

# Anamorphosis in Archaeology Aspects of Phenomenology and Perception in Interpretations of Anthropogenic Material Culture

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*Noesis gehört zum Menschsein und alle  
menschliche Kultur ist damit von Noesis geprägt<sup>1</sup>*

## Introduction

**W**HILE RESEARCHING *The Funerary Aspects of the Eastern Carpathian Basin*<sup>2</sup>, the lack of a cultural theory which would describe the relation between humans and their habitat or environment, and the processes which they were subjected to and part of, became obvious. Although some<sup>3</sup> theories concentrate on environmental aspects, they lack a description of the human process. This creates and alters the anthropogenic material culture<sup>4</sup> that in the end links humans to their environment. Other theories<sup>5</sup> do exactly the opposite in that the human part of the process is attributed higher importance, to the point where the environmental aspect is marginalized or even completely absent in the description of the intended process.

The purpose of this study is to capitalize on these previous theories and descriptions of processes and to attempt a synthesis which considers as many variables as possible (environment, human, anthropogenic material culture and present day perspective) in a single, wide-ranging theory of cultural change. At the centre of this is placed the anthropogenic material—the object of all archaeological research—which will be presented from the perspective of present-day perceptions of the environment and human processes. In this sense, considering that the object of the research (anthropogenic material culture) remains the same, it is obvious that the shift occurs in the subject, that is to say in the present-day, archaeological perspective: a process

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which is best described as an *anamorphosis in archaeology*. In other words, a new vantage point from which the archaeologist observes and reports or from which research is conducted.

The cultural theory that is presented here is based on a combination of two main ideas or ‘philosophies’. Phenomenology<sup>6</sup> provides a system of quantification of the individual and its interaction with the anthropogenic material culture and the environment, and the means of understanding this was allowed by the Peircean trichotomy,<sup>7</sup> especially its applied views on pragmatism.<sup>8</sup>

## Individual cultural change

**T**HE INDIVIDUALS’ interaction (perception and alteration) with material culture and the description of such a process can best be described as *individual noetic change* (fig. 1). Noetic<sup>9</sup> is defined by the OED<sup>10</sup> (draft ver. Dec. 2009) as follows: “of a process, faculty, etc.: characterized by or involving intellectual activity or, more narrowly, intellectual intuition; of or relating to knowledge or intellect, cognitive.” It is a word that aptly describes the idea that all anthropogenic creation is governed by a single process, whether or not it is cognitive, sub-conscious or originating in belief. The descriptive psychology of Franz Brentano<sup>11</sup> laid the path for his student, Edmund Husserl, to develop and adapt an empiric, and in some ways unifying, idea using the concept of *noesis* and its derivatives (*noema*, *noematic* and *noetic*).<sup>12</sup> It can be broken into two major parts: *noetic perception* and *noetic embodiment*. The former is further divided into two major parts: *noema*<sup>13</sup> and *noesis*<sup>14</sup>. Noema is defined by OED (draft ver. Dec. 2009) as: “an object of perception or thought, as opposed to a process or aspect of perceiving or thinking” and basically expresses the intentionality of consciousness of an object. Noesis is defined by OED (draft ver. Dec. 2009) as: “a process or an act of perceiving or thinking, as opposed to an object of perception or thought; (also) the subjective aspect of an intentional experience, as opposed to the noema,” and thus expresses the intentionality of consciousness of the subject, that is to say a consciousness of consciousness. A simple example might help explain the relation between the two concepts: I am thinking of the apple (noema), as opposed to: I am thinking of the idea of an apple (noesis).

In the following, this philosophical system will be adapted to the needs and rhetoric of the humanities and especially historical science. The object (anthropogenic material culture in this case) is processed in the human mind through *sensory perception*, which results in the creation of the noema. This aspect is one of the fundamental elements of phenomenology, namely *consciousness of the object*.<sup>15</sup> In the noetic process, the noema is linked to the noesis through the noetic perception, that is to say a consciousness of consciousness.<sup>16</sup> This latter process modifies the consciousness into an *altered noema* through another process, the *noetic embodiment*.<sup>17</sup>

