

INTERVIEW

# The juniper tree. A conversation with Michael B. Schiffer and Randall H. McGuire

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## Abstract

What are the circumstances through which we become archaeologists? In April 2018, Rui Gomes Coelho met with his former adviser, Randall H. McGuire, and his adviser's adviser, Michael B. Schiffer, for a conversation about the reasons why they became interested in archaeology, about mentorship and about how they connect their experiences to broader social questions. This conversation is an affective reflection that crosses the emergence of behavioural archaeology, Marxist archaeology, the postprocessual turn and the context that shaped the origins of the archaeology of the recent past.

**Keywords:** Genealogy; affect; behavioural archaeology; Marxist archaeology; postprocessualism; New Archaeology; contemporary archaeology

## Introduction

We tend to imagine the professional development of an archaeologist as a rational process that starts with elementary school and lands in everyday jobs, eventually after many years of college and graduate school. The intellectual emergence of an archaeologist is commonly perceived by peers as a logical pursuit, sometimes framed by academic politics but always subjected to the topicality of research problems and the availability of research resources. However, our personal experience and memory of archaeology owe more to the social dimension of its practice than to scientific challenges.

This conversation results from an encounter between three archaeologists bonded by particular forms of community making intersected by the experience of academia, fieldwork and friendship. In April 2018, I drove to the Society for American Archaeology's (SAA) annual meeting in Washington, DC, where I met Michael B. Schiffer (b. 1947) and Randall H. McGuire (b. 1951). Schiffer was the Ph.D. adviser of McGuire, who in turn was my own adviser. At the time I had just finished a book on the role of affect in the development of Portuguese archaeology during the 20th century (Coelho 2018). Throughout the writing process, I became more aware of the impact that personal relationships and everyday experience have on archaeology and was intrigued by the role that affect has in the formation of communities of practice.

The centrality of fieldwork in archaeology is the core of social and personal bonding among archaeologists. However, community-building practices go far beyond the field and also include conferences, classrooms and offices where we meet and correspond with people. It is at those sites that archaeologists collectively establish the social and professional norms of the community while training and integrating students and younger colleagues. The discussions, conflicts and encounters that occur in each one of those settings shape their agents' perceptions of the discipline. These perceptions are intersected by class, gender and racial lines. Yet we know very little about the specific circumstances in which all this happens. How did we become interested in archaeology? Where did our questions emerge from? When did we discover the political implications of our work?

The conversation with Schiffer and McGuire emerged out of a self-reflexive process in which I interrogated the paths that had taken me from a working-class family in the post-industrial belt of Lisbon to study archaeology in the United States. I had completed my doctoral studies about a year earlier and taken my first job, and often wondered about the transformative effects of certain personal encounters and conversations in my academic experience. This conversation is a product of a reflexive moment, but also an acknowledgement of the importance of mentorship and guidance in the formation of archaeologists. This is the record of an exchange through which I tried to make sense of bonds that are simultaneously affective and intellectual, and how they are embedded in places and events.

Readers should have brief notes about the participants in this conversation before reading the transcript. Michael B. Schiffer defended his dissertation at the University of Arizona in 1973. In the early 1970s, Schiffer developed the core ideas that shaped behavioural archaeology along with J. Jefferson Reid and William L. Rathje. Behavioural archaeologists contended that archaeology was the study of 'relationships between humans and material culture ... regardless of time and space' (Reid, Schiffer and Rathje 1975, 864). They also pointed out that the archaeological record cannot be interpreted as static evidence of the past. It is the result of a formative process that continued well beyond the cultural context in which it was originally formed, all the way down to the archaeologist's intervention. Behavioural archaeologists pushed forward the idea that archaeology could also focus on the study of modern societies, opening up space for what we know today as contemporary archaeology or archaeology of the contemporary past (Reid, Rathje and Schiffer 1974).

The emergence of a sensibility about the modern world among archaeologists cannot be dissociated from the context of New Archaeology, in which Schiffer and McGuire were initially trained. Rathje's Garbage Project reflects Lewis Binford's approach to ethnoarchaeology (Rathje and Murphy 1992), whereas Schiffer's discussions on the formation of the archaeological record depart from a critique of the Binfordian notion that archaeological contexts are fossilized imprints of past societies (Schiffer 1976; 1995).

