Rodney Harrison

Archaeologies of Emergent Presents and Futures

ABSTRACT

This article traces the genealogy of the subfield that has become known as the "archaeology of the contemporary past" and argues for its more thorough integration with an expanded field of historical archaeology. One of the central challenges for archaeology over the coming decades will be to find a way to engage with emerging, contemporary, sociomaterial phenomena and, hence, with issues of both contemporary and future ecological, social, political, and economic concern. Drawing on the framework for a new internationally collaborative, interdisciplinary research project, Heritage Futures, that seeks to understand the material-discursive processes of heritage and other heritage-like fields as distinctive forms of future-assembling practices through the application of a range of archaeological ethnographic methods, the article concludes that the potential for an expanded field of historical archaeology lies in its ability to engage with *emergent futures* by way of archaeological ethnographies that are attuned to the sociomaterial aspects of these and other future-assembling practices.

Introduction

Over the past decade, the archaeology of the recent and "contemporary past" has developed as a discrete subfield of later historical archaeology in its own right and is beginning to have a significant and distinctive impact both theoretically and methodologically within the field of archaeology and a range of adjacent academic disciplines more generally. However, with some noteworthy exceptions, this subfield has developed largely independently of Anglophone historical archaeology with which it might be understood to share at least temporal boundaries, if not the potential to make important intellectual contributions. With this in mind, this article provides a brief introduction to this emerging subfield and some arguments for a better integration within historical archaeology more generally, before tackling what I believe will be one of the central challenges for archaeology over the coming decades—that is, how archaeology might address itself to *emerging*, contemporary, sociomaterial phenomena and, hence, to issues of both contemporary and future ecological, social, political, and economic concern. In doing so, I draw on the framework for a new, internationally collaborative, interdisciplinary research project, Heritage Futures, that seeks to understand the material-discursive processes of heritage and other heritage-like fields as distinctive forms of future-assembling practices through the application of a range of archaeological ethnographic methods. This article positions itself in relation to a number of recent calls from archaeologists, e.g., González-Ruibal (2006, 2008, 2013), Dawdy (2009, 2010), Harrison (2011); papers in Wurst and Mrozowski (2014); and anthropologists, e.g., Rabinow et al. (2008), Rabinow (2008, 2011), and Appadurai (2013), to develop a critical anthropological engagement with both the contemporary (defined not only as a temporal, but also as a spatial and ontological domain [Harrison et al. 2014]) and with the futures that are enacted through archaeologists' practical engagements with it. I conclude, perhaps counterintuitively for a discipline that is by definition centrally concerned with the "past," that the potential for an expanded field of historical archaeology lies in its ability to engage with *emergent futures* by way of archaeological ethnographies that are attuned to the sociomaterial aspects of such future-assembling practices.

Archaeologies of the Contemporary Past

I begin with a brief historical review of the emergence of the subfield that has become known as the "archaeology of the contemporary past" as background to the question of why it has not found greater interest within the temporally adjacent subfield of historical archaeology as it is practiced in Anglophone contexts more generally. The historiography of the subfield has been addressed in detail elsewhere, e.g., Hicks

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(2010) and Fewster (2013), and I draw particularly on the accounts published in Harrison and Schofield (2010) and Harrison (2011) to provide a brief outline here. My focus is specifically on its emergence within Anglophone contexts, however, I will also comment briefly on various parallels in other regional traditions at the end of this section.

As Buchli (2007:115) notes, archaeologists and anthropologists have long taken an interest in contemporary material culture. However, it is the interest in ethnoarchaeology within the New Archaeology that formed the background to what are generally acknowledged to be the first formal publications on the archaeology of the contemporary past (Graves-Brown 2000a:2; Buchli and Lucas 2001a:3; Buchli 2007:115), titled *Modern Material Culture Studies* (Rathje 1979) and *Modern Material Culture: The Archaeology of Us* (Gould and Schiffer 1981); but see some important earlier precedents in Redman (1973) and especially Salwen (1973) and Leone (1973). These publications grew out of the research developed by Schiffer and Rathje at the University of Tucson, Arizona, and separately by Gould at the University of Honolulu, Hawaii, during the 1970s. Where most ethnoarchaeological research had been undertaken with communities that employed traditional technologies in a contemporary setting, the student programs developed at Tucson and Hawaii, and by contributors to *Modern Material Culture*, were largely concerned with the description and analysis of contemporary material cultures in modern, industrialized societies.

Rathje's provocative article, "Modern Material Culture Studies," outlined an ambitious agenda for the development of an archaeology of contemporary material culture. He suggested that archaeology should be defined as the study of "the interaction between material culture and human behavior or ideas, regardless of time or space" (Rathje 1979:2) and, as such, research on the recent past or present was as much the job of the archaeologist as undertaking research into the deeper past. He anticipated that "the archaeology of today" (Rathje 1979:4) could make contributions to the teaching and testing of archaeological principles and to the development of models that relate present society to past societies. Further, we archaeologists should see it as a sort of "rescue archaeology" of contemporary life, helping to address what might become future gaps in knowledge as the material and archaeological record of contemporary life is being destroyed around us. For Rathje, modern, material culture studies represented "a final step in the transformation of archaeology into a unified, holistic approach to the study of society and its material products" (Rathje 1979:29).