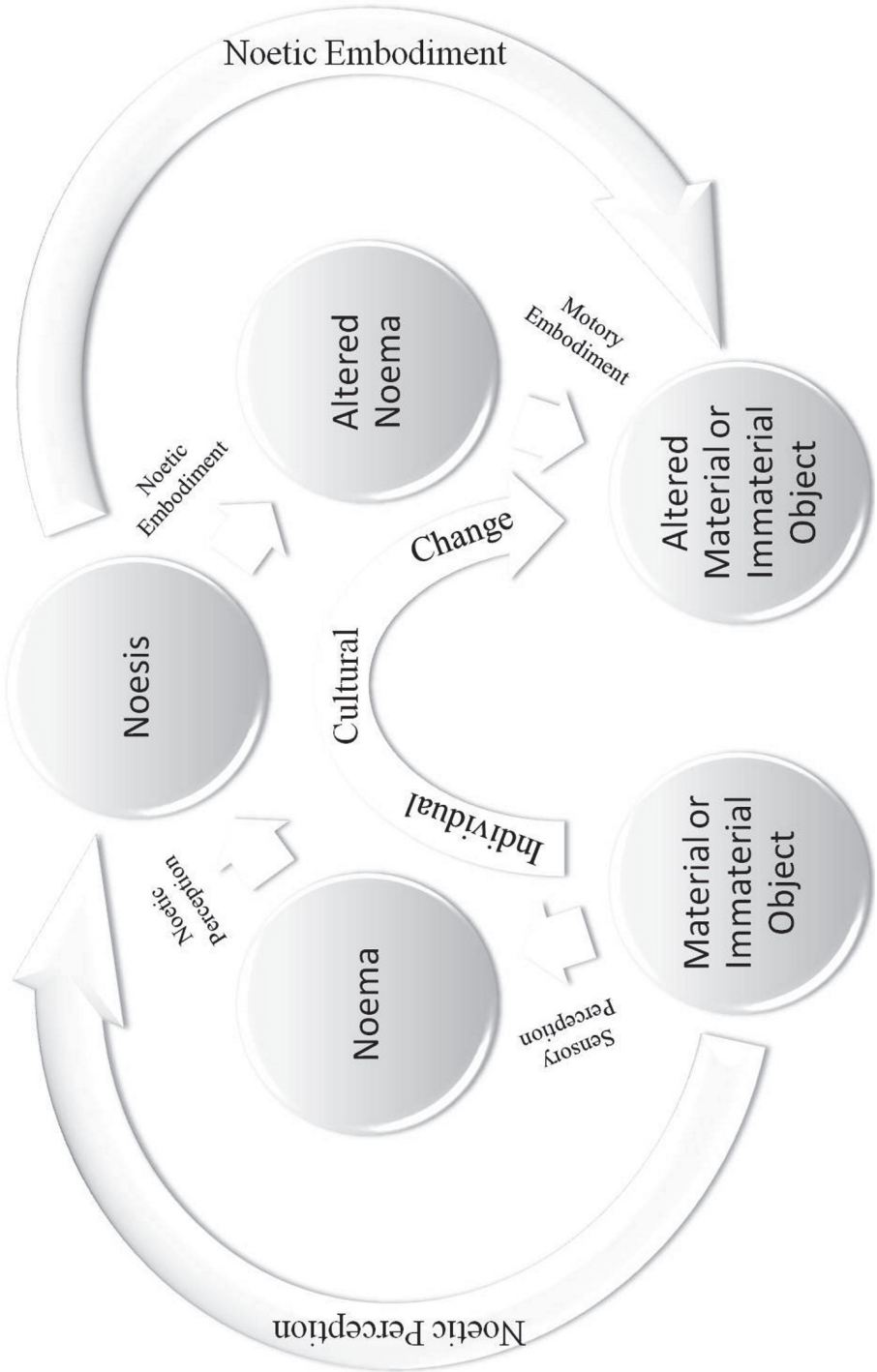


Fig. 1. Individual noetic change

The final step in altering the actual object of our perception (anthropogenic material culture) is *motory embodiment*,<sup>18</sup> where we, as humans, try to shape the object of our perception into the image of our altered noema, that is to say, to our altered consciousness. The alteration of an object belonging to the anthropogenic material culture is only as good as our sensory and noetic perception of it (how well we can “observe and report”) and obviously largely depending on the noetic embodiment (basically, as it is more commonly used, on our “power of imagination”), and on the motory embodiment (how skilled we are). An example might help explain the process. Imagine a naturalist painter. He can “observe and report” (basically experience) the apples shape, shading effect and texture the best he can imagine it. This image of the apples is nothing else than how it would “look” in his mind. Due to his “skills and talent” he can alter the anthropogenic material culture of the canvas and paint, and reorganize it in a way that will most closely reproduce what he first experienced. The relevance for the historical and, in this case, for the archaeological interpretation of such a descriptive method of individual cultural change is enormous, since it is not societies or groups that change and revolutionize humanity, but individuals. In this, if we can only deal with anthropogenic material culture of past individuals, it is important to understand that ‘Z’ archaeological culture did not change into ‘Y’ archaeological culture; it did not disappear or was annihilated, but rather that it is a continuous alteration instituted by individuals. Such “personifications” of present-day ideas of archaeological cultures, of pottery groups, and of metal object typologies only over-simplify historical facts. The research of such historical facts, in the end, should be the purpose of historians; basically, understanding and reporting that cultures did not change, or die or evolve, but rather that, at the best, people did.