Schiffer returned to the University of Arizona a few years later as an assistant professor, where Randall H. McGuire became one of his first graduate students. McGuire finished his doctoral studies in 1982 and joined Binghamton University shortly afterwards. Trained as a behavioural archaeologist, McGuire joined the early debates of postprocessual archaeology in the 1980s and contributed to discussions on power, the origins of inequality and the role of material culture in political processes. Whereas processual and behavioural archaeologists attempted to develop systemic explanations of human adaptation, McGuire moved on to the study of power dynamics behind social conflict and change. In this context, he reframed Marxist archaeology as a contemporary praxis, defining it as a set of methods and theory that enable archaeologists to study, critique and change the world (McGuire 1992; 2008). The growing political engagement of his work influenced his most recent projects, focused on the materiality and agency of contemporary state apparatus (see Sheridan and McGuire 2019).

Both Schiffer and McGuire contributed decisively to the development of an archaeology practice that is simultaneously theoretically grounded and engaged with the broader society. The context in which their encounter occurred is important to understand this shift. In the late 1960s, new federal legislation set the foundations of cultural resource management (CRM) practices in the United States. The laws pushed many young archaeologists to field projects that produced unprecedented amounts of data, particularly in the Southwest. Schiffer was part of this process by involving his students while trying to make sense of the new data in academic research. This shift enabled a growing connection between academia and the economic realities of the country, as well as the germination of class-based tensions within the discipline. McGuire's double interest in the materiality of class inequality and the class structures of archaeology is grounded in his working-class background and his own early experience as a CRM archaeologist.

In the following conversation, Schiffer and McGuire talk about how they discovered archaeology and describe the paths that led them to a meeting in Schiffer's office at the University of Arizona. Although their experiences as archaeologists differ in many ways, their encounter in the 1970s resulted in a long-lasting relationship that had multiple ramifications in the commitment to mentorship, in intellectual work and in political engagement. Schiffer and McGuire differ in their understanding of how archaeology gets to be involved in politics. However, it is not possible to grasp McGuire's politically engaged archaeology – and that of his students at Binghamton University – without the position of behavioural archaeologists towards archaeological science. For them, the archaeological record should be understood as a thing of the present, the final outcome of a long formative process. The discipline of archaeology eventually became a legitimate tool to study every society through its materiality. The theoretical contributions of behavioural archaeologists opened up space to think of the discipline as a present practice, to act upon the present.

This conversation teaches us that the complex process in which archaeologists are formed, both intellectually and politically, is also embedded in the material world. The ever-shifting circumstances of a personal life may lead the archaeologist to different professional settings, whether at a university, a CRM company or a museum. In the meantime, archaeologists remain bonded by their love of archaeology through affective landscapes, the performance of labour, engagements with friends and colleagues. Schiffer and McGuire are bonded by the landscapes of the United States' Southwest, which emerge in memories of jokes, smells and encounters.

This conversation started with a self-reflexive journey about my own motivations and the affective role that my intellectual kinship has in my current commitments. I would like to invite the readers to think of archaeology as something more than the disciplinary investigation of humanity through its materiality. The smell of juniper after the rain, which Michael B. Schiffer evoked as one of the most cherished memories from his early days as an archaeology student, is a gentle reminder that as the members of a community of practice, archaeologists flow between personal encounters, events, places and ordinary affects (Stewart 2007) (Figure 1).

It is important to be aware of the affective roles that we take in this process of community making as much as we become self-reflexive, critical and consistent in our professional and political commitments. In other words, we need to be self-aware of our own role in the relationships that shape archaeology, repay mentors that mattered to us by becoming good mentors. To be a politically engaged contemporary archaeologist is to learn how to take care of each other in the present, and care for the future.

## The juniper tree

*How did you discover archaeology?*

McGuire: I first discovered archaeology because I got fascinated with the Hittites. And the woman who drove this bookmobile would bring books out to where we lived, and she got Hittite books. And then my dentist who was an amateur archaeologist in Colorado told me, 'You know, you don't have to go to Turkey to do this.' There were a couple of spectacular sites outside Fort Collins, bison jumps and things like that. So, you know, I became aware of them and . . . all of this was happening when I was about 10 to 12 years old and that's how I got interested.

Schiffer: I received a book on archaeology as a tenth birthday present from my parents. That gave me a little bit of a bug, but I never thought of it as a possible career. In high school I read about archaeology, and a bit of classical archaeology, but again not thinking of it as a possible career. I started out at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), in chemistry, but the Vietnam War broke out.

