ARCH/BIOANTH LUNCH TALK

Presenter: Dr. Phyllis Johnson

WEDNESDAY, FEB 22 @ 12PM

Machine Learning and Gender: Rethinking "Women's Work" in the Archaeological Past and Present

Archaeologists have traditionally assumed that women's work is invisible in the archaeological record. Thus, unless explicitly written about in ancient texts or hieroglyphs, men are the default actors and the "obvious" participants in most prehistoric activities. Because stone tools are virtually imperishable and therefore the most prominent of archaeological materials, these artifacts have the potential to illuminate and make visible the important roles of women in prehistoric social, economic, and political processes. Even so, the role of women in the production of stone tools has not been examined in most archaeological settings because of the idea that one "cannot see gender" in the archaeological record. In my research, I use machine learning and dynamic image analysis to identify where and how stone tools were produced at archaeological sites, which can illuminate gendered production strategies, thus strengthening our understanding of the lives of women within archaeological societies. At the same time, I critically examine who is using machine learning in the archaeological present and question the reasons behind gender imbalances that have become apparent in the field of computational archaeology.