## Group cultural change – the X group identity

THE RESULT of such research led scholars of phenomenology to develop the theories needed in order for us to understand concepts as *identities*, *Ander-sartigkeit*, *Dasein*.<sup>19</sup> The definition of such concepts is crucial because the “identities” that we as historians or archaeologists conduct our rhetoric with are, paradoxically, the basis and also the aim of our humanities research. If the archaeological research methods have a fallacy, it should be sought in this paradox.

Individual or noetic change alters anthropogenic material culture, and we as individuals interact through it. This interaction through anthropogenic material or non-material culture<sup>20</sup> is the actual basis of identity (**fig. 2**). As the object of archaeological research is the anthropogenic material culture, the analysis of identity aspects of the non-material anthropogenic culture will be limited in the following.

Since the difference between anthropogenic material and non-material culture is stated above, an explanation for the two terms will be presented below. The former’s

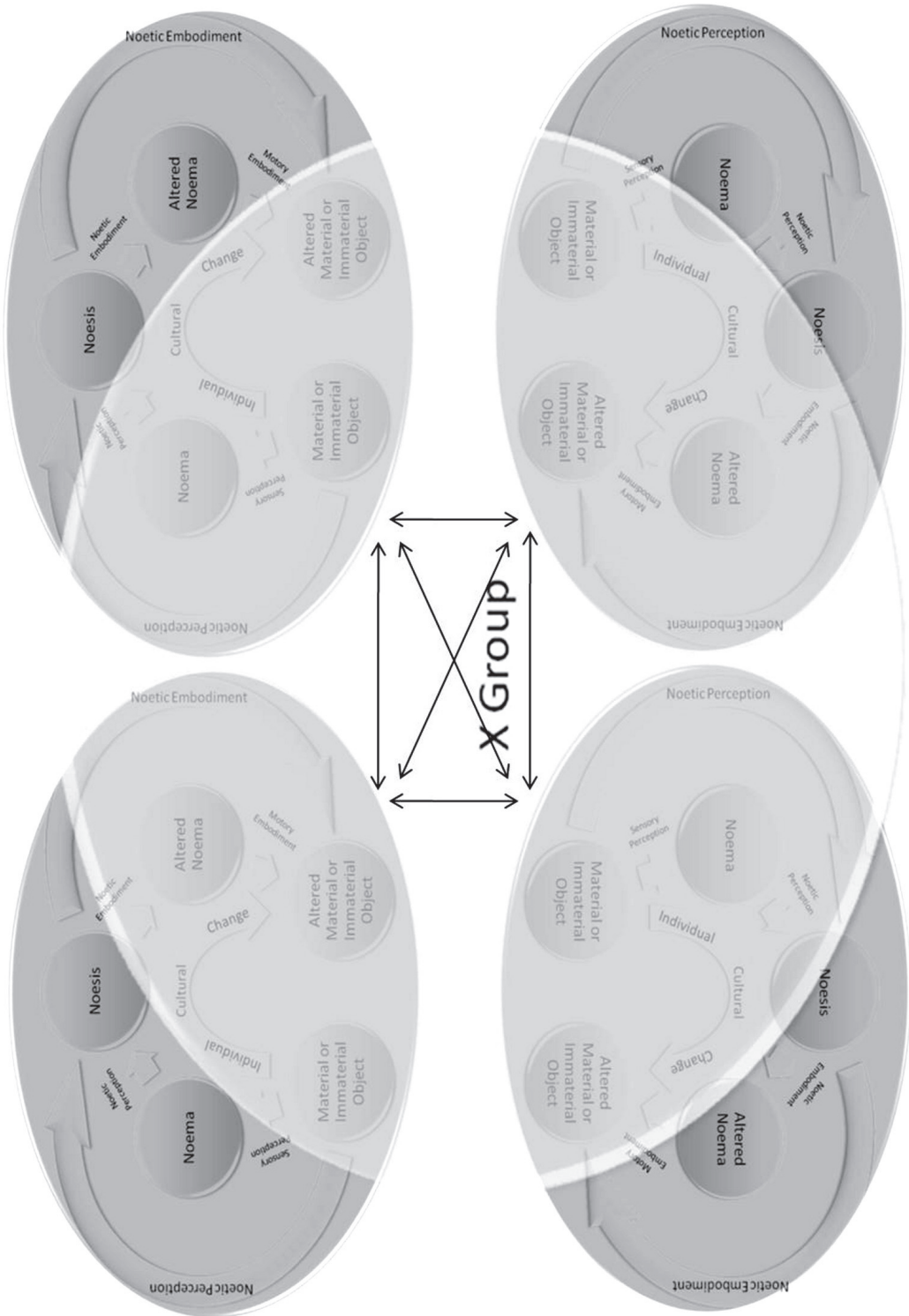


Fig. 2. Group cultural change – the X group identity

analysis and involvement in the processes described above is the object of archaeology. This involves processes like the documentation, classification and analysis of the anthropogenic material culture. In turn, they should be related at a multidisciplinary level to aspects of humanities that make the non-material anthropogenic culture (e. g. ethnology, ethnography, linguistics) the object of their study. In order to facilitate understanding, to have a “common denominator” and *eidetic science*<sup>21</sup> for the research of human history, it should be mentioned that the presented system is also applicable for the non-material aspects of this individual interaction.

## Cultural change mechanism

**I**N THIS sense, the adherence of any individual to the X group (or we could say the members of X group) is conditioned by noetic interaction. If the perception of any given individual of the anthropogenic culture of the X group is more than the alteration of that, we may safely state that the individual is part of the X group. Being part of the X group is defined here by the individual considering him/herself part of it, and being accepted by the members of the X group as well, which in the end is the basis of any identity. If, on the other hand, the alternate possibility is presented, that there is more alteration of the anthropogenic culture of the X group on behalf of an individual than just the perception of it, it can be said that the members of the X group do not consider the individual a part of their group.