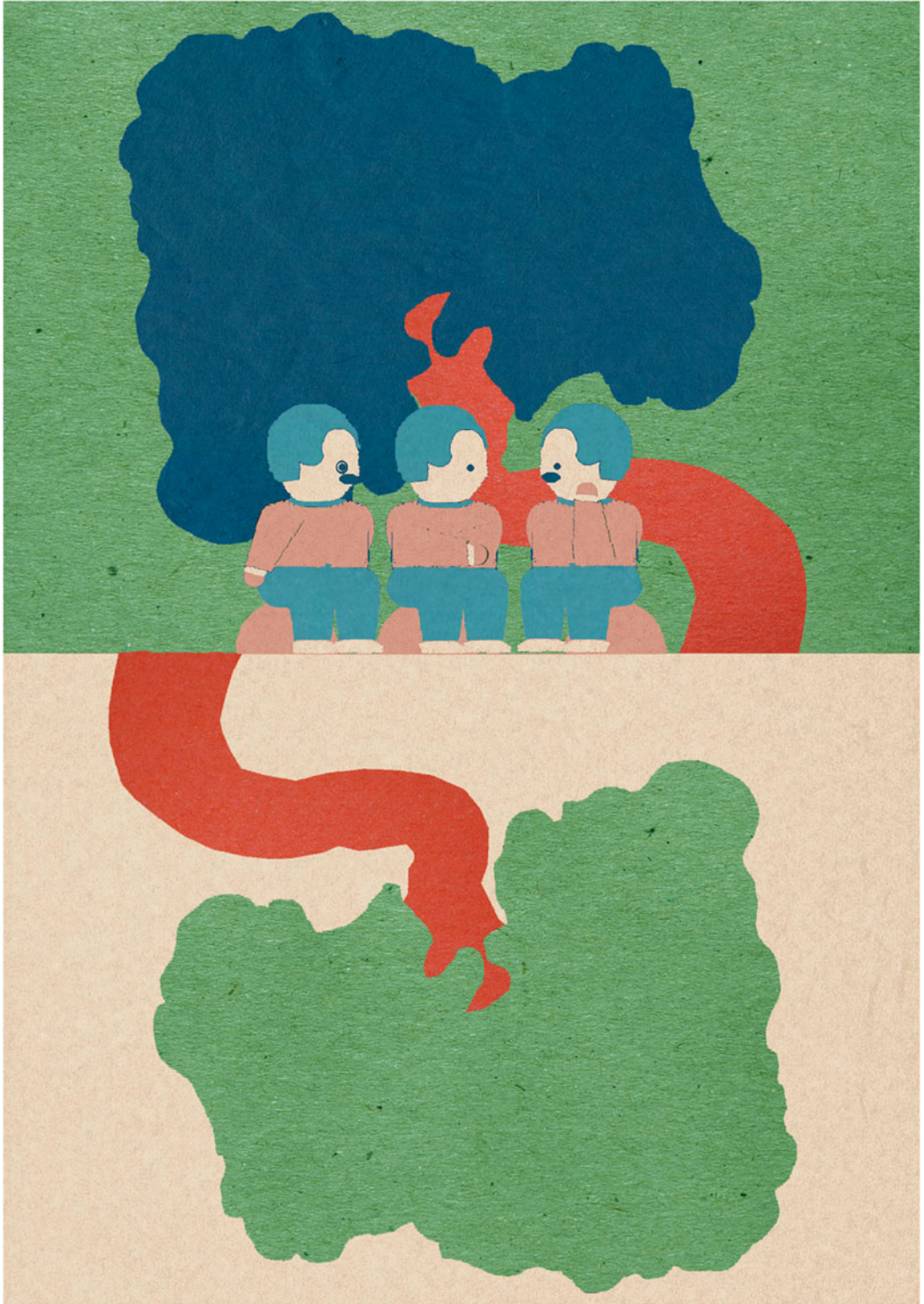


Figure 1. *The juniper tree*, illustration by Tiago Guerreiro

When I looked around for archaeology at UCLA I didn't even know it was part of anthropology. Then I went to talk to James Hill, and he said, 'Yeah, go for it.' So I changed my major. I was interested in all the areas of anthropology except for linguistics, but when I took my first class from Lewis R. Binford I really got excited. It was called 'Invention and technology' and I'm still grappling with some of the questions that he raised in that class. I was really excited, and that was when I decided to become an archaeologist.

*So, no more chemistry.*

Schiffer: No more chemistry but I never lost my love for physical science.

*Why did you decide to become an archaeologist? There is an important difference between getting interested in archaeology and deciding to do it professionally.*

McGuire: I was raised on the plains near Fort Collins, essentially in a very rural working-class background. So men worked with their hands. Archaeology is something that intellectually I'm interested in, but I also love fieldwork, I like calluses on my hands, I love to be in the field, I like the physical labor and all of that. And archaeology combines those things.

