Where Tradition and Pragmatism Meet: African Diaspora Archaeology at the Crossroads

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Abstract The trope of "tradition" dominates archaeological studies of the African diaspora. Much of the information archaeologists have about traditions on the African continent or in the early diaspora comes from historical documents and from ethnography. Here, the author argues that pragmatism provides a model for analysis that allows archaeology a degree of independence from these allied datasets. Archaeologists, like other social scientists, confront the problem of the relative importance of social learning (i.e., tradition) vs. structure as forces shaping cultural expression in the African diaspora. An analytical strategy inspired by pragmatism is here applied to beads recovered from Tidewater Chesapeake slave quarters occupied in the 18th and early 19th centuries in order to demonstrate that tradition is only part of the story

Extracto El tropo de "tradición" domina los estudios arqueológicos de la diáspora africana. Una gran parte de la información que los arqueólogos tienen sobre las tradiciones del continente africano o de la primera diáspora procede de documentos históricos y de la etnografía. En el presente documento, el autor argumenta que el pragmatismo proporciona un modelo para el análisis que permite a la arqueología un grado de independencia de estos conjuntos de datos aliados. Los arqueólogos, al igual que otros científicos sociales, se enfrentan al problema de la importancia relativa del aprendizaje social (es decir, la tradición) frente a la estructura como fuerzas que dan forma a la expresión cultural en la diáspora africana. Una estrategia analítica inspirada por el pragmatismo se aplica aquí a abalorios recuperados de los barrios esclavos de Tidewater Cheaspeake ocupados en el siglo XVIII y a principios del siglo XIX, con el fin de demostrar que la tradición es sólo parte de la historia.

Résumé Le trope de la « tradition » domine les études archéologiques de la diaspora africaine. Beaucoup des informations dont disposent les archéologues à propos des traditions sur le continent africain ou sur les premières années de la diaspora proviennent de documents historiques et de l'ethnographie. Ici, l'auteur soutient que le pragmatisme fournit un modèle d'analyse qui permet à l'archéologie un degré d'indépendance de ces ensembles de données connexes. Les archéologues, comme d'autres spécialistes des sciences sociales, font face au problème de l'importance relative de l'apprentissage social (p. ex., la tradition) par rapport à la structure des forces façonnant les expressions culturelles dans la diaspora africaine. Une stratégie analytique inspirée par le pragmatisme est. ici utilisée pour les perles récupérées dans les quartiers d'esclaves de Tidewater Chesapeake, occupés au 18e siècle et au début du 19e siècle afin de démontrer que la tradition n'est qu'une partie de l'histoire.

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On a balmy August night, around 11, 19-year-old Robert Johnson was walking down Martinsville Road, coming up on the crossing. He wanted more than anything to become a successful musician, and he had a plan. He had brought his guitar with him and knew that if he sat down to play it, sooner or later, "the black man" would come and tune it for him. Rumor had it that's what Tommy had done. Ike said that he'd taught him all he could, and the rest was up to him—how badly did he want to master that instrument? How badly did he want to make a living doing something other than picking another man's cotton? Some people said that it was dangerous, messing with the devil, though others said it wasn't the devil at all, but an old-time spirit—from Africa—who met you at the crossroads. Johnson didn't care, now that Virginia and the baby were dead, what did it matter what happened to his soul?

On an unusually cool December night, a little after 11, 20-year-old Robert Johnson was walking down Martinsville Road, when he came to a crossing. He had just left early from a ball outside Hazlehurst, Mississippi. He was unfamiliar with the area, having left as a small child, but was glad to be back, learning guitar from Ike and the others and meeting people who'd known his real father. He had accepted the gig with some trepidation. Having no car, he didn't know how he was going to get back to the house. He wasn't sure if any of the white folks around here knew that Dodds was his stepfather or remembered his stiff-necked ways, but he thought it would be best not to meet any of them out here in the middle of nowhere. He remembered hearing about what had happened to Eli Johnson last spring—and that was right in Vicksburg![1] While he'd taken a lot of foolish risks since losing Virginia and the baby, lately his music had given him something to live for.

Introduction

The preceding fictional vignettes are based on two prevalent interpretations of the lyrics of blues musician

Robert Johnson's "Cross-Roads Blues."[2] And, yet, in the popular imagination, the former version (in which Johnson enters into a Faustian bargain, trading his soul for musical talent) completely overshadows the latter (in which Johnson pleads desperately for aid in a strange and threatening landscape). In the more common, deal-with-the-devil story, Johnson's musical genius is explained by his receipt of knowledge or skill passed on from a preexisting outside source or force. In the other tale, he is a man, fully, tangibly, in the present, searching for a solution to a practical problem: how to live safely as a Black man in Jim Crow Mississippi.

Likewise, the social sciences offer a number of paths toward meaning. Examining the residue of cultural behavior, we archaeologists can make sense of our observations and connect them to people's lives in several ways. One option is to seek meaning in the past, to think traditionally. But another strategy is to look to the moment, to think pragmatically (Baert 2005). Pragmatism, an American philosophical tradition that emerged in the nineteenth century, is a mode of thought centered on the question: "What are the consequences?" (Peirce 1994a:402).

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[1] *Chicago Defender* (1931).

[2] I went down to the crossroad
  fell down on my knees
  I went down to the crossroad
  fell down on my knees
  Asked the lord above "Have mercy now
  save poor Bob if you please"
  Yeeooo, standin at the crossroad
  tried to flag a ride
  ooo ooo eee
  I tried to flag a ride
  Didn't nobody seem to know me babe
  everybody pass me by
  Standin at the crossroad babe
  risin sun goin down
  Standin at the crossroad babe
  eee eee eee, risin sun goin down
  I believe to my soul now,
  Poor Bob is sinkin down
  You can run, you can run
  tell my friend Willie Brown
  You can run, you can run
  tell my friend Willie Brown
  [th]'at I got the crossroad blues this mornin Lord
  babe, I'm sinkin down
  And I went to the crossroad momma
  I looked east and west
  I went to the crossroad baby
  I looked east and west
  Lord, I didn't have no sweet woman
  ooh-well babe, in my distress
The song may be heard on Youtube, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qD2jXjV9Z8A>.

Pragmatism has found its way into archaeology as a tool for thinking about the consequences of archaeology for living people, or the practical applications of archaeological knowledge, or critical, self-reflexive trends within the discipline (McDavid 2002; Saitta 2003; Preucel and Mrozowski 2010; Mrozowski 2012). Elsewhere I have outlined how several specific characteristics of pragmatism align with archaeology (Agbe-Davies 2016).

The key concepts of pragmatism that drive this analysis are introduced below, as needed, to develop the overarching argument that if blue beads are part of a tradition of magical practices that can be traced to African antecedents, then what should we archaeologists think about particular contexts in which they are found? Pragmatism's *antifoundationalist* stance encourages an *inductive* spirit that complements the prevailing emphasis on deductive reasoning in archaeology. It directs attention to *consequences*, as noted above. Pragmatism is also useful—as we shall see in this paper—as a lens through which to reexamine our research *problems* and consider whether or not we have been led astray. Above all, pragmatism is about *context*. That is to say, the truth of a proposition or the meaning of a *sign* is deeply influenced by, even dependent upon, its context (Agbe-Davies 2017). My interest in pragmatism was rekindled as I searched for a countervailing force to historical archaeology's deep-seated dependence on the idea of tradition, specifically as it relates to the *symbolic* meanings of artifacts. But, as we shall see, symbolic meanings are but one kind among several.