Nonetheless, for many years work such as this remained idiosyncratic in terms of its archaeological focus on the present. The initial North American efflorescence of research on the archaeology of modern material culture was generally not followed up with the establishment of further research projects. While research by Rathje (Rathje 1991, 2001; Rathje and Murphy 1992), Gould (1980, 2007), and Schiffer (1991, 2000) continued, and, indeed, all three scholars established a central place for themselves within the development of North American archaeological theory and method, much ethnoarchaeology throughout the 1980s and early 1990s remained focused on traditional forms of technology and on the use of ethnoarchaeological models for the explanation of cultural change in the past; see, e.g., David and Kramer (2001).

However, an interest in archaeological approaches to the contemporary past reemerged amongst British "post-processual" archaeologists in the 1980s. For example, Hodder (1987) undertook a study of the social meaning of bow ties in a contemporary British pet-food factory, as a case study for modeling the relationship between social practices, material culture, and meaning in human societies. Similarly, in *Reconstructing Archaeology*, Shanks and Tilley (1992) also explored contemporary material culture through a study of the design of Swedish and English beer cans. In their introduction to this case study, they criticized the authors of the chapters in *Modern Material Culture* for being too empiricist in their approach, suggesting that they "failed to realize the potential of the study of modern material culture as a critical intervention in contemporary society ... with transformative intent" (Shanks and

Tilley 1992:172). In addition to particular post-processual studies of contemporary material culture, another important aspect of post-processualism in the development of the archaeology of the contemporary past was the way in which it turned the archaeological lens on the process of "doing" archaeology itself through its emphasis on archaeology as a critical engagement with the production of the past in the present.

Another decade passed before the publication of two key books that have been central to the establishment of the archaeology of the contemporary past as a subdiscipline in the Anglophone world: *Matter, Materiality and Modern Culture*, edited by Paul Graves-Brown (2000b), and *Archaeologies of the Contemporary Past*, edited by Victor Buchli and Gavin Lucas (2001b). Both volumes were part of a significant shift in orientation away from the ethnoarchaeological focus of most of the earlier work on the archaeology of the contemporary past and toward a more specific focus on contemporary life that now characterizes the subfield. These two books established key themes that came to characterize the archaeology of the contemporary past over the subsequent decade. Graves-Brown (2000b) suggested that the role of an archaeology of the recent past was to make the familiar "unfamiliar," to destabilize aspects of contemporary quotidian life that would otherwise be overlooked. Buchli and Lucas (2001a:9) also emphasized this aim, suggesting that "there is a sense in which turning our methods back on ourselves creates a strange, reversed situation—a case of making the familiar unfamiliar." In addition, Buchli and Lucas and their contributors pointed to the linked themes of production/consumption, remembering/forgetting, disappearance/disclosure, and presence/absence. A theme very prominent throughout the book was that of the subaltern and the idea that archaeology has a major role to play in foregrounding those aspects of contemporary life at the margins that are constantly being overwritten by dominant narratives:

> In addressing the issue of the non-discursive realm the archaeological act comes directly into contact with the subaltern, the dispossessed and the abject. This is not simply in terms of the usual archaeological preoccupation with material remains, but the practical and social act of uncovering that which has once been hidden. The two converge here both literally and figuratively. (Buchli and Lucas 2001a:14)

Since the publication of these two key volumes, the archaeology of the recent and contemporary past has seen a relative explosion. Significant edited collections that deal specifically with the subfield have been published, e.g., McAtackney et al. (2007), Holtorf and Piccini (2009), Harrison and Schofield (2009), Fortenberry and Myers (2010), Fortenberry and McAtackney (2012), May et al. (2012), González-Ruibal (2013), Olsen and Pétursdóttir (2014), and Orange (2015); along with noteworthy articles in a range of journals, including *Current Anthropology*, *Journal of Material Culture*, *World Archaeology*, and *Archaeologies*; and monographs dealing with significant contemporary archaeological projects, e.g., Andreassen et al. (2010), McAtackney (2014), and González-Ruibal (2014). A major step was the development of the Contemporary and Historical Archaeology in Theory (CHAT) conference group in Bristol in 2003; see further discussion in Holtorf and Piccini (2009:19). This group now hosts an annual conference that considers issues relating to both historical archaeology and the archaeology of the contemporary past, and has acted as a forum for the development and presentation of a significant proportion of the research that has subsequently come to define this field. Of equal significance has been the emergence of modern "conflict archaeology" (Crossland 2011; Moshenska 2013); "forensic archaeology," e.g., Powers and Sibun (2013); archaeologies of contemporary internment and confinement, e.g., Myers and Moshenska (2011); and "disaster archaeology," e.g., Gould (2007), as distinctive subfields in their own right. Another important influence has been the increasing interest of the public in the conservation of modern heritage and archaeology's role in contributing to this, e.g., Penrose (2007). Most recently, the subfield has "come of age" through the publication of the *Oxford Handbook of the Archaeology of the Contemporary World* (Graves-Brown et al. 2013) and the launch in 2014 of the *Journal of Contemporary Archaeology*, which is devoted specifically to the topic.