*Was it similar in your case?*

Schiffer: No [laughs]. It was as opposite as you can get. You know, I grew up in suburbia of Los Angeles, and had no acquaintance with rural areas at all although I was born on a farm in Canada. But my father was a salesman of appliances and my parents wanted me to have an education. Neither of them went to college, and neither of them finished high school in their youth, so they insisted that I get an education through college. They pretty much didn't care about what I did, although when I changed to archaeology and anthropology they asked, 'How are you going to make a living?' And this was in the '60s, when people were saying, 'Don't worry about jobs.' So I didn't worry. I really didn't. What attracted me to archaeology were the intellectual challenges. And fieldwork? . . . Well, I knew that I had to do some fieldwork [laughs], but that never touched me, no. That's the truth.

McGuire: That's the big difference between us, it's that I thrive in fieldwork.

Schiffer: It's not that I don't respect and value and appreciate the importance of it . . . and the intellectual aspect of it as a craft. It is all well known to me, but I grew up in different circumstances, had different experiences. I'm just not attracted to the fieldwork aspects of archaeology and I couldn't make a great contribution there. Because I knew that, with my limited organizational skills, I would never be a good field person.

McGuire: Like in running a project?

Schiffer: Yes, in running a project. I mean, in order to run a project, you have to be a jack of all trades, you have to give people orders, you have to hold them responsible and . . . that's just not my personality. I worked best in one-on-one situations with graduate students.

McGuire: There was a concern in my family about what I was going to do for a living. I remember a talk I had with my father; he was trying to give me advice in a mentoring kind of fashion: 'Have you realized that if you want to be an archaeologist you have to teach at a university?' And I had never actually thought

about that, I just wanted to be an archeologist. I was just starting college. And I said, 'If that's what I have to do, that's what I have to do.' And you know, I learned that I love teaching, but that was a side part of it. So, in that sense we have a similar background.

*How did the contemporary past enter your professional path?*

Schiffer: I was always interested in things, in artifacts. When I was young, I used to repair radios and televisions. I was always observing contemporary material culture. Rathje was really the one who let me see that it could be part of archaeology. He went in one direction, and I went in another direction with that seminal idea. All throughout my career it came up again and again, but I never sustained one project like Rathje did. I always did little things. We became very good friends when he was a junior faculty member. In fact, when he went to Arizona in '71 he hadn't finished his dissertation. So we became good buddies. I was a teaching assistant for one of his classes. Later, I did a project on vacant lots and reuse processes in Tucson. Finally, I got really serious about electrical technologies and ended up writing four books (Schiffer 1991; 1994; 2003; 2008).

McGuire: I was a student of Mike Schiffer and Bill Rathje.

*Most archaeologists engage in mentoring relationships in their early careers. Is there a particular mentor who impacted your choices?*

Schiffer: [Laughs] I'm a counterexample. A lot of my students realized, 'We can't be like Mike Schiffer and be the pariahs of the discipline because he doesn't do fieldwork, so I'm going to do a lot of fieldwork.'

McGuire: No! [laughs].

Schiffer: Well, I think James Hill was an influence when I was an undergrad. When I came to Arizona, first I went to Vernon, the Southwest expedition of the Chicago Field Museum. That was a network that I could explore. When you look at the people who went there – William A. Longacre, James N. Hill, Mark P. Leone, Fred Plog – all of them were among the major names of the early New Archaeology. There I made a lot of relationships that are still valuable, some of them going back 50 years to the first summer together in the field. When I came to Arizona, Longacre immediately embraced me as one of the people he could mentor. He was a wonderful man. Ray Thompson was my dissertation chair kind of by default because Longacre was away most of the time in my last two years of grad school. Thompson was a wonderful editor. He did not really engage with the intellectual aspects of my dissertation, but he had a very open mind to different ideas and I really appreciated that. He taught me the value of good editing.

McGuire: Hands down, no question: Mike was my mentor. I came to graduate school at Arizona as an experienced fieldworker. I had already directed a field project. In the early days of cultural resource management, it was possible to have an undergraduate degree and if you were good you could end up directing a project. So when I went to Arizona, I was already an experienced, professional, field archaeologist. Mike taught me how to be a scholar. Both at the intellectual level and what it involves in the positive sense. He also taught me how to be a scholar in the practical sense of what you need to do, in terms of how you publish and

how you network and all of these things. One of the things that Mike is not telling you is . . . When did you start at the UCLA? Were you 16?

