“Modern” Humans: Modern Humanity?

Cultural Florescence in the Later Pleistocene
Hominid Genus as Pleistocene Phenomenon

- All homo species developed during Pleistocene
- Cultural behavior as a Pleistocene evolutionary trajectory
- Late Pleistocene as a time of culminating technological development for human hunter-gatherers
Archaeological Challenges:

- How do we interpret the explosion in technological, behavioral diversity?
- How do we ‘read’, or understand the increasing diversity at this time, in this archaeological record?
Where are we talking about?
Late Pleistocene Homo Sapiens, 100,000 to 20,000 years ago
How important was the weather? (And where? And when?)

- Colder, more variable away from middle latitudes
- Fluctuations may have had more influence than extremes
- Ice, moisture, sea levels, and impact on mobility
What does “modern behavior” mean?

- Hunting vs. scavenging vs. foraging
- Working organic tool materials: bone, antler, wood, fiber
- Reworking tools: typological variability
- Composite and hafted tools: projectile technology
- “Art”: both representational and adornment
- Symbolic behavior: burial, ritual

- Territorialism, ‘semi-sedentism’, and group identity
- Clothing: furs, fibers, and textiles
- Dwellings and structures
Elaborating hunting economies

• In some cases/places, increasing specialization in prey species
• In others, experimentation with broader range of diet (expressed in new technologies – eg. bow and arrow, and new material remains – eg shell)
• Much greater indication of collective and collaborative economic strategies
Broadening the material technologies

• New materials, new ways of working older ones
• Working organic tool materials: bone, antler, wood, fiber
• Reworking tools: typological variability
• Composite and hafted tools: projectile technology
• Clothing: furs, fibers, and textiles
“Art”

• Symbolic communication
• We don’t know “what” they meant; we do know “that” they carried meaning: structural and semiotic analysis
• Shift from looking at the objects to analyzing potential social context
New Modes of Organizing Space

• “semi-sedentary” living patterns
• Territoriality
• Group identity
• Aggregate sites
• Social differentiation in-group: gender, age
Ritual

- Burial
- Ocher use
- Mural art as ritual context
- Group identity markers
Mobility and Innovation
For each general region:

• How ‘fast’ were human groups moving? (How often? How big were territories?)
• Were they moving into the unknown, or following the known?
• Did they specialize or generalize?
• How experimental were they, technologically?
• What were their inter-group information systems like?
• What were the population numbers like?
Footnote: Radiocarbon Dating

• Provides much tighter date ranges
• Limited to maximum time range of 40,000 bp
• Works only on organic material
• Subject to all kinds of fluctuations, contamination, etc.
Torralba: H. heidelbergensis ‘hunting’
Blombos, S.A. abstract art (MSA)
Anghilak Cave (Neanderthal, cent Europe)
Original “Neander Valley” skeleton
Shanidar Cave Burial, Neanderthal (Iraq)
Quintera Mousterian tools (Late Middle Paleo)
Lascaux gallery
Alta Mira, (Upper Paleo) Spain
Dolni Vestonice (upper Paleo)
Dolni Vestonice burials
Coa Valley engraving
Dordogne Valley, Upper Paleo
Brassempouy Venus (France)
Kostenki Mammoth bone structure
Kostenki Site stratigraphy