality if we hope to properly understand the distinctions between motivation, practice, and unintended consequences (2001, p. 79). In this way, if agency theory is going to focus upon the effect agents can have upon structure and vice versa, the issue of intentionality and its relationship to consequence becomes central. Is it important that agents have conscious and intended effects upon structure or is their impact simply understood as a result of human action, intended or not? In other words, are we interested in motives (i.e. the “causes” of actions) or effects? As noted above, agency theory in general resituates the locus of social change from macroprocesses of the system to the actions of individuals. Yet we must ask what this means—that the agent has the ability to purposefully alter structures, or that agents are simply the unit upon which our analysis of social change should be based because it is at the level of the individual that social change originates? Is agency an attempt to provide the individual with the conscious ability to impact their social reality or is it simply an attempt to include the implications of the existence of individuals within larger theories of social construction, maintenance, and change?

This aspect of agency raises the specter of ideology (in the Marxist sense) in that, if actors are knowledgeable, how can we understand the unintended reproduction of oppressive structures (see McGuire, 1992)? In particular, the reproduction of social inequality through acts that are intended to be acts of resistance and resistance to inequality through acts intended to reproduce the system, indicates that we cannot exclusively rely on intention nor on consequences when interpreting human practices. These tensions, exposed by the intentions versus consequences divide,

force us to seek a theoretical middle ground between a focus upon an ideological representation of the world and on an individual's perception and interpretation of that same world. Ultimately this is an issue of internalization—to what extent are social and/or ideological ideas directly internalized and accepted by individuals? In other words, to what extent can an ideology (i.e. external, necessarily distorting systems of meaning) *determine* an individual's perception and interpretation of the world and, therefore, their actions within it? Importantly, Foucault suggests that the very concept of an ideology wrongfully presupposes a clear “reality” versus “ideology” dichotomy, which does not effectively address “how effects of truth are produced within discourses which in themselves are neither true nor false” (1980, p. 118). Assuming that an individual is either suffering from false consciousness or entirely enlightened ignores the multiplex nature and functioning of human consciousness and the phenomenological understanding of knowledge as situated and embodied (Dilthey, 1989). Perhaps a return to Durkheim's notions of individual versus collective consciousness can provide a useful analytical tool for understanding how individual perceptions of the “objective world” are not only externally constructed but also actively appropriated through participation in and *selective internalization* of interpretive frameworks (see again Hochschild, 1983; Mahmood, 2001).

It is through the internalization of normative/structural boundaries that structures can and do bound individuals' actions. Although extreme examples such as the “bound captive” are useful, it is the gray areas where there are no overt physical restrictions on a given action that are of interest to agency theory (see Giddens, 1979). As Weber acknowledges, for individuals to share a collective idea, that idea can not only be manifest in the collective as an external structure but must also have “a meaning in the minds of individual persons” (1978, p. 14). Although Weber argues that it is always the individual's *belief* in the legitimacy of authority that gives it power, he provides little explanation for how diverse individuals can, despite their unique meanings, also share collective beliefs and actions. While Durkheim attempted to highlight the social and downplay the psychological (i.e. put the social before the individual), it is clear throughout his later writings that he recognizes the importance of individual psychology within larger social collectivities (see Throop and Laughlin, 2002).

According to Durkheim, society is founded upon collective sentiments and these collective feelings are “written upon the consciousness of everyone” and are born from the “emotions and dispositions strongly rooted within us” (1984, p. 37). Durkheim suggests that these collective sentiments are a manifestation of our collective consciousness and are therefore a consciousness “that we share in common with our group in its entirety, which is consequently not ourselves but society living and acting within us” (1984, p. 84). Durkheim also argues, however, that we have a more individual consciousness that “represents us alone in what is personal and distinctive about us, what makes us an individual” (1984,

p. 84). In other words, Durkheim envisions every individual as constituted by a dual consciousness, one part based on social morals and values that society has inculcated in the individual and another part based on individual emotional, sensational, and experiential aspects that are unique to that individual (see Shilling, 1997; Shilling and Mellor, 1998; Throop and Laughlin, 2002).

Unlike Marx (1964), Durkheim does not view the relationship between the individual and social consciousness as a simple mapping of one onto the other. Instead, he acknowledges that there can be unique interpretations of social representations/ideologies and that there is a complex interplay between the individual and the social. According to Durkheim, because of this tension between individual and society, there must be mechanisms that act upon an individual's consciousness in order to "strongly root" within that individual the emotions and dispositions "written upon the consciousness of everyone." The bases of a collective consciousness are shared feelings and values and, according to Durkheim, these shared feelings and values must be *meaningfully internalized* by individuals in order to have social force.