I want to be clear here, as elsewhere (Harrison et al. 2014), that, in charting this history of the subfield, it is not to assume a particular hagiography, but simply to provide a series of waypoints as indicators of an increasing interest in the archaeology of the recent past and present as an area of research and publication. Indeed, there are certainly as-yet unexcavated historiographies of a focus on the contemporary within other regional archaeological traditions, e.g., early work from Spain and Latin America that maps a similar intellectual trajectory to that which I have noted from Anglophone and traditions above, e.g., Alcaide (1983), Bellan (1993), and Gutiérrez et al. (1996). Similarly, in Francophone archaeology and anthropology there is a long tradition of scholars working with both ancient and contemporary material culture, e.g., Leroi-Gourhan (1943), Lemonnier (1992), Schlanger (1994), and Olivier (2000), and the archaeology of the recent past has also developed as a strong area of focus for Scandinavian archaeologists, e.g., Burstrom et al. (2009) and Olsen and Pétursdóttir (2014). My aim here has been to consider the emergence of this subfield in particular Anglophone regional contexts and to consider the particular themes and issues that such work has addressed. This discussion has served as a point of entry for exploring the possible intersections of "contemporary" and "historical" archaeologies more generally.

On the Relationship between "Contemporary" and "Historical" Archaeologies

One curious aspect of the historiography of the subfield has been the generally closer ties it has had with prehistoric archaeology, perhaps, as Gavin Lucas notes, because in its earliest incarnations it was seen to be connected closely with the more general project of developing middle-range theory (González-Ruibal et al. 2014:266). This was certainly the case of the majority of scholars working on this material until the late 1990s. So, while many who work on "recent" and "contemporary" time periods today might also work on material that might be more conventionally understood as falling within the purview of "historical" archaeology, the connections between theoretical and conceptual developments within each subfield have been relatively weak. Yet, besides sharing temporal boundaries, it seems that there are many broader themes that constitute areas of shared interest. For example, the interest of scholars working on the archaeology of the contemporary past in questions of inequality, power, and class, e.g., Kiddey and Schofield (2011), Zimmerman and Welch (2011), Zimmerman et al. (2010), Zimmerman (2013), and Gokee and De León (2014), resonates strongly with a long tradition of engagement with the sociopolitics of pasts in the present and attempts to trace the genealogies of modern global inequalities in historical archaeology, e.g., McGuire and Paynter (1991), Leone and Potter (1999), Mullins (1999, 2010), Singleton (1999), Hall (2000), Leone (2005), Hall and Silliman (2006), Tarlow (2007), Voss (2008), and Matthews (2010). Similarly, the strong orientation within Anglophone historical archaeology toward a critical engagement with colonialism and postcolonial theory, e.g., Silliman (2004), Lydon (2009), Leone (2009), and Croucher and Weiss (2011), can also be seen to intersect clearly with approaches that have characterized archaeologies of the contemporary, e.g., González-Ruibal (2014). One could easily characterize both fields of research as dominated ethically by the idea of the development of useful pasts and a general orientation toward contemporary social, political, and economic concerns, e.g., McGuire (2008), Dawdy (2009, 2010), Leone (2010), Voss (2010), and Edgeworth et al. (2014).

So one could ask, why has "contemporary archaeology" not found traction in or at least intersected with "historical archaeology" as it is practiced in Anglophone (and especially within North American) contexts? It is possible to argue that this is at least partially a function of the different approaches to and emphases on particular kinds of sources that have been developed within each subfield. While both have been explicitly concerned with the question of sources, historical archaeology has developed a strong approach to the integration of multiple lines of evidence, arguably with an emphasis on textual and visual sources in addition to material ones.

The integration of multiple lines of evidence as part of an interpretive historical archaeology has received much critical focus and discussion, e.g., Schuyler (1978), Beaudry (1988, 1995), and Wilkie (2006). Contemporary archaeology, on the other hand, has tended to prioritize material sources explicitly over textual or remembered ones and, in this sense, has perhaps been betrayed by and perpetuated the strong connections with prehistoric archaeology that I have noted above. One could easily see this as a legacy of the experimental nature of the subfield and the ways in which it has sought to justify the value of an explicitly *archaeological* approach to the study of contemporary life, given the