Archaeologists and others studying the African diaspora often treat blue beads as signs of African-ness (see the examples under the heading "Bead Traditions" below). The arguments have at their root a collection of texts, many associated with the transatlantic slave trade, others produced by foreign explorers and ethnographers of Africa, and still others the testimonies of people living in Africa or its diaspora. Multiple texts point to the use of beads for adornment and protection on the African continent, as well as among Africans and their descendants in the Americas (La Roche 1994:14). Others emphasize associations between the color blue and protection or success (Stine et al. 1996:63–64). The beads become for archaeologists signifiers of religious or magical practices, evidence of Africa in the diaspora. Accepting as premises that (1) blue beads mean protection and (2) this association was widely shared across the African diaspora, the present analysis comes not to bury this interpretation, but to praise it—to explore it and to ask: "What are the consequences?"

Pragmatism and Archaeology

Any description of a pragmatist canon would include a range of scholars. C. S. Peirce attempted to explain how people know things and how they know what signs mean. His associate William James considered how and what people should believe—questions about truth. John Dewey, a pragmatist of the next generation, directed attention to what people do with their knowledge and the processes of teaching and learning. According to Muller (1992:320), W.E.B. DuBois's pragmatism melded the "method-oriented pragmatism of C. S. Peirce" with the "experiential ethical-justice-oriented pragmatism of William James." Indeed, DuBois began his university education as a student of philosophy, but turned to the social sciences as a more fitting tool to uncover truths, specifically those about race and Africans abroad.

As might be expected, the ethical-justice thread is more fully developed in the archaeology of the African diaspora. For example, McDavid (2002), in describing the Levi Jordan Plantation Web Site Project, emphasizes the pragmatist inspiration for its anti-essentialist, pluralist conversation that incorporates archaeology into a broader pursuit of a more democratic society (Jeppson 2001; McDavid 2002). But pragmatism has analytical as well as sociopolitical implications. On the analytical side, significant attention has focused on one particular element: semiotics, the science of signs.

Pragmatism in archaeology is often associated with Peirce's explorations of meaning, commonly referred to as semiotics (Bauer 2014). Preucel and Bauer (2001:97) noted, following Parmentier (1997), that a semiotic approach to material culture provides a conceptual language for identifying different kinds of signs and, therefore, allows the analyst to discriminate among the various meanings of a given attribute or pattern. They observe that "the significance of this approach is that it accounts for and directs inquiry into the multiple meanings of a single artefact or sign." When the practice of African diaspora archaeology is considered, however, it is clear that interpretations are often restricted to a narrow spectrum of meanings—Morris (this issue) being an important exception.

Other archaeologists have been inspired by pragmatism's epistemological implications. Reid and Whittlesey (1998:276,281,283) argued for the harmony between pragmatism's ideals and the practice of archaeology. They see the former as "an appropriate path to scientific and historical knowledge of the past." Among the qualities that make them compatible are antifoundationalism,[3] inductive practice (discussed in more detail under the heading "Crossroads," below), and "knowledge through performance" (one of the cornerstones of ethnoarchaeology and replication studies).

Saitta (2007:9–10) also described a pragmatic archaeology characterized by an antifoundationalist attitude toward truth, of which wide and creative experimentation is an essential part. The truth claims so established "must be evaluated in terms of their concrete consequences for life today. ... Pragmatism asks what difference the claim makes in how we want to live." Further evaluation tests these claims in relation to those produced from other standpoints, allowing for a "measured" or "sturdy" relativism. The truth claims of his case study concern the relationship between a past collectivity and the "powers that were," as well as the significance of past collective action in the present.

Clearly, we archaeologists are finding pragmatism useful for grappling with fundamental issues raised by our own practice. I am interested in using it to make an end run around "tradition," particularly within African diaspora archaeology.

A problem that might be labeled the tradition/*pragma* conundrum has a long history in scholarship of the African diaspora. The problem is depicted as a classic "debate" between positions personified by E. Franklin Frazier—a sociologist, and Melville Herskovits—a sociocultural anthropologist.[4] Frazier saw the origins of contemporary African American culture in the American social structure within which Black people had to operate, and he rejected explanations of modern conditions that implicated heredity and tradition (Frazier 1932:11–29). Herskovits emphasized cultural continuity with Africa and rejected the idea that African Americans represented a tabula rasa, with a culture that emerged primarily out of the American experience of enslavement (Herskovits 1990).

[3] Antifoundationalism: resisting the assertion that no steps toward new knowledge can be taken until it has been proven that the investigation rests on an infallible foundation. It rejects the view that "there are firm, unchangeable foundations to knowledge" (Baert 2005:192).
[4] Yelvington (2006) offers a critical analysis of this simplified picture of the "debate."

Pragmatism has a special relevance for African diaspora archaeology, in part because a pragmatism-influenced archaeology can bring new disciplinary perspectives to this conundrum, advancing general knowledge about the African diaspora and its attendant processes. These objectives can be realized, provided we archaeologists keep in mind our special strengths and how they relate to other fields of inquiry. I explore the issue more thoroughly in Agbe-Davies ([2018]). The present paper implements a pragmatic method in archaeological analysis in contrast with methods I characterize as traditional in their implementation while also using "tradition" as their guiding epistemology.

Bead Traditions

Beads, and blue beads in particular, have become a type fossil for sites of the African diaspora. Of course, no one claims that only African or African diaspora sites yield such finds. Many archaeologists problematize the stark equation of (blue) beads with "Africa." Yet the association is reinscribed again and again:

> Concerning blue beads, Ascher and Fairbanks (1971:8) suggest they are similar to trade beads highly valued in Africa. Smith (1977:161) and Otto (1984:75) propose they are ethnic markers for sites occupied by African Americans. Adams (1987:14) argues blue beads were symbolically meaningful artifacts for slaves between the 18th and 19th centuries. (Stine et al. 1996:49)

> Beads—particularly blue beads—have been consistently associated with African-American sites (Stine et al., 1996), but whether this patterning is to be explained in terms of shared economic, social, or cultural characteristics is unclear. ... The simple inexpensive blue beads may speak more to the socioeconomic status of African Americans in the plantation setting than a shared system of beliefs. (DeCorse 1999:144)

> [I]f blue beads, for example, were consistently and openly worn as protective charms only by members of certain African American ethnic groups (see Stine et al., 1996), those objects could have served as ethnic markers understandable to European Americans who utilized analogous, but stylistically distinct, charms. (Fennell 2000:306)

This ambivalence sometimes comes through in the interpretation:

> The presence of this bead provided a tantalizing suggestion that African Americans visited the cold cellar and alcove. Faceted blue glass beads are a type of artifact "consistently associated with African-American sites" (DeCorse 1999:143–144). While many sites cohabited by African Americans and European Americans have produced such objects, one must bear in mind that the presence of blue glass beads does not provide unequivocal evidence for the presence of African Americans fleeing from enslavement (Yentsch 1994; Stine et al. 1996). (Delle 2008:53)

> Blue glass beads are found in higher numbers on sites known to have been inhabited by African Americans. ... Although two enslaved people resided at [the site,] there is no way to connect these blue beads with a particular African American presence. One possible reading of these beads could be as items used to mark individuals as affiliated with an ethnic group. Alternatively, such an interpretation must be regarded as tenuous at best. (White 2008:29)

As interpretations move farther from the original data and argument, or are taken up in secondary literature, the qualifiers and cautions sometimes drop away.