Schiffer: I was almost 18. Almost 26 when I finished my dissertation.

McGuire: Almost 26! So when I got to Arizona we were not that different in age. I think you are five years older than me. So there wasn't really a generational difference. We had fundamental disagreements, but Mike was always open and he showed me how to do it, how to be a scholar and how to be a professor. How to play this game intellectually, which I didn't know how to do before I got to Arizona. And then there were other people: the sociocultural anthropologist Robert McC. Netting taught me a lot about being a scholar; Bill Rathje taught me a lot about how to sell archaeology, be flamboyant and do that kind of stuff. And then Gwinn Vivian. Mike, Gwinn and Bill were in my committee. Gwinn kept me grounded in the Southwest. He reminded me about the fieldwork and all that. I had run projects for him.

*Did you ever think of leaving the Southwest?*

McGuire: I started on the plains as an undergrad and I did fieldwork in northern Colorado. Then I came down to Arizona for my first job; I was still an undergrad. I walked onto my first Southwest site and looked around, and thought this is it. In the plains, if you dig a meter square and find one artifact you are happy. So the Southwest was like heaven to me [laughs].

Schiffer: I loved the Southwest, so I never thought of leaving, although my first job was in Arkansas, where people were really good to me.

McGuire: I think a lot of people have forgotten, or don't know, that the period we are talking about was really the founding of modern cultural resource management (CRM) in the Southwest. The laws were already operating and established, but archaeologists were trying to figure out how to do it. And I don't think that a lot of people today realize that Mike played a major role in the discussions. There was a meeting called the Airlie House (McGimsey and Davis 1977). He was part of the meeting that essentially laid out modern CRM. His one CRM field project in Arkansas figured prominently in the discussions of what we should do to practice CRM. At this point in time, I think not many people remember that . . .

Schiffer: Probably not. At that time there were a number of us who were feeling that CRM was not just something that you had to do because there was going to be a land modification project or something like that, but that it was a great intellectual opportunity for archaeology to make contributions, to ask major research questions of the databases that we would be working with. A lot of us converged there in the early 1970s. I never thought I would be doing it . . . Like I said, I never worried about jobs, and the only job offer I had was a one-year contract in the Arkansas Archaeological Survey. Ray Thompson got me that. I benefited greatly from him.

McGuire: Another thing to realize is that before this point in time, archaeology was totally dominated by academics. And a lot of academics, most of them, didn't see contract archaeology as real archaeology. There was a move, and Mike was a leader of it, to take CRM seriously, saying that it had to be an intellectual exercise. So this was very exciting for me because I had already worked for two years doing CRM and the discussions all happened during my first years in graduate school.

Schiffer: So you started in '73? Yes, '75 was my first year in Arizona. And I still remember you coming into my office. It was this small cubicle. I was there for several years as an assistant professor and we had an interesting discussion whose details I can't remember.

McGuire: I worked in CRM for the Arizona State Museum from 1974 to 1976 and then started graduate school. I remember going to see you, but I don't remember what I said. I had already decided that I wanted you to be my adviser.

*Did your students and the people you mentored also impact your choices?*

McGuire: Definitely. I had many students who have impacted me in significant ways . . . You are one of them! You came in and you had your own program, you made yourself a presence on campus . . . and I definitely had several others. I'm graduating my 20th Ph.D. this May and I always gained from students and that interaction, and if nothing else, just trying to engage and involve students enriched my intellectual abilities. But students that in some fundamental way challenged me or led me to see things differently, there has been a few and you are certainly one of them.

Schiffer: I think students broadened my interests but did not necessarily change the direction of my work. I learned a lot from them when they were writing their dissertations, because they knew more about the subject than I did. It's a learning experience, and it's fascinating. And that was one of the things I enjoyed the most, working with graduate students. Once I got an opportunity to run a library-based project, which ended up being Randy's dissertation. Someone contacted me and asked, 'Do you want to do this project?', a CRM project. It sounded kind of interesting, but I wasn't going to do it alone, so Randy agreed to take part. That project, an overview of southwestern Arizona, got me interested in Hohokam archaeology. Before that, I didn't know anything about Hohokam archaeology, so I learned a lot. You know, every graduate student teaches us something.

McGuire: I think it also is a measure of how you worked with the students, because you were always open to a wide range of ideas. I could always do anything with Mike as long as it was creative, as long as it was challenging. And it didn't matter if we agreed about it. You know, we disagreed about a lot of things [laughs].