Marx's understanding of ideology (and Bourdieu's notion of habitus) fails to account for this central aspect of the individual internalization of social ideas. Indeed, Marx simply argues that social consciousness is the outcome of individuals producing their own material circumstances (1964, p. 76). That is, consciousness "only arises from the need, the necessity, of intercourse with other men" and, therefore, this social consciousness is in fact an ideological/false consciousness (1964, p. 71). According to Marx, this ideological consciousness naturalizes social inequality through an alteration of the way an individual perceives the "real" world. Thus, Marx suggests that social existence determines consciousness and that determined consciousness is the means through which individuals perceive reality.

Durkheim, on the other hand, in acknowledging that there can be contradiction and discordance between individual and collective consciousness turns to the important role of social action (practice) and process (such as religious ritual) and the resulting shared feeling of collective effervescence in creating social unity between individuals by generating, within each individual, emotions and experiences that support and perpetuate the collective consciousness (Shilling, 1997). Through shared social actions such as ritual and the resulting collective effervescence, an individual's subjective reality can become synchronous with the collective consciousness as individuals share similar emotions and experiences within the same interpretive framework (Durkheim, 1995, p. 273). Durkheim thus argues that shared structures are always "mediated by collectivities of embodied individuals both cognitively and emotionally engaged in with their social worlds" (Shilling and Mellor, 1998, p. 194). As Karen Fields suggests in her introduction to *Elementary Forms* (Durkheim, 1995), Durkheim believes that "at moments of collective effervescence, when human beings feel themselves

transformed . . . through *doing ritual* . . . the agent of that transformation . . . is *created by the fact of assembling* and temporarily living a collective life” (1995, p. xi, emphasis mine).

In this way, the inner world of an individual and the external social system in which they function can resonate with each other as the individual’s subjective experience is, in reality, shared with their community. Thus, social ideas can come to have social force for the individual and this social force is not some externally created and imposed system of value, but generated within the individual through their own participation in social practice. Despite Durkheim’s neglect of issues of power and domination, the logical extension of his practice-based understanding of internalization is that there must be some level of consonance between an individual’s experienced reality and the interpretive symbolic systems within which those experiences are given meaning. Coupled with the work of Hochschild and Mahmood, this concept of active, selective internalization points to the centrality of experience and intentionality in accounts of human action.

For this reason, a reliance on an analysis of consequence alone glosses over the complex interplay of experience and subjectivity, leading to somewhat patronizing and often uninteresting understandings of human practice. In relegating intentionality to the sidelines in an explanation of agency, we preclude an understanding of the ongoing relationship between motives and the (potentially ideological) structures within which they are bounded and enabled.

The works of Sahlins (1981) interestingly addresses this issue of intentionality in the context of colonial inequalities. Sahlins was one of the first scholars to take up the ideas presented by Bourdieu and Giddens within an explicitly historical–anthropological framework. According to Sahlins, the actions of individuals in any given social interaction can be understood as an attempt to enact traditional categories. Thus, he suggests that the great challenge is “not merely to know how events are ordered by culture, but how, in that process, the culture is reordered. How . . . the reproduction of a structure become its transformation” (1981, p. 8).

Derived from his study of colonial Hawaii, Sahlins argues that the potentially unique nature of any given interaction, though based on individually conceived traditional categories, can force those traditional categories to be applied to different domains, possibly leading to transformation of shared traditional structures. In other words, “relationships generated in practical action, although motivated by the . . . self-conceptions of the actors, may in fact functionally revalue those conceptions” (1981, p. 35). Although Sahlins, like Durkheim, often glosses over issues of power inequality within his conceptualization of “structures of conjuncture,” he does acknowledge that “[p]owered by disconformities between conventional values and intentional values, between intersubjective meanings and subjective interests, between symbolic sense and symbolic reference, the historical process unfolds as a continuous and reciprocal movement between the practice of the structure and the structure of the practice” (1981, p. 72). Sahlins thus views the interplay

between pragmatic structures of conjuncture and the individually received cultural order as mediated by the intentions and interests of historical actors (1981, p. 33). Thus, intentionality can be understood, not as simply springing forth from an individual's ideologically grounded perception of the world, but as directly related to "the distinctive role of sign in action, as opposed to its position in structure" (1981, p. 68).