For this study the sample is drawn from a narrow geographical and temporal range (Fig. 1) (Table 1) with the aim of reducing the impact that such factors might have on between-site and within-site variation. Therefore, it sets aside the problem of why beads might be blue (perhaps because of the limitations of manufacturing processes or other factors unrelated to users' desires for blue beads). It also sets aside the question of whether assemblages associated with the diaspora are distinct from others in the prominence of blue beads. Therefore, it is not necessary to compare diaspora sites with those occupied by members of other groups. Rather, my questions are: "(When) are blue beads like other beads?" and "What does the blueness of beads tell us about their contexts?" and, ultimately: "How do blue beads signify?"

This last question can be approached by the application of ideas articulated by Peirce (1994b). Semantic treatments of meaning emphasize the relationship between a *sign* and the *object* to which it refers. Peirce proposed a triadic relation among signs, objects, and interpretants. The *interpretant* is, one could say, the sign's consequence, the effect that the sign evokes. For example, the sight of a family member wearing a necklace of blue beads (sign) calls to the mind of an Afro-Virginian of the 18th century the idea (interpretant) of protection (object). The best way to characterize the relationship between the sign and object in this example is as arbitrary, law-like, and historical: it is traditional. Such signs are called *symbols*, and because there is no necessary relationship between protection (object) and blue beads (sign), the "meaning of blue beads" is treated as a problem of translation—one that can be solved by discovering and then applying a key to the blue beads that have been recovered. As I have argued elsewhere (Agbe-Davies 2016), the value of the pragmatist perspective is that it allows the envisioning of other interpretants (for example, archaeologists) and other kinds of signs (namely Peirce's "indices").[5] When we archaeologists understand meaning to include not only symbols, but also indices—signs that are "really affected by" their object (Peirce 1994b:248), signs that are related by co-presence or effect to what they signify—then we are no longer reliant on testimony and texts to translate the blue beads into past beliefs. Archaeological methods thus have new relevance for the discovery of meanings that are, in several senses of the word, contextual (Preucel 2006; Bauer 2014; Agbe-Davies 2016).

Blue Beads in Context

Stine et al. (1996:51–52) compiled evidence from 50 assemblages dating from the 18th through the late 19th centuries in South Carolina and Georgia, discovering that blue was the predominant color of bead on African American domestic sites, comprising nearly 48% of all beads. What, then, is the meaning of the results from plantations in the colonial and antebellum Tidewater Chesapeake, where blue beads are only 24% of the combined assemblage (Digital Archaeological Archive of Comparative Slavery [DAACS] 2014a)? The difference is statistically significant (χ^2=17.3; df=1; p<0.001), but what does it *mean*? And, what are the consequences of starting from the premise that blue beads are

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[5] Icons are a third kind of sign; they are related to their objects by resemblance. While blue beads may have held iconic meanings for people in the past, any relationship between blue beads and protection is—because it is historically contingent and arbitrary—by definition, symbolic.
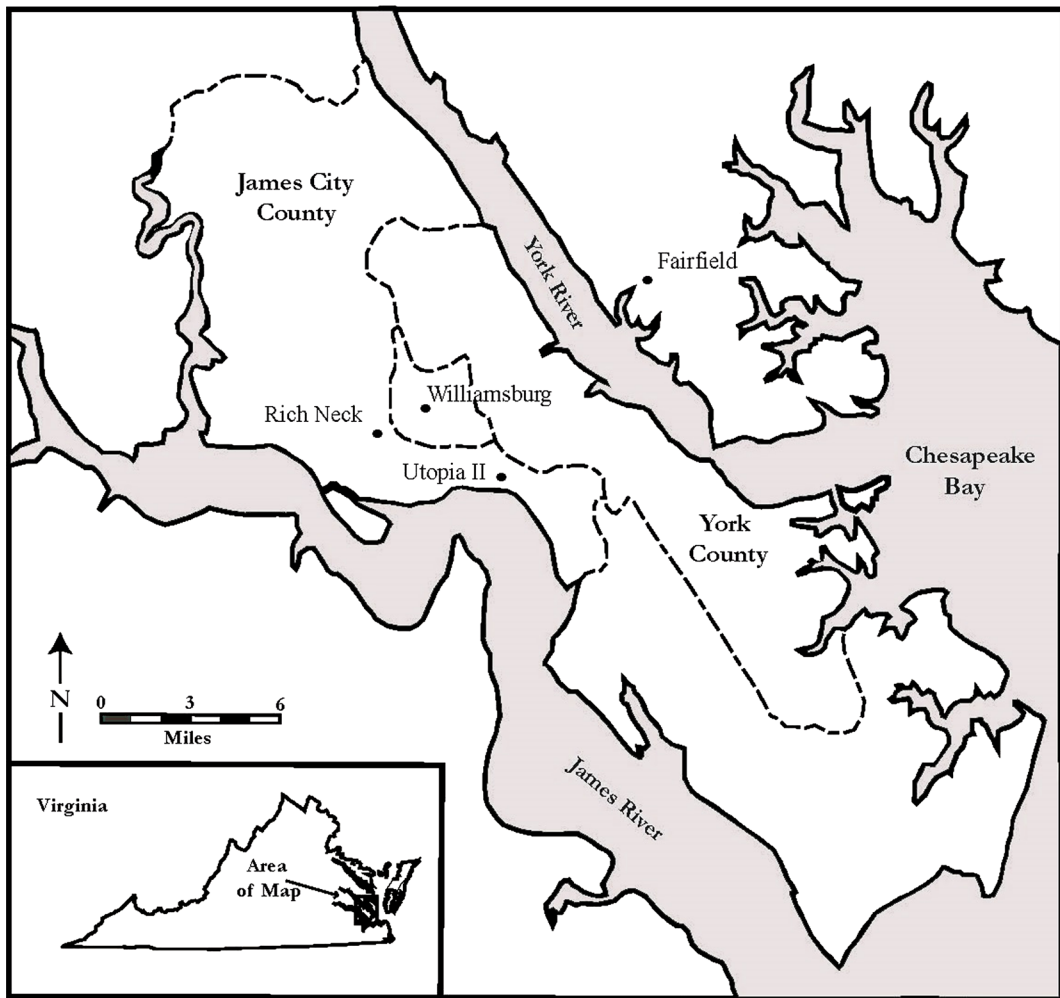
Fig. 1 The three plantation quarters discussed in this article are in Tidewater Virginia, not far from the colony's 18th-century capital at Williamsburg. (Illustration by J. Eric Deetz, 2016.)

important because they signify traditional practices with origins in Africa?

It is a commonplace to assert that historical archaeology is where "history" and "anthropology" meet (or,

Table 1 Occupation dates for Fairfield, Rich Neck, and Utopia II quarters, using several techniques (DAACS 2014b)

	Pipe Stem Mean Date	MCD	TPQ Range for Site Phases	TPQ 90 Range for Site Phases
Fairfield	1744	1777	1775–1790	1700–1775
Rich Neck	1760	1763	1720–1765	1700–1762
Utopia II	1732	1761	1700–1720	1700

perhaps, collide). Historical archaeology is rooted in these two scholarly traditions, but it is worth noting that the work is more than a subset of either. What sets historical archaeology, or any archaeology, apart is the way we archaeologists use the dimensions of space, time, and form to think about material culture (Spaulding 1960; Deetz 1967:9). Not only do our questions concern variations across space, through time, and in form, but our most basic concepts and procedures are derived from these dimensions, for example, archaeological context, stratigraphic relationships, and typology, as outlined in Table 2. With this special set of glasses, archaeologists view the world. What makes our work distinctive is not really the nature of the phenomena we observe (for example, material culture)

Table 2 Space, time, and form intersecting to create archaeological meaning

Archaeological Data	Dimensions
Context	Space (and time and form)
Stratigraphic relationships	Time (and space and form)
Systematics/typology	Form (and time and space)

or even our methods for collecting cases (for example, excavation). Rather, it is the way in which we transform them into data—the way we make them mean something. If archaeology is to make a contribution to its sister disciplines, bringing not just new cases but new knowledge, we might expect that our special perspective and approach could be a key.