Schiffer: We did [laughs]. I can still remember you complaining thoroughly when we were working on that project that I spent so much time on Hohokam chronology. But I got really interested in it, and I never thought I would be interested in the cultural-historical set of questions. You know, you will never make this project work if everybody has to agree. We made our separate contributions. I worked mainly on survey design and chronology.

McGuire: And it's a good thing you did. He came up with something referred to as the 'old wood problem' (Schiffer 1986). Wood, for various reasons and I'm not going into details here, survived literally for hundreds of thousands of years in the desert and therefore you can't just use charcoal to date things and it's a basic principle when you work in the desert. It was Mike who figured that out, and he did that in this project we're talking about.

Schiffer: Interesting. If Randy hadn't agreed to be my partner in this project, who knows? I would have gone in a different direction.

McGuire: And it's good that you didn't do more because in the end it became my dissertation [laughs].



Schiffer: Yeah! It was published before you graduated. So he came, and we went to the SAA meeting in Minneapolis and he had this handsome blue book (McGuire 1982). Then he went to the job interviews and they asked, 'Will you publish your dissertation?' [laughs].

*And then you got your job.*

McGuire: Yes, I went to Binghamton and that was the only academic job I ever had.

*Was your job at Arizona the only academic position you had?*

Schiffer: I was there from 1975 to 2014. Why would I want to leave Arizona? It was *the* place. As far as I was concerned, it was one of the top two or three departments of archaeology in the country.

McGuire: And for me, staying in Binghamton . . . I have always liked the department; I have always liked the students. Intellectually it was the job I wanted. I'd rather be in the Southwest, in Arizona, New Mexico or Colorado at a research university. Those four or five schools were the only places where I would ever leave Binghamton for and I was just never able to find a position at one of them.

*Archaeology is a discipline that is very social and relies on extended fieldwork seasons and meetings like this one, in circumstances that do not replicate archaeologists' daily lives. How do you see archaeology as a community that is built on those events?*

Schiffer: I have always attended the SAA meetings; I only missed three in my entire career. I enjoy colleagues and renewing friendships, and that became more and more important. Earlier it was only finding out what people were doing, giving papers, trying to establish a profile in the discipline doing self-promotion. People don't express it that way but that's what it is. I remember, I was still a graduate student, when I heard that Chuck Redman was editing a book on new approaches in archaeology or something like that. And I ran up to him at a meeting and I said, 'I'm working on some stuff on formation processes.' Chuck hesitated a little bit but he actually sent me an invitation to write a paper too. Rathje helped me write the paper, and it was published in '73 (Schiffer and Rathje 1973).

McGuire: That was a very important volume in the New Archaeology.

Schiffer: You have to be persistent, looking for opportunities, seizing opportunities . . . and giving opportunities when you finally are in a position to give back.

McGuire: I'm an archaeologist because of fieldwork. If it wasn't for fieldwork, I would be a historian, or a cultural anthropologist or a sociologist. So for me the aspects of the physical labour, the camaraderie, the fact that when I'm in the field I'm in a different world. Since I work in Mexico, when I go in the field I'm in a different country and work in a different language. I suppose that to some extent it's a form of escaping. To me it's a fundamental reason why I'm an archaeologist.

*Is there anything in particular you remember from your first experiences in archaeology? Like going to the field for the first time?*

- Schiffer: I had a little bit of experience at UCLA. There was a Saturday fieldwork class and Jim Hill was the director. We drove out to a site in Ventura county. The most exciting thing we found was a piece of bivalve. But I learned a little bit about field techniques. The second time I was involved was outside of the TA class as an undergraduate at Vernon in 1968. I remember this absolutely lovely survey. I was part of the crew, not directing it. Christopher White was the field director. And we came out to the field, it was just an hour drive from Vernon to the Hay Hollow Valley where we did the fieldwork. It had rained the previous afternoon . . . the smell of the juniper was exhilarating.
- McGuire: I'll tell a story on Mike. I used to have this old Volkswagen van and a bunch of us . . .
- Schiffer: I know this story.
- McGuire: [laughs] . . . a bunch of us drove to Albuquerque to go to the Society for Historical Archaeology. We were up north, it gets cold, and the SHA is in January. We were driving back, Mike is sitting in the very back of this van and it was cold, it was really cold. I looked back and he was miserable, he was really miserable. He howled at me, 'Randy, turn up the heat!' [laughs]. I don't know if you know about Volkswagen vans but they had a very inadequate heating system to begin with, and this one was broke. So I had to yell back, 'Mike, there is no heat!' [laughs].
- Schiffer: What Randy maybe didn't know at the time is that I have always been excessively sensitive to the cold. So it was miserable.
- McGuire: I have a formative experience when I was working in a field school in Colorado, as an undergraduate. I was digging this test trench and it was deep, above my head, and I am toiling away with a pickaxe and it was hot, I'm sweaty, and lot of times I was working shirtless, so I was just covered with mud . . . I'm sweaty and I hear something above my head, and I look up at my grandfather who lived near there.
- Schiffer: Wow . . .
- McGuire: . . . He was standing there looking down on me and said 'Hi Randy!' – 'Hi grandpa'. And then just as I hurried out of the trench he disappeared. My family was supportive of me wanting to be an archaeologist even though my father thought it would be hard for me to make a living, but my grandfather didn't get it. He didn't understand it. But after that, he thought it must be good work, it was obviously physical labour. It callused my hands, so it was appropriate work. And then I got my first job the next summer. It callused my hands, and someone was willing to pay me, so it was OK.