At this point I would like to draw attention to the obvious fact that arises from the cultural change theory presented here. This fact is that the interpretation of past identities is always affected by the perception of historians/archaeologists, which materializes in their rhetoric. As pointed out above, there are many variables of individual belonging, group identity and Andersartigkeit. Hence, due to the nature of the historical/archaeological rhetoric, only a very limited amount of discourses are adopted, describing from the same perspective over and over again the same present-day manufactured identity. The obvious result of this is that the perspective will undermine itself and it will be shaken by studies which will highlight these generalizations and inadequacies of present-day fabricated identities.<sup>22</sup> Some of these studies even go as far as attempting to prove that the unity of so-called archaeological cultures does not exist; however, based on the presented cultural change theory, these cultures could have never existed. The only explanation for the creation of such identities is a unifying present-day perception of complex past identities.

Identities are ever-changing social units which can only be perceived in a dynamic system that changes in space and time through the noetic alteration of their anthropogenic culture. What this would mean is, if the X group is defined, let us say, as a religious identity, it does not mean that all of its individuals will share the same economic, political or other identities. Based on the theory presented here, it is suggested that only a mixture of such “identities” could result in actual past archaeologi-

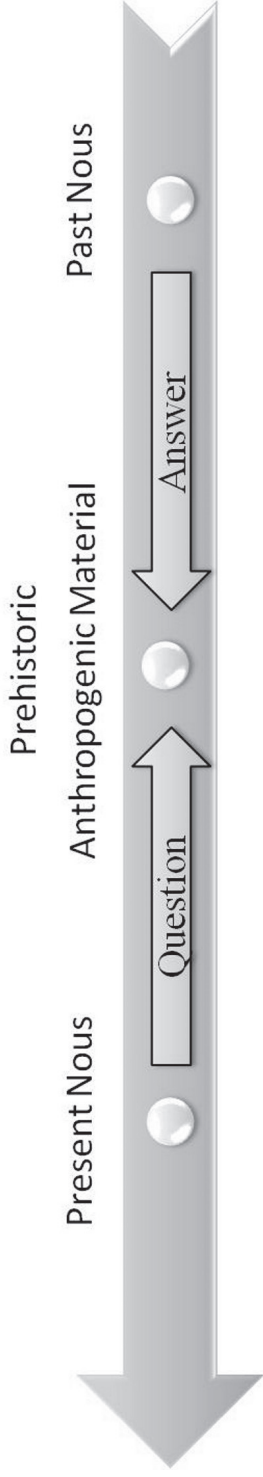
cal cultures or identities. A limitation in focus on only one or two such “identities” would create an artificial identity that never actually existed. Such concerns have, for example, been raised for south-east European prehistoric archaeological cultures and periods, where in most cases the grounds for defining an identity is solely based on pottery and/or metal objects.<sup>23</sup>

## Archaeology—the diachronic sabir

**A**FTER HAVING dealt with the relation between the anthropogenic material culture and individual/group cultural change, we may place our present-day perception in the syntax of these two variables. The relation between these three elements will be called the *diachronic sabir*. According to the *OED* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1989) it is “a French-based pidgin language used in parts of North Africa; also, = lingua franca; 1939 L. H. GRAY Foundations of Lang. 37 Sabir, a mixture of French, Spanish, Italian, Greek, and Arabic, which serves as a lingua franca for the Mediterranean ports.” The concept of a sabir is a very fitting way of describing the relation between anthropogenic material culture, individual/group cultural change and present-day perception; just as in the literary meaning of it, a new language is created by taking components from previously existing ones. In this sense, this new “language” is used to communicate between different identities based on an “information system,” which was newly created from the elements that previously belonged to the different identities. It will be made clear below that this communication is not a conventional dialogue but rather a communication system adapted for diachronic needs.