"Action," Sahlins argues, "is intentional: guided by the purposes of the acting subject, his or her social living in the world" and in action "signs are subject to the contingent arrangements and rearrangements, instrumental relations that also potentially affect their semantic values. All such inflections of meaning depend on the actor's experience of the sign as an interest: its place in an oriented scheme of means and ends" (1981, p. 68). As Jean Comaroff argues in her extension of Sahlins' notion of intentionality, we need to parse out the interconnections between context, consciousness, and intentionality as separate from notions of ideology if we hope to gain insight into the complex relationship between intentionality and social structure (Comaroff, 1985, p. 5; see also Comaroff and Comaroff, 1992). On the basis of an acknowledgement of the dynamic interplay of power, symbol, and subjectivity, both Sahlins and Comaroff, in their suggestion that signs acquire intentional value as implemented by a historic subject (Sahlins, 1981, p. 68), point to a potential middle ground between an exclusive analytical focus only upon either the ideological or the entirely subjective.

CONCLUSIONS

The search for motives and meanings as well as structures and consequences highlights the historically contextual nature of any understanding of the agency/structure relationship. Yet, much of current agency theory has in fact injected western, modern notions about human action into our attempts to address the ongoing uncertainty surrounding the relationship(s) between the individual and society in the past (see Johnson, 2000b). The association of agency with resistance, the individual, or unintended consequences leads to a notion of agency as "something essential and timeless in its qualities which fashions the world without itself being fashioned" causing us to "explain history as the consequence of the actions of agents (rather than agency being created within history)" (Barrett, 2000, p. 62). It is through the addition of historical context, proximate cause, and a local understanding of intentionality that we can add temporal scale and counteract a normative notion of agency. As Barrett argues, any historical/social "analysis cannot be dedicated to the representation of agency as the object of our inquiry; rather it must work on the time/space field of resources through which agency constitutes itself in its actions" (2000, p. 63). It is in the temporal intersection of individual intention with resistance to or incorporation of particular social structures that agency can be located. None of the elements of this intersection can

be discarded—the temporal context, including historical imaginings, habits, and beliefs; the individual intention, which is clearly interpenetrating with and situated within larger social structures; the intended and unintended consequences of individual actions; and the social structure(s), of which there are many, possibly contradictory systems functioning at the same time on multiple scales.

On a practical level, the search for past intentionality is clearly difficult. If, as Pauketat (2001) suggests, understanding the complex events of this time requires broadbased information about the actual dynamics of social practices, shared values, *and* those of historically constituted actors—archaeology must attempt to provide the broadest possible context based on multiple sources of data. Recent work by archaeologists such as Meskell (2002) and Thomas (1996) point to the promising possibilities of an archaeology that “looks at as many spheres of life as possible—economic, legal, social, domestic, religious, funerary, and so on” and thus draws “interpretive force from the contestation of these domains” (Meskell, 2002, pp. 109, 133). For example, by looking at the diverse types of evidence available from New Kingdom Egypt that speak to issues of personal freedoms, marriage and divorce, adultery, domestic violence, personhood, pregnancy, death, memory, love, and sexuality, Meskell attempts to understand Egyptian experiences of the self and their social world (2002, p. 59). Meskell’s work indicates that while there is clearly a dialectic happening between (cultural and biological) structure and (individual) agent, there is never one simply impinging upon the other—instead they are mutually constituted to such an extent that they cannot be understood as separate entities. Following Sahlins (1981), an agency-oriented archeology could, therefore, increase our understanding of the interests of the historical actors inhabiting a particular historical context in order to better understand the interaction between the generally accepted cultural order and the ever-fluid dynamics of human practice. As Meskell suggests, “[t]he interstices of all these networks of identity and experience provide the truly interesting terrain of ancient life” (2002, p. 125).

In other words, a broad approach that seeks to interpret past structures *and* intentions and that incorporates more recent notions of power and ideology could begin to access, as much as is possible, the vast network of historical systems impinging upon an individual (the external social structures) and the cross section of varied and unique experiences within those differing systems (the uniquely, sometimes proactively internalized structures). While we may never be able to fully reconstruct this intricate and unique information in its entirety, an agency approach must incorporate as much disparate information as possible in order to create the most inclusive and comprehensive account of the interests and motives of past actors. Ultimately, I would argue that an effective agency approach requires a delicate and reflexive movement between an exploration of structural events and patterns of practice, between historically unique microprocesses and more macroscale, long-term processes, and between a focus on observable consequence and less obvious intentionality. It is in the moving back and forth between these

poles that a more inclusive and complex picture of the practices of past individuals and the structures that they effected and were affected by can be constructed.

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