I believe deeply in the mutual dependence of archaeology and anthropology; nevertheless, here I am arguing that African diaspora archaeology is actually archaeology or it is nothing, in contrast with Phillips (1955:246–247). Unless and until archaeological research does more than react to the propositions of other fields, we archaeologists will remain "handmaiden[s] to history" (Noël Hume 1964) or to sociocultural anthropology or to area studies. We will be very specialized, very interesting handmaidens, but handmaidens nonetheless. What is the alternative? To ensure that material culture is central, certainly, but also to ground our analyses in the strengths of our archaeological perspective, our emphasis on space, time, and form. Artifacts are not just pretty trinkets to illustrate arguments about the past. Sites are not just containers for artifacts; much of the meaning of material culture, for an archaeologist, resides in archaeological data, rather than artifacts as such. If we look to allied fields (e.g., sociocultural anthropology and history) or related datasets (texts and oral histories) for our hypotheses, we can confirm or illustrate the patterns thus established, but we contribute little in the way of new knowledge. The analysis here uses the principles of pragmatism to ground interpretations of blue beads first and foremost in archaeological evidence.

Returning, then, to the blue beads, using a traditional framework one might assume a simple relationship between time and cultural change and expect to see a decrease in the number of blue beads over time. Such a decrease over time does appear in the South Carolina and Georgia material (Stine et al. 1996:52), but the Virginia and Maryland sites actually show an increase in the numbers of blue beads over time, as shown in Fig. 2. Furthermore, the comparison between the (earlier) Chesapeake vs. the (later) South Carolina and Georgia sites in Table 3 further undermines the cultural-drift-through-time explanation.

Realizing that time alone does not account for an erosion of tradition, one might next turn to a black-box explanation like "acculturation." Textual evidence could be used to show which diasporic communities experienced a more intense association with non-Africans. Those assemblages would then be expected to contain fewer blue beads. The consequence is that the analysis is limited to suggesting that the residents of the Chesapeake quarters were "less traditional" than their South Carolinian and Georgian counterparts because of the timing and nature of their enslavement. In fact, this could be a good explanation for the differences between the two regions, given what historians have learned about their respective demographic trajectories. Black South Carolinians outnumbered their White counterparts, Black Virginians did not. Plantations and work regimes in South Carolina often isolated the enslaved from the rest of the population more thoroughly than was typical in much of Virginia (Morgan 1998). But here, again, archaeology simply provides an illustration of a pattern already established by detailed examination of the archival record. Furthermore, because of the way we historical archaeologists traditionally frame our questions, this tends to become the only explanation and the end of the discussion. We do not know whether this explanation travels. Can it account for differences *within* a region?

Pragmatism, as a mode for knowledge seeking, encourages the framing of questions in such a way that we archaeologists (1) take advantage of archaeological data and archaeology's analytical strengths and (2) acknowledge not only tradition, but lived experience, consequences, and pragmatic action on the part of past social actors as forces shaping the archaeological record. An examination of beads in their context(s) allows us to take full advantage of archaeological attention to space (archaeological context, feature, structure) and time (chronology, phase), as well as form (blueness, material, shape), in order to understand what these beads may mean. A pragmatist archaeology reminds us to consider not only the blueness of beads or the "beadiness" of but

Percentage of Blue Beads at Tidewater Sites

$R^2 = 0.2222$
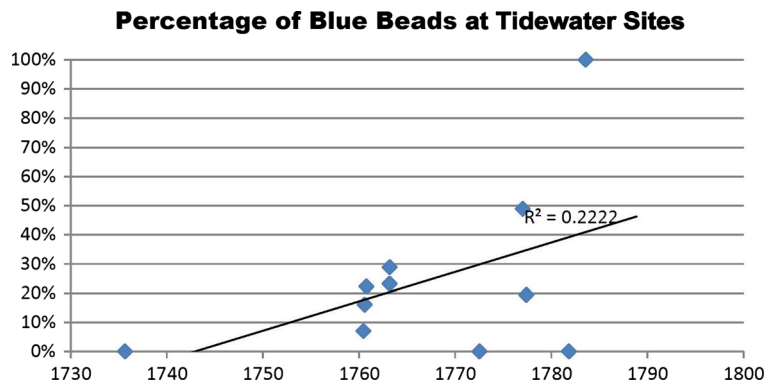
all of the other archaeological data associated with these artifacts and their contexts as well.

Three sites included in the Digital Archaeological Archive of Comparative Slavery (DAACS) serve to illustrate a pragmatic approach to analysis. Each of the sites, Rich Neck, Fairfield, and Utopia II, was associated with a different Tidewater Virginia planter family, each of which enslaved hundreds of people across multiple farms. As seen in Fig. 1, the quarters are located in the watersheds of the James and York rivers, close to Virginia"s 18th-century capital, Williamsburg.[6]

The sites are contemporaneous, as shown in Table 1. The earliest features may date ca. 1700, but estimates of dates, using established techniques, such as *terminus post quem* (Miller 2000), mean ceramic dates (South 1977), and pipe stem-bore diameters (Harrington 1954; Binford 1961), indicate that most of the deposits contain material dating from ca. 1720 to ca. 1770. At each of the sites, the beads come principally from cellars and subfloor pits under dwellings. Crossmends and artifact dates seem to indicate that each quarter grew over time, with the addition and removal of individual buildings throughout the occupation span. These are the sites with the largest number of beads in the DAACS dataset, and all have 20% or more blue beads (Table 3), but the assemblages differ in interesting ways.

How will the blueness of beads or the beadiness of assemblages be measured, whether among quarters or among analytical units (such as features, phases, or structures) within quarters? The percentage of blue beads at Rich Neck and Utopia II are about average for the quarters in the region that have been cataloged in DAACS. Fairfield's percentage of blue beads is twice as high, comparable to rates found among the South

Carolina and Georgia sites studied by Stine et al. (1996). A chi-square test shows a significant difference among the three sites in the relative proportions of blue beads and not-blue beads.[7] All of these distinctions warrant a closer look, as they are the key to discovering whether and what blue beads mean at these respective sites.

Spatial, Temporal, and Formal Dimensions of Blue Beads

Most of the beads analyzed here came from subfloor pits at their respective sites. At Fairfield, they were concentrated in two structures. Archaeologists recovered the Rich Neck beads from the subfloor pits under a single dwelling. The site at Utopia II was a compound of three dwellings with multiple subfloor pits and a small outbuilding. Archaeological context is underexplored as a factor in the meaning of blue beads. Here, however, the emphasis is less on using the interpreted meaning of a deposit to ascertain the meaning of its contents than on the formation processes (cultural and otherwise) that bring assemblages of beads together in ways that might be either patterned or random. I begin with a simple question: Are blue beads just like any other bead, or does their distribution within a site (phase, feature, deposit) suggest that they are different from other beads in some way? Next, we archaeologists will want to know from which contexts the (significant) blue beads come, given the premise that they relate to magical protection. What does that tell us about life in particular times and places?