The syntax of archaeology as the *diachronic sabir* is the best expression for the means of observing-reporting and interpreting anthropogenic material cultures of past identities. Archaeology has also been envisioned as a language,<sup>24</sup> where the actual manifestations of past humans could be “decoded”; due to its failure to be successfully applied, this idea has been abandoned.<sup>25</sup> In this author’s opinion this “dialogue” between past and present can only be pursued in one direction: the answers have been already presented to us by past people (*nous*-see below) through their anthropogenic material culture. This only leaves the possibility, from the present-day perspective, of asking questions which will fit the already given answers (**fig. 3**).

Due to the tripartite nature of the diachronic sabir, it is possible to arrive at an understanding, through the noetic processes of phenomenological thought, of how past individuals described and quantified their material culture. The concept of *nous* represents the complex system of individual and group identities of the past and present, as the individuals’ creative force in what is referred to as “anthropogenic material culture.” According to the *OED* (draft ver. Sept. 2010), *nous* means: “mind, intellect; intelligence; intuitive apprehension.” Basically, in the present rheto-



*Fig. 3. Archaeology as the diachronic sabir*



ric, it is a formal way of summarizing the complex individual and communal noetic processes as described above, while still preserving their essential meaning.

## Perception and the Peircean trichotomy

**I**F THE previously presented noetic cultural change model is integrated in the syntax of the diachronic sabir, we could obviously ask ourselves, ‘what are the means of perceiving anthropogenic material culture?’ It has been suggested that the Peircean trichotomy<sup>26</sup> could be applied for such a purpose.<sup>27</sup> The application principle is simple: individuals perceive (or have consciousness of) and give meaning to all anthropogenic culture (material or not) by attributing them a tripartite semiotic meaning. This tripartite meaning is *iconic*, *symbolic* and *indexical*, based on the *morphological*, *functional* and *contextual* variables, respectively, of the anthropogenic material culture that is being perceived (**fig. 4**).

This is to say, individuals who perceive the same object (anthropogenic material culture) in more or less in the same manner (iconic, symbolic and indexical) will be part of the same X identity group. As all anthropogenic material culture has more or less its unique morphological, functional and contextual attributes, which rarely change without the individuals’ alteration of them, it may be concluded that the perception of such anthropogenic material culture, and hence its alteration based on these three aspects, will be the foundation of the identity of any X group.

## Applied diachronic sabir

**B**Y CLASSIFYING all anthropogenic material culture in the context of the diachronic sabir into the three aspects of morphology, functionality and contextuality, present-day questions may be asked to past answers. If past nous<sup>28</sup> perceived the objects through these three aspects, a similar categorization and classification in present-day nous would allow for a more or less accurate spatial and temporal delimitation of such an X group identity. This identity would be defined by the nature of the material that is subjected to analyses. If, for example, the material consists of figurines, graves and sanctuaries, a past identity based on common beliefs might be discovered, irrelevant of present-day cultures and groups, in contradiction with modern day practice where these common beliefs (past “religions”) have so far been manufactured in most of the cases based on the morphological classification of anthropogenic material culture.

In conclusion, it is suggested that a general observation/report and analysis of the anthropogenic material culture, from all three aspects of perception (morphology, functionality and contextuality)—and not only from one (morphology), as it usu-

