Alyssa Thelemaque
ARCH 1900
18 October 2009
Section 4 Response

Since this is an academic class, our main purpose is gaining a better understanding of archaeology (especially the fieldwork aspect). I think that in order to do this, we have to make sure we stay engaged during the class. It’s important to notice things such as soil color or consistency change when they first appear in order to be able to make the most accurate interpretations possible at a later point in time.
 Besides the obvious purpose, we also have the job of excavating the yard of the John Brown House to not only find more information that builds upon previous finds (documents, artifacts, items in the museum etc.) in order to build the most complete picture possible of the site’s history, but to find evidence of events and actions that we never even realized existed. Hopefully, in understanding how exactly the space was used, we also will be able to paint a clearer picture of how the larger Rhode Island society functioned at a given time period.
 Jones defined fragmentation as “the manner in which archaeological information is both created and presented,” and hierarchy as something that “manifests itself in the organization, management, and dissemination of archaeological information[[1]](#footnote-1).” Both of these principles are obviously applicable to our work at the John Brown House and it’s important that we make sure not to fall into the traps that Jones suggests the two things can present. Jones warns that once fragmented or decontextualized, artifacts cease to be something that we encounter, and instead become things that we simply observe. He also cautions to not let the hierarchy of supervisory positions on the site compromise the integrity of reports and presentations on data.
 In terms of hierarchy, I think we are doing a good job of making sure that everyone is aware of what is happening on the site and keeping everyone accountable for not only their work, but the work of the rest of team. Our weekly site tours help keep everyone up-to-date on how work is progressing around the rest of the site. Within the unit, checking in with the weekly recorder when new soil is discovered and small artifacts are found also helps to ensure that everyone stays in the loop and all finds are recorded. It’s also important to make sure that we double check with one another before we make a decision such as deciding a new context or deciding whether a not a shard of rock is worth keeping as an artifact. One thing I do think we need to do is work on standardizing, across the site as a whole, the way we record information on the context sheets. When I was doing the weekly excavation summaries, I noticed that there were a lot of discrepancies in the way that people recorded information on their sheets—even within the same units. I think that in order to make accurate interpretations later, our records need to be understandable and easy to interpret quickly.
 I don’t think that we’ve had to really worry about fragmentation at this point. Since we are simply collecting data at this point, we haven’t encountered the obstacle of having to interpret data without just treating it like a single, isolated piece of data (versus an object that is part of a broader historical sequence.) We’re in still in the process of collecting data, and I think that we will really have to pay attention to Jones’ advice when we start to examine artifacts in the lab. I’m not sure what exactly our methods will be, but hopefully we will be able to make interpretations about the use and function of objects without too much of a contemporary bias. We also need to remember that although the artifact we will be examining has been taken out of its original context, its context is still a great point for beginning to make our interpretations.
 I think we also should be familiar with the work done on the site last year. Especially with Unit 6, the work done on the site last year corresponds with things that we are finding this semester. The team last year already interpreted a good deal of content and our work this year could be much more thorough and accurate if we already have a foundational understanding of what is contained on the space we are excavating.

Jones, Andrew. 2002 Archaeology observed, pgs. 39-62, In Archaeological theory and scientific practice. CUP: Cambridge.

1. Andrew Jones (2002) 40. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)