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[6] For additional information about the sites, including maps and detailed descriptions, the reader is directed to <http://www.daacs.org>.

[7] Furthermore, two-by-two contingency tables suggest the difference between Rich Neck and Utopia II is insignificant, whereas the Fairfield assemblage differs significantly from both. Rich Neck vs. Utopia II: x^2=1.74, df=1, p>0.10; Fairfield vs. Rich Neck: x^2=5.79, df=1, p<0.02; and Fairfield vs. Utopia II: x^2=23.8, df=1, p<0.001.

Table 3 Comparison of blue beads from selected South Carolina and Georgia, and Tidewater Chesapeake sites

	South Carolina and Georgia (50 Sites)[a]	Tidewater Chesapeake (14 Sites)[b]	Rich Neck	Fairfield	Utopia II	"Average" Tidewater Chesapeake Site
N beads	392	843	82	223	130	60.21
N blue beads	140	205	19	109	29	14.64
Blue/total beads	35.7%	24.3%	23.2%	48.9%	22.3%	19.0%
Bead abundance	N/A	0.019	0.035	0.023	0.201	0.042
Non-glass beads/total beads	2.6%	3.6%	26.8%	0.4%	1.5%	4.8%

[a] Stine et al. (1996:51).

[b] Includes three sites with no beads at all.

For all the attention archaeologists pay to blue beads, Fairfield is the only one of the 14 Tidewater Chesapeake sites in DAACS for which blue is the most common bead color.[8] The color of bead most frequently found in the region is actually red. At Utopia II, for example, an overwhelming number of beads are red. At Rich Neck, the most common color is white, several examples of which are materials other than glass (shell, porcelain). In fact, Rich Neck is the only quarter in the region to yield appreciable numbers of non-glass beads: nearly 27%, compared with less than 2% at Fairfield and Utopia II.[9] And even without the beads made of other materials, the Rich Neck assemblage is still more white/clear than blue. As it happens, the Rich Neck case varies in other interesting ways as well.

At Rich Neck, the beads are concentrated in a limited number of features, but among those features there is little distinction other than the fact that Feature 21 has a larger-than-normal share of the non-glass beads.[10] In contrast, at the Fairfield and Utopia II quarters, among features with beads, the beads were unevenly distributed, with more appearing in some structures (Utopia II Structure 1) and features (Fairfield Feature 8 and Feature 88) than others.

The intersite differences between Rich Neck on the one hand and Fairfield and Utopia II on the other, hold true for the blue beads as well. At Rich Neck blue beads are evenly distributed across the different features at the site. Not so at Fairfield, where blue beads came disproportionately from a single cellar, or Utopia II, where they were concentrated in features associated with only one of the three dwellings in the quarter. In other words, the residents at these two quarters did not encounter beads generally (or blue beads in particular) as a constant part of the landscape, available for incorporation into feature fill at random, but rather as occasional items that entered the archaeological record in bursts. The difference between Rich Neck and the other two sites could be explained by site-formation processes. However, in combination with the prevalence of non-glass beads and white/colorless beads, the spatial distribution is one more piece of evidence suggesting beads signify that something different was happening at Rich Neck.

The spatial patterning for blue beads within Fairfield is interesting as well. Of all the Tidewater Chesapeake quarters in DAACS (2014a), it had the second greatest number of beads (n=223), the second highest proportion of blue beads, and was the only one for which blue was the most common color, as illustrated in Fig. 3. It seems like the perfect site to argue for the magically protective applications of blue beads. Nevertheless, blue beads were rare in the one feature from which excavators recovered other items interpreted as having special properties. Feature 8, a subfloor pit, is highlighted in the excavators' preliminary analysis for yielding an unusually high number of artifacts that in other settings have been taken to mean "adornment," "wealth," or "divination." They observed that Feature 8

> includes a high proportion of personal and decorative items, such as buttons, glass beads, cowrie shells, and possibly symbolic items such as a

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[8] With the exception of ST116, which has only one bead—a blue one (DAACS 2014a).

[9] For the Tidewater Chesapeake sites, fewer than 5% of beads are made of materials other than glass. At the New York African Burial Ground, the rate was even lower, less than 2% (LaRoche 1994:6; Bianco et al. 2009: table 55). Only 2.6 % of the beads from the sites in the Stine et al. (1996) sample were amber, shell, or stone.

[10] Beads made of other materials do not cluster in a particular phase at Rich Neck, though there is a noticeable concentration of beads, especially shell beads, in Feature 5 and of copper alloy and porcelain beads in Feature 21. These two concentrations appear to be sets of beads, as they were recovered from distinct deposits within each feature.
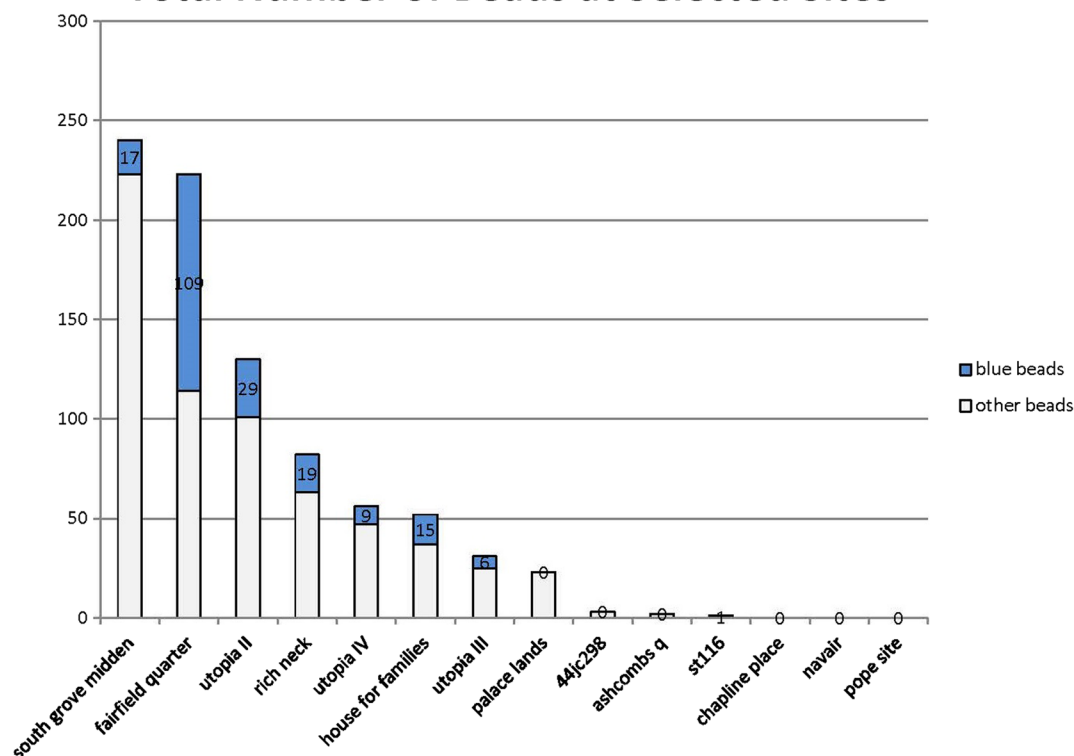
Fig. 3 Fourteen Tidewater Chesapeake quarters arranged according to the number of beads recovered. Sites are all included in the Digital Archaeological Archive of Comparative Slavery (DAACS 2012a). (Figure by author, 2016.)

raccoon baculum. It also contained a high number of small artifacts ... [Feature 88], in contrast, contained a diverse mix of layers of sterile sand, hard-packed clay, architectural debris, and artifact-filled loam. (Brown 2006)

However, blue beads, and beads generally, were just as likely to occur in Feature 88. Table 4 shows that, in fact, the majority of the blue beads from the site did come from this cellar filled with demolition debris. The beads were concentrated in particular locations within the site, but not necessarily in the places where archaeologists recovered other similarly polysemous objects.