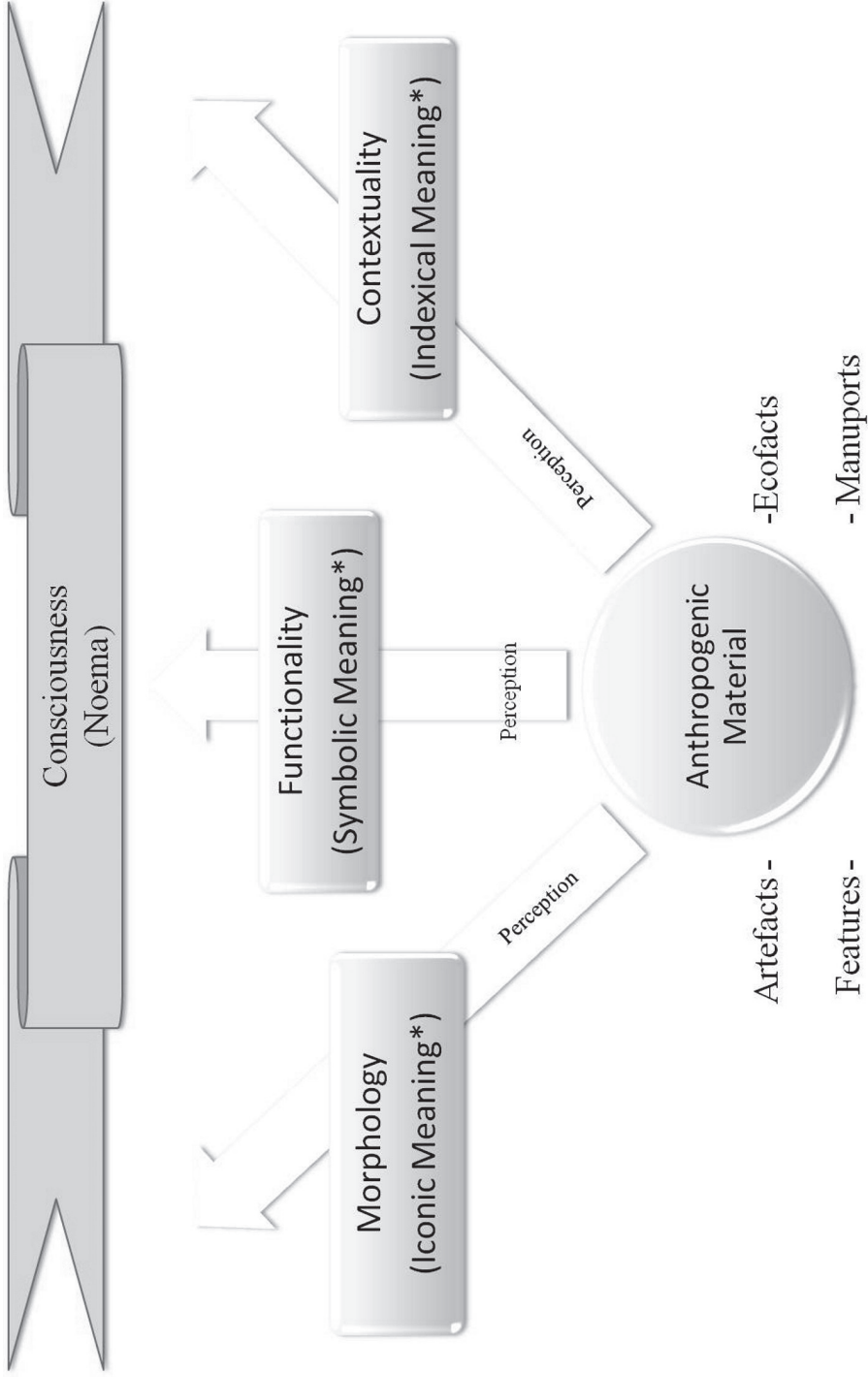


Fig. 4. Perception and the Peircean trichotomy

ally happens—is required before grouping and clustering the material and drawing conclusions.

## Environment, consciousness and historical rhetoric

**B**EFORE VENTURING into the excursus of possible applications of the theory and concept, a few words on the background of past individuals, anthropogenic material culture and present-day perceptions are needed. ‘Background’ is understood as *non-anthropogenic material culture*,<sup>29</sup> which ranges from geological, hydrological variables to Aeolian and those related to the sun. A cultural model is only valid if the alteration of the material culture by individuals or groups of individuals is perceived as their means of interacting with the environment. Temperature changes, precipitations and many other variables affect the way individuals alter their material culture. To understand and to describe, as closely as possible, these past processes the aspects of consciousness of anthropogenic material culture and the environmental interaction of past individuals should be noted as well. That is to say, the individuals’ consciousness of non-anthropogenic material culture should be added to present-day perspectives.

The fourth cornerstone of the cultural change theory presented here is the environmental factor. This can be integrated in the present theory as the consciousness of past individuals of non-anthropogenic material culture (in this case, environmental variables). The means of perceiving the environment is the same tripartite system based on the Peircean trichotomy of recognizing morphological, functional and contextual variables of the non-anthropogenic material culture. Hence, the environment plays a major role in the creation of the identity of the X group. Basically, individuals who perceive the non-anthropogenic material culture in more or less the same manner (iconic, symbolic and indexical) will be part of the same X group.