*Were your CRM experiences formative for you?*

- McGuire: They were formative in many ways. In two years, I did a lot of archaeology, I did a lot of fieldwork. I also did a fair amount of analysis . . . I have two published monographs that came out of it and a couple of articles (McGuire 1977; 1978). And that's one thing that Mike taught me: how to publish. I still can't match what he has done, but he definitely taught me how to publish. Yes, CRM was very formative for me. And also, that's when I learned how to run crews. The first time I was put in charge it was a survey and it was a horrible disaster because I didn't have the confidence. It wasn't my project and there was another person in the crew who felt they should have been put in charge. So there was

tension and it was ugly. We ended up missing a whole bunch of sites in the area . . .

- Schiffer: Oh yeah, now I remember. That's what you mentioned when you came into my office.
- McGuire: Was it? It could be. But when I came to your office, I had successfully run an excavation in between them. So I learned both the good way and from seriously screwing up. But then after this survey project I ran an excavation project and it went very well.
- Schiffer: I had no experience in CRM, although I knew Mark Grady. But when I got to Arkansas, the Arkansas Archeological Survey had a load of CRM reports mostly from the Southeast. I went through them and they seemed like garbage. You know . . . it was like one paragraph of site description and no analysis. I got to do something about this, and that's what motivated me to become more interested in CRM. And I got complete support from Hester Davis and Bob McGimsey.
- McGuire: I think Hester and McGimsey were very concerned about CRM being legitimate. And I think they saw you as someone who could help them do that.
- Schiffer: Yeah. Sometimes you don't even know what motivates you. But I thought I could play a role in this formative time that Randy mentioned, when things were still really in flux and there were a few people like Mark Grady, Valetta Canouts and McGimsey and Davis who thought that CRM should be going in the right direction. That it should be intellectually rigorous, and that archaeology should be concerned with doing the research in this context and not what is happening like now. Now, there were always salvage projects, but they got a bad name. They were one step ahead of the bulldozer and then moved to the next project. But the National Environmental Policy Act generated an enormous amount of fieldwork.
- McGuire: Salvage had a bad reputation, as just ripping sites out. The new laws changed that. This was a transformative time, but it was not as if there was nothing and then there was. Before the National Historical Preservation Act, the idea was like builders might discover something and call in the archaeologists but now they were required to put archaeology in the planning process – what we refer to as Section 106, which is the procedures in the National Historical Preservation Act that guide all CRM work. These laws were passed in the late '60s, but it's when you get into the '70s that people are trying to make it work. There was a lag.
- Schiffer: And then George Gumerman and I put together this whole textbook on CRM, basically how to do NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act) and the issues that would come up. I spent a whole summer writing the introductions to the different sections. George did squat [laughs] but he got me excited about the possibility at the Pecos conference in Mesa Verde, I believe in '74. He had been doing Peabody Coal CRM work. That came out in '77 (Schiffer and Gumerman 1977). So for quite a while I had some involvement in CRM. Pushing to get everybody on the same page, to take it as a serious research opportunity.
- McGuire: I continued to be involved in CRM after I graduated. When I was a student I picked up small jobs, little one-day surveys and letter reports and things like that. Afterwards I got involved in something called La Ciudad project, a 1.5-million-dollar project which in 1982 was a lot of money. It's still a lot of money, but then it was even more money. My tenure case was essentially based in CRM publications, stuff I published through CRM. So I was very active, and even at Binghamton I continued to be active in CRM in Arizona well into the late '80s.