At Utopia II, Structure 1 clearly has far more beads than the others and has much higher bead and blue-bead abundance indices. However, the structure in which the blue beads predominate—which differs significantly from the other two in terms of the proportion of beads that are blue (Structure 20)—is one where beads in general were relatively rare. Background information on the site indicates

that Structure 20 is distinctive in other ways; it may have been the residence of a driver (enslaved) or overseer (free) (DAACS 2012).

As far as formal variation is concerned, among the Tidewater Chesapeake assemblages collected in DAACS, blueness and sphericity or subsphericity are significantly associated, so the blue tubular beads clustered in Feature 21 at Utopia II and the lack of association between color and shape at Rich Neck[11] might be considered to be anomalous in the region. The blue beads are generally in shapes different from other beads at Fairfield and Utopia II, whereas the color blue is not associated with any particular shape of bead at Rich Neck.[12] At Fairfield, other colors are more likely to be barrel- or tube-shaped, while blue beads are more likely to be spheres or

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[11] Though spherical/subspherical forms are the dominant shape in the regional assemblage (62% of all beads), this is not the case at Rich Neck. This is true whether one considers all beads or only glass beads.
[12] Again, this is true whether one considers all beads or only glass beads.

Table 4 Bead distribution at three Tidewater Chesapeake sites

	All Beads	Blue Beads	Bead Abundance Index	Blue Bead Abundance Index	Blue Beads/ All Beads
Fairfield Quarter					
Feature 8	26	10	0.377	0.189	38%
Feature 88	137	81	0.291	0.195	59%
Feature 87	34	12	0.041	0.015	35%
Utopia II					
Structure 1	106	17	0.535	0.156	16%
Structure 10	13	1	0.413	0.003	8%
Structure 20	11	10	0.090	0.083	91%
Rich Neck					
Feature 5	46	10	0.247	0.067	22%
Feature 10	14	5	0.175	0.70	36%
Feature 21	11	0	0.141	—	—

Notes: An abundance index allows one to compare the number of items (blue beads or beads generally) in relation to another artifact category that should be evenly distributed across the quarters. For further explanation, see Galle (2010). Percentages are presented here as they are more frequently reported.

A chi-square test shows no significant difference in the proportion of blue beads vs. other beads among the features at Rich Neck. There are significant differences among the features at Fairfield and among the structures at Utopia II, namely, that blue beads did appear in several other contexts at Fairfield and at Rich Neck. (Fairfield had 6 blue beads in plowzone and 17 other beads. Three postholes had one not-blue bead apiece. Four other features at Rich Neck contained one blue bead each; two of those also contained one other.) Their inclusion did not change the in-/significant determination.

Moreover, Fairfield's Feature 8 and Feature 88 are similar to each other and distinct from Feature 87. Utopia II's Structure 1 and Structure 10 show no significant differences between them, but both differ sharply from Structure 20.

subspheres. At Utopia II, both blue beads and other beads are spherical or subspherical, but there are also a significant number of blue tubular beads concentrated entirely in Feature 21 of Structure 20. Again, this is the structure that might have housed a driver or overseer. Furthermore, the lead archaeologist identifies it as a familial household, in contrast with the other dwellings that housed groups of solitary individuals rather than families (Fesler 2004:374).

As with space and form, evidence organized by time also suggests that people were doing things differently at Rich Neck. At Fairfield and Utopia II there are more beads in the earlier phases and fewer in the later phases. At Rich Neck, more beads entered the archaeological record in the earliest and latest phase, while the deposits comprising Phase 02 yielded fewer beads (measured using abundance indices). However, for each of the three sites, there is little evidence of temporal change in the proportion of blue beads recovered.

Chi-square tests show no significant difference among the various phases at Rich Neck, where there are doubts about the *sign*-ificance of blue beads, or, interestingly, at Fairfield, where archaeologists have

this analysis begins to suggest that blue beads do have a special meaning. The evidence from Utopia II is ambiguous. There the significant difference between Phase 01 (less blue) and Phase 02 (more blue) is contradicted by Phase 01's abundance index for blue beads, which is quite high (0.401). In other words, the Utopia II Phase 01 beads are not the bluest (frequency), even though the phase includes an unusually high number of blue beads (abundance index). As suggested by the evidence from the Tidewater as a whole, individual site phases show that time alone is neither a strong nor convincing explanation for the presence or absence of (blue) beads, whether time is measured by date or the developmental cycle of a quarter is considered.

In summary, the examination of space (provenience by structure/feature), time (dates of occupation and relative sequence of phases), and form (association of blueness with other bead characteristics) shows that, for the residents of the Rich Neck quarter, blue beads were like any other bead. And, indeed, in many ways, beads at Rich Neck do not

seem to have been appreciably different from any other kind of artifact. On the other hand, at Fairfield and Utopia II blue beads were distinctive—whether considering their distribution across the site, their presence during different stages of a quarter's occupation, their shape, or their size. And it is worth noting that the variables that make blue beads distinctive at Utopia II are not necessarily the same variables that distinguish blue beads at Fairfield, which preempts any argument that blue bead prevalence is a product of region-wide (or larger) structures, such as simple availability or manufacturing patterns.

The key insight is not that the residents of Fairfield and Utopia II had more blue beads, therefore their orientation toward that artifact class was more "traditional," but that blue beads had different practical implications within these quarters. This understanding has been achieved through close attention to the multiscalar archaeological contexts from which these artifacts were recovered, as well as the social contexts within which they functioned. Beads index significant actions on the part of men, women, and children in the past. The meanings of these actions are approached, in part, by attending to the data co-present with the beads and attempting to discover exactly what blueness and beadiness were "really affected by."

Just as concepts of "tradition" or "acculturation" fail to explain variation through time (either interregionally or intraregionally), as discussed above, they also fail to explain variation among contemporaneous sites within a single region. Again, a "traditional" framework might lead to the hypothesis that close association with non-Africans (such as owners) would work against the prevalence of blue beads. Using dwelling distance as a measure of association, Fig. 4 shows, instead, a weak negative correlation between distance and proportion of blue beads. I suspect that the admittedly less-than-remarkable strength of the association is because the variable "distance" is not continuous, but nominal (in sight vs. out of sight). And, in fact, a comparison of sites with owners estimated to be living within 1,000 ft. of a quarter vs. sites with an owner living 4,000 ft. or farther away suggests that distance from one's owner is indeed significant, statistically as well as pragmatically.[13] Perhaps, as others have argued (Leone

[13] The sample included all the sites shown in Fig. 4 (DAACS 2014a); x^2=6.79, df=1, p<0.01.

2005:203–212), those living closest to their owners, such as the residents of the Fairfield quarter, felt the need for protection most acutely.

Onward

Of course, archaeology is not needed to convey that enslavement was fraught with danger, that owners could be terrifying and prompt attempts to protect oneself and one's household. Texts and testimony can do that (Jacobs 2000; Williams 2012). What archaeology has done is to go beyond the question of whether people maintained tradition (at any given site), even beyond the question of whether people invoked protection (at that site). I have not shown any more definitively that blue beads are an African mode of protection, but I have shown what the consequences of such a premise would be for understanding several archaeological sites.