As a preliminary conclusion, based on the above, it can be stated that the belonging of any individual to an X group is defined by the extent to which that individual perceives the same anthropogenic and non-anthropogenic material cultures in the same manner (iconic, symbolic and indexical) as the members of the X group. Furthermore this anthropogenic material culture is used by individuals to interact with the non-anthropogenic material culture.

## Application possibilities

**A**N EXCURSUS will exemplify the possibilities and limitations of such a cultural change theory. As the system is designed for the processing of large amounts of data, which may cover a considerable area and time, the creation

of a catalogue or a database is suggested. In this, the anthropogenic material culture is broken up based on the outlined principles. Each feature, ecofact, manuport and artefact is entered into the database three times, based on its morphological, functional and contextual classification. Furthermore, the macro- and micro-spatial variables of the environment should be registered for each entry next to its possible chronological (relative and absolute) attributions. The morphological classification implicitly has a macro-spatial and temporal value; the functional one could represent a social and raw material value, whereas the contextual one will harbor micro-spatial and social values. Such a database will allow for the formal spatial and temporal outlining of the distinct identity that is being sought. The grouping or clustering of such individual entries of anthropogenic material culture will not rest solely on the morphological criteria, as in most of the cases in present-day archaeology, but rather on a tripartite system which would require the similarity of functionality, morphology and contextually between the individual elements of the X group in question. Such groups would have specific limits in space and time and would also be presented with actual areas of spatial and temporal interference between two or more of them.

The plotting of these individual entries on thematic maps, designed in a multi-disciplinary spirit by humanities and natural sciences, would bring the awareness of non-anthropogenic material culture of past individuals (environmental) to the table of identities. The mapping on thematic maps, which represent geology, hydrology, precipitations, vegetation and fauna, raw materials, temperature variations, to name a few, would allow for the most accurate, as far as it is possible, rhetoric by historians/archaeologists.

The merit of such a system would lie in the present-day perception of past anthropogenic and non-anthropogenic material as a dynamic system and not as a static one. It would not be subjected to inapplicable theoretical concepts such as “beginning” and “end,” but would rather represent a constantly changing and interactive perception of past individuals’ consciousnesses and groups.

## Conclusions

**A**FTER THIS short and preliminary presentation of a cultural change theory based on phenomenology and Peircean trichotomy, we may see that a change of the analyzed object of archaeologies is impossible, as the answers have already been given by the past nous. As the diachronic sabir presents it, the individual noetic process and group identities of the past cannot be altered or reshaped by present-day historic/archaeological rhetoric, nor is it possible for the same present-day perception to alter the anthropogenic and non-anthropogenic material culture of past individuals and groups. Therefore, if a metamorphosis of the analyzed objects

is not possible, we are left with the possibility of shifting our perspective from the views and expressions of an already presented past “image” to a different one, in this case based on the noetic processes, thus enabling the elimination of the fallacy in the research methods by an *anamorphosis*<sup>30</sup> in archaeology.

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## Notes

1. Pers. comm., Prof. Dr. Joseph Maran, 29.11.2009.: *Noesis belongs to the essence of being human; hence all human cultural creation is marked by it.*
2. Present authors' Ph.D. subject for the joint thesis with Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu and Ruprecht-Karls University of Heidelberg.
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5. Cătălin A. Lazăr, “Inventarul funerar din mormintele culturii Starčevo-Criș. Studiu de caz,” in *Studii și Comunicări Satu Mare XXIII-XXIV*, 2007; Colin Renfrew, “The archaeology of ritual, of cult, and of religion.” In *The archaeology of ritual*, ed. Evangelos Kyriakidis, (Los Angeles, Cotsen Institute of Archaeology, 2007), Valeriu Sîrbu, *Arheologia funerară și sacrificiile: o terminologie unitară (dicționar, lexic, arborescență)/ Funerary archaeology and sacrifice: an unifying terminology (dictionary, lexis, branchinh)*, Brăila, Istros, 2003.
6. A good and relatively easy starting point for it is: Dermot Moran, *Introduction to phenomenology*, London/New York, Routledge, 2000.
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10. *Oxford English Dictionary*.
11. Franz Brentano, *Psychologie vom empirischen Standpunkt*, Hamburg, Meiner, 1955, 27, 124.
12. Edmund Husserl, *Logische Untersuchungen. Zweiter Theil, Untersuchungen zur Phänomenologie und Theorie der Erkenntnis*, Halle a.S., Max Niemeyer, 1901, 41 sqq; Jitendra Nath Mohanty, *The philosophy of Edmund Husserl: a historical development*, New Haven, Conn., Yale University Press, 2008, 126 sqq.