*We all tell stories in the field but we rarely reflect about this practice. And we rarely publish them. I can see that Schiffer's last book (Schiffer 2017) draws some inspiration from storytelling practices. How do you see the role of storytelling in creating social bonds, and in mentoring?*

- Schiffer: My interest in telling stories began with a book that I wrote on the history of the portable radio (Schiffer 1991). I've written four books on the history of electrical and electronic technology (Schiffer 1994; 2003; 2008).
- McGuire: And most archaeologists don't even know half of his production.
- Schiffer: So those have been a lot of fun, since I've written them so everybody can read them if they want to learn about people like Edison and stuff like that. I began to learn how to write more for general audiences, trying to communicate about relatively complex things. When I thought of doing this book it seemed natural that I was telling stories. I can tell you that I loved working on that book. I love writing stories, putting them together, doing the research, figuring out what is the book here. There was a paper published on storytelling in one of the edited volumes I did but I can't remember who did, it was a long time ago . . . – John Terrell! – and I thought 'That's interesting' (Terrell 1990). But I never really wrote for a general audience except for that article for *Archaeology* magazine (McGuire and Schiffer 1982). It's a different path.
- McGuire: As you probably know, I'm pretty good at verbally telling stories about archaeology. In terms of writing to tell stories, it's something I've kind of struggled to do a few times but it's not something I feel I do very well.
- Schiffer: But we are all gossipers!
- McGuire: Yes, that part I'm good at [laughs]. It's part of the camaraderie. Archaeology is still a relatively small field.
- Schiffer: Yeah. So we tell stories about each other, self-replicate stories . . .

*How do you see the role of politics in your work?*

- McGuire: You narrowed down to the major thing that separates us, that we disagree about.
- Schiffer: I've felt a few years ago, just after I retired, that archaeology was coming with new trends and that the intellectual establishment in American education was being threatened by right-wing extremists who had other agendas. That's where I can see my recent book (Schiffer 2017) . . . This is the first time I was overtly political in writing about archaeology. I was concerned that archaeologists had to speak more to non-archaeologists, people in policy-making positions, about how archaeology has made a panorama of contributions to modern society. It's being threatened because it's regarded as unnecessary and trivial.
- McGuire: I essentially built a career based on the idea that archaeology is political. This is the thing that we disagree about, although not when I was a student. I didn't see archaeology as being political from the very beginning. When I went to Binghamton it was a transforming moment because Margaret Conkey was there, we had Ian Hodder coming to teach for a couple of semesters. I got involved with Marxist colleagues over at the Fernand Braudel Center. I had none of that in my graduate education. My training was in processual archaeology and I got one of the best . . .
- Schiffer: . . . in behavioral archaeology [laughs].
- McGuire: Behavioral archaeology. Anyway, so I didn't really learn how to do a political archaeology until I got to Binghamton. I guess, for me one of Mike's biggest

contributions is what we now call an archaeology of the contemporary or modern material-culture studies. It is something that I have come back to. When I was a student, I thought it was perfectly legitimate to do modern material-culture studies; it was great that Bill Rathje did the Garbage Project and I worked in the Garbage Project for him. I thought it was fine that Mike was doing the kind of stuff he was doing, but it didn't interest me. Some people were dismissive of it, but I always thought it was legitimate. I just never thought it was what I wanted to do. Now I find myself coming back to that archaeology of the contemporary with my most recent project on the US–Mexico border wall (McGuire 2013; 2018).

Schiffer: I always felt that if you start out with a political agenda it would have an enduring influence on the contents of your archaeological production. I've thought about my views on that. But I was kind of closed-minded about it because I was afraid that it would take the practice of archaeology to some other place . . . Politics can influence the questions we ask, and once you ask questions you shape the craft of archaeology. That's what Randy has taught me.

McGuire: I wouldn't say you were closed-minded about it. Given the context of the time . . . I mean, I was trained to be a processual scientist. I didn't have any problem with that. I only started to be self-critical when I got to Binghamton, which was a completely different environment. I saw things being political, but when I was at Arizona I didn't know what to do with that. And then I learned what to do with it. Mike and I have disagreed about a political archaeology, but I've always admired Mike's politics. His politics are good left politics and he lives them. But many people have left politics but wouldn't live them.

Schiffer: Yes. You know, I had forgotten about the overt political implications. The portable-radio book was about the loss of American manufacturing (Schiffer 1991). I was really concerned about that. The portable radio was where the transfer of technology began, it was the first manufacture to be lost. Then the electric-car book was all about what technology had become, that we should take it seriously. Although 90 per cent of the book is about the first period of the electric car beginning between 1895 to 1920, the last chapter jumps ahead and makes those political connections (Schiffer 1994).

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