Blue beads' significance does not depend on their absolute numerical dominance in the region or at a particular site. That significance is revealed by close attention to their differential distribution and their contexts. People at Rich Neck could have made a good number of the beads they used. They disposed of beads, blue and not blue, in the way they disposed of everything else at the site. Except for their color, the formal characteristics of the blue beads at Rich Neck were just like those of any other bead. On the other hand, people at Fairfield and Utopia II used/discarded blue beads in very specific social contexts (such as within a household whose members had little in common with their neighbors) and in distinct archaeological contexts (such as in a feature that has nothing to do with other potentially powerful artifacts left by the quarter's residents). Their blue beads were not just beads that happened to be blue, they had other qualities that set them apart.

My approach also provides an alternative to the (depressing) narrative of "acculturation." Just because a practice is rooted in tradition, its transformation likely signifies more than simple cultural atrophy or cultural colonization. The regional trend in the Tidewater Chesapeake suggests the opposite, in fact: blue beads became more prevalent as time went on. What is more, no downward trend within the communities represented by the sites is seen. People with particular social roles, in specific circumstances, found these objects and practices necessary. Ever pragmatists, they activated bead

Fig. 4 The farther away from the owner's residence, the lower the proportion of blue beads in a quarter's bead assemblage. Rich Neck, with owners unusually distant, has been removed to enhance the effect. In fact, the significance of distance appears not to be metric, but nominal (in sight vs. out of sight). (Figure by author, 2016.)
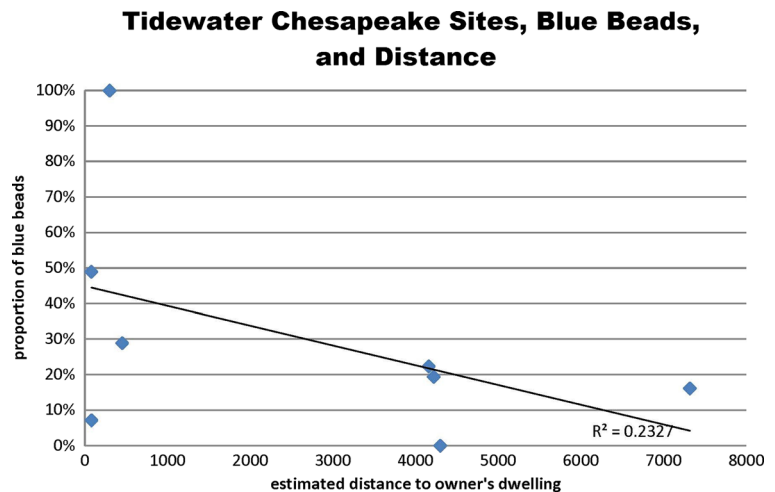
traditions as circumstances warranted, when owners neared, or neighbors clashed.

This pragmatic approach to the archaeological analysis also gives focus to the continued interrogation of the meanings of the patterns that we archaeologists identify. Just as Peirce saw each interpretant as a new sign in an endless chain of signification (Nöth 2011:182; Bauer 2014:65–66), so a pragmatist archaeology treats each discovery as the basis for the next question. For example, the most common bead color at Utopia II, by far, is red, and the difference between blue and red bead distributions is highly significant.[14] The next iteration of analysis could ask how else the residents of Structure 20 sought to protect themselves—compare Franklin (1995)—and why they might have been so much more concerned with protection than the occupants of Structure 1, where most of the beads from the site were found and the red beads are concentrated. Ideas for further exploration might be found in Ogundiran's (2002) discussion of blue and red beads as they relate to power in Yorubaland. Other research explores the mercenary, even harmful, applications of beads' powers (Wilkie 1997). The whiteness and diverse materials of Rich Neck's bead assemblage also beg further examination. Does the color white itself signify at this site (Fennell 2007:58–59)? Did the distinction between glass and non-glass beads mean anything to the people who used them?

Additional iterations of this analysis are warranted, particularly at the intersections of the archaeological dimensions of space, time, and form. My concern here has mostly been with the differences between sites and between constituent parts of sites (space + form). The blueness of bead assemblages does not necessarily decrease through the years, but other formal qualities of blue beads do change (form + time). Likewise, we archaeologists operate as though beads associated by archaeological context went side by side in life, but which beads were true contemporaries, being used as sets (time + space)? There is much more to this matter of beads and blueness than a simple question of African "traditions" liable to disappear as cultural memories faded.

Crossroads

Reasonable readers may ask: How do we know that the blueness of beads really is an important quality to investigate? One response is to appeal to antifoundationalism:

[W]e must nest what is problematic, for the moment, in what Morris describes as the 'pragmatic non-problematic' (1970:4). *This is what is taken as non-problematic for the issue in hand, but always subject to its own test later.* This is an observable feature of the way rational problem solving works and precisely why Galileo had to see experimental knowledge as a continuing process. It is foolish to say that because this is in fact the character of rational judgments, such

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[14] Comparison of structures: x^2=33.3, df=1, p<0.001; comparison of phases: x^2=15.8, df=1, p<0.001. Even though there is an association between structure and phase, the bead color seems to be linked to structure (with all blue and no red) rather than occupation date (almost twice as many blue as red).

judgments are unreal and we must confine our-selves to deductions from arbitrary posits instead [emphasis added]. (Leaf 2003:97)

Here we see that pragmatism permits us to start with the premises of magical meanings for blue beads and an origin for these applications in African traditions. As Reid and Whittlesey (1998:283) asserted specifically: "[P]ragmatism is sufficiently versatile to permit the incorporation of ethnographic information that may include supernatural components well beyond the explanatory requirements of a stridently empirical science." However, as I have shown here, pragmatism is also a means by which one may circumvent traditional tropes that allow research themes to become caught in narrow tracks or stuck going down a one-way street, limiting the view of the wider social terrain, can be circumvented. Pragmatism may be thought of as an orientation that encourages archaeologists to appreciate, among other strategies, inductive reasoning and dialogue as a part of the analytical process.

A pragmatic approach to knowledge conceives of the scientific process as incorporating not only deduction ("deriving conclusions based on premises through the use of a system of logic") and induction ("deriving knowledge from empirical experience based upon a system of handling sense data"), but abduction as well; the latter being the combination of the two former processes to "form a guess as to the cause of something observed" (Pierce 1994b:266–270; Samuels 2000:214–215). If Staat (1993:233) is correct in claiming that "inquiry is not limited to analytic reasoning and is, therefore, not restricted to deduction," what might an archaeology that embraces other forms of inquiry look like?

For one thing, an inductive archaeology may be more archaeological; so argued Archer and Bartoy (2006:5–6):

[W]e have found it useful to return to the core of what makes archaeology archaeology, rather than history, literary criticism, or philosophy. That is the material evidence of the past ... we cannot shoehorn archaeological resources, unique and nonrenewable, to the sole service of theoretical agendas. Rather, we should increase our ability to let the potentialities of the site, the collection, or the sample guide and generate research design, excavation, analysis, and theoretical interpretation. ... In essence, we are arguing for more inductive approaches.

Wylie (2002:63) described research that proceeds from examples to explanation as "simple induction," but also talked about a more ambitious induction, "ampliative inference." What might a rigorous inductive archaeology, one that drew inspiration from archaeological (as opposed to text-based) problems and sources, look like? It is my contention that archaeologists would cease to use "tradition" as the primary episteme and turn to modes of analysis that give equal weight to processes, such as adaptation, innovation, and interaction: to *pragma*.