13. Edmund Husserl, *Logische Untersuchungen. Zweiter Theil, Untersuchungen zur Phänomenologie und Theorie der Erkenntnis*, Halle a.S., Max Niemeyer, 1901, 37 sqq; Edmund Husserl, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie. Allgemeine Einführung in der reine Phänomenologie*, Tübingen, Neomarius Verlag, 1950, 218 sqq.
14. Edmund Husserl, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie. Allgemeine Einführung in der reine Phänomenologie*, Tübingen, Neomarius Verlag, 1950, 194, 200 sqq; Jean-Paul Sartre, *La transcendance de l'ego: esquisse d'une description phénoménologique*, Paris, Vrin, 1965, 27 sq.
15. Edmund Husserl, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie. Allgemeine Einführung in der reine Phänomenologie*, Tübingen, Neomarius Verlag, 1950, 218 sqq; Dermot Moran, *Introduction to phenomenology*, London/New York, Routledge, 2000, 142 sqq.
16. Edmund Husserl, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie. Allgemeine Einführung in der reine Phänomenologie*, Tübingen, Neomarius Verlag, 1950, 232 sqq; Dermot Moran, *Introduction to phenomenology*, London/New York, Routledge, 2000, 154 sqq.
17. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, Paris, Gallimard, 1945, 115, 162.
18. Ibid., 114, 121; Jean-Paul Sartre, *L'être et le néant: essai d'ontologie phénoménologique*, Paris, Gallimard, 1943, 330.
19. Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit: erste Hälfte. Elfte, unveränderte Auflage*, Tübingen, Max Niemeyer, 1967, 11 sqq; Emmanuel Lévinas, *Humanisme de l'autre homme*, Paris, Fata Morgana, 1972, 50, 62 sqq; Emmanuel Lévinas, *Le temps et l'autre*, Paris, PUF, 1991, 57 sq; Dermot Moran, *Introduction to phenomenology*, London/New York, Routledge, 2000, 327 sqq, 376 sqq, 417 sqq; Jean-Paul Sartre, *L'être et le néant: essai d'ontologie phénoménologique*, Paris, Gallimard, 1943, 197, 200; Jean-Paul Sartre, *La transcendance de l'ego: esquisse d'une description phénoménologique*, Paris, Vrin, 1965, 24, 29.
20. For ex. utterance, dancing etc.
21. Dermot Moran, *Introduction to phenomenology*, London/New York, Routledge, 2000, 189.
22. e. g. Borja Legarra Herrero, "The Minoan fallacy: cultural diversity and mortuary behaviour on Crete at the beginning of the bronze age," in *Oxford Journal of Archaeology* 28, 2009, 49 sq.
23. Nikolaus G. O. Boroffka, "Probleme der späten Otomani-Kultur." In *Kultura Otomani-Füzesabony - rozwój, chronologia, gospodarka. Materiały z konferencji archeologicznej Dukla, 27-28.11.1997/Die Otomani-Füzesabony-Kultur - Entwicklung, Chronologie, Wirtschaft. Materialien der archäologischen Konferenz Dukla, 27-28.11.1997*, ed. J. Gancarski, (Krosno, Mitel, 1999), 124 sqq.
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25. Ian Hodder, *Theory and practice in archaeology*, London/New York, Routledge, 1992.
26. Charles S. Peirce, 1888, *Trichotomic* (Manuscript).
27. Terrence W. Deacon, *The symbolic species: the co-evolution of language and the brain*, New York, Norton, 1998, 71.
28. In this case used in the plural sense.
29. Environmental variables: hydrological, geological, astrological, colian etc.

30. A distorted projection or drawing of anything, so made that when viewed from a particular point, or by reflection from a suitable mirror, it appears regular and properly proportioned; a deformation *OED* (2nd ed. 1989).

### **Abstract**

#### **Anamorphosis in Archaeology: Aspects of Phenomenology and Perception in Interpretations of Anthropogenic Material Culture**

The object of this paper is to present a theory of cultural change in archaeology, especially in relation to anthropogenic material culture. It will place the major elements of cultural change (the environment, humans, anthropogenic material culture, and present day perspective) in a single, wide-ranging description of the processes. These elements will be based on concepts and processes of phenomenology, Peircean trichotomy and pragmatism, which in turn will be adapted for the needs of the description of a cultural process with special attention to archaeology. At the end of this, a small excursus will show how such a system might be applied and used in archaeological research. The aim of such an attempt is to balance the interpretations of present-day archaeologists and scholars of the humanities with the abovementioned variables, which all equally influence cultural change. Such an attempt will also provide a frame of argumentation and understanding for writer and reader alike.

### **Keywords**

Phenomenology, perception, Peircean trichotomy, cultural change theory.