If we archaeologists envision the concepts of tradition and *pragma* not as opposites, but as intersecting continua, as shown in Fig. 5, we have a schematic model of possible perspectives on the archaeological record. The tradition continuum ranges between specific/particularity and generic/conformity. Meanwhile, *pragma* embraces the two extremes of action and essence and everything in between. But we also need to attend to the spaces between the lines (Gundaker 2011:180). To date, we seem to have been focusing all of our energy on the lower-right quadrant of the diagram, emphasizing uniformity and essences. This article has argued for attention to its opposing number in the upper left as well: the space defined by the boles of action and particularity (i.e., context).

The focus on context and action draws us as archaeologists again and again to the archaeological record and the data at hand. Yes, we can learn a great deal from texts about the materials that we encounter archaeologically, but it is not enough to transpose such meanings directly onto archaeological materials. The things that words tell us that the blue beads mean are only the start of the story. We can take such meanings as our starting point, but what archaeologists can do, that those who deal only with words cannot, is explore the consequences for those meanings in context, in other words, we explore the realm of *pragma*.

Consequences and Conclusion

I hope that it has been clear that this paper is not a critique of the idea that blue beads are for protection or that their significance may be traceable to Africa, but that they are all too often used as an index of Africanness. The choice is not between blue beads having magical properties or not, but between blue beads telling us something about essence or about action. How can

Fig. 5 This article is not about choosing one road or another, but about where we archaeologists stand, and where we turn our gaze. (Figure by author, 2016.)
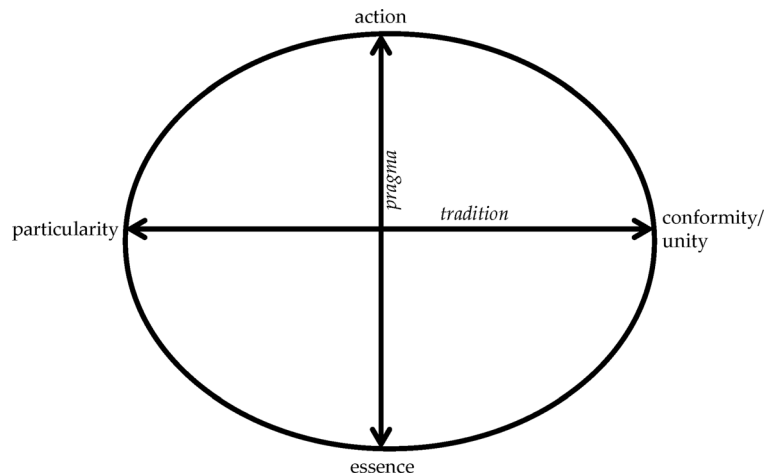
blue beads be used to discover what people are doing, rather than what they are?

The traditional (in multiple senses of that word) approach, applied to the bead assemblages, measures their meaning in degrees of conformity to a preestablished African (American) norm. This is, in part, because for many years a central analytical aim of African diaspora archaeology has been to understand the social groups that comprised plantations. In particular, researchers have sought to understand how the residents of the quarters differed from White owners and managers. Such studies generally follow the model established by Otto (1984:15), who attempted systematically to distinguish patterns shaped by "economic status" or "social and occupational status" from those that may be explained by "racial and legal status." Inspired by the example of South and his pattern-recognition technique, several researchers sought to identify a "slave pattern" (South 1977; Moore 1985:142–143). Archaeologists have also used the detritus of the "consumer revolution" to examine the initial cost of the vessels recovered and, from that, make arguments about the quality of life in slave quarters (Moore 1985; Adams and Boling 1989; Potter 1991).

Recently, investigations centered on provisioning (by owners) and choice (among the enslaved) have come to the fore (Galle 2010; Wilkie and Farnsworth 2010). For example, Russell (1997:70) argued for the spiritual significance of the beads recovered from slave quarters at Andrew Jackson's plantation, the Hermitage, stating:

A cursory examination of beads excavated from historical Cherokee sites and Euroamerican trading sites in eastern Tennessee suggests that glass beads traded to Native American populations slightly before and during the initial occupation of the Hermitage were predominantly of different types than those acquired by enslaved African Americans at the Hermitage.

He goes on to corroborate this pattern with reference to the observation of Stine et al. (1996) that blue beads did not consistently dominate bead assemblages from contemporaneous Native American sites the way that they did assemblages from plantation quarters and workspaces—the implication being that members of each group selected beads that suited their purposes.

Alison Bell's stance is more skeptical, and she emphasizes the beads' "meaning-in-action" over the role of a person's identity in their selection:

The example of the (in)famous blue beads or pierced coins should be useful. ... We do not (yet) know what blue beads connoted to various enslaved people who wore them (DeCorse 1999), but archaeologists can infer that these personal objects carried meanings that made them useful in contests of signification. (Bell 2008:142)

Both of these questions, "beads-as-signs" as well as beads and "ethnicity," are taken up in detail elsewhere (Agbe-Davies 2016, [2018]). Such analyses will not reveal much about what made African American culture

distinctive or about the origins of the practices that left traces in the material record, but they will provide insight into how African American culture operated, and what it might have meant to live in that world. Why is it that questions of distinctiveness and origins seem to be *the* questions? It may be because we historical archaeologists study a world in which such distinctions were used strategically (Delle et al. 2000; Barnes 2011). Or, it may be that because we ourselves live in such a world such questions come "naturally" to us (Agbe-Davies 2015:11–14,194–195).

Archaeologists, and others, have considered why such associations endure:

> A large proportion of work related to African American archaeology has been about the persistence of tradition. These studies have identified artifacts that have some association with, or exhibit memory of Africa, like cowrie shells, blue beads and gaming pieces. (Shackel 2010:59)

> We want to find blue beads; we want to find cowry shells. ... Why is it that such artifacts are so welcomed by archaeologists studying African-American sites? ... One reason—and certainly not the only one—is because we tend to view "identity" as a key driving force behind the questions we ask of African-American sites, and we often tie African-American identity—at least during the colonial and antebellum periods—to its African roots. (Thomas 2002:148)

> Wherever possible, we prefer to find responses to the experience of slavery in memories of Africa: The celebrated cowrie shells and blue beads excavated on slave sites speak as eloquently about our desires as they do about African-American culture (Singleton 1990:75, 1991:157–158,164; Ferguson 1992:116–120). (Upton 1996:3)

These scholars observe, as others have done, that African Americans—past and present, as individuals and as an idea—do a great deal of cultural work in American society (Mosley 2003; Hughey 2009). The prevalence of African diaspora archaeology in the American academy—out of all proportion to the number of people of African descent in the United States today—means that it represents something significant to researchers, particularly in the United States. So the present argument about pragmatism has a special relevance for the archaeology of the African diaspora.

Robert Johnson is a powerful symbol, in part because so little is known about him. The basic facts of his life—birthdate, given name, residential history, cause of death—are the subject of endless speculation because of the quality and quantity of texts available (Schroeder 2004; Graves 2008; Greenberg 2012). The relationship between him, a real man (as a sign), and his meaning (as an object) is underdetermined. A field that plays to its own strengths and operates alongside rather than within the parameters of its sister disciplines will give us as archaeologists more opportunities for understanding worlds like the one he lived in. It will not tell us the thoughts he had when he came to a crossroads at night or the means by which they came into his head, but it will help us understand better what he might have done when he got where he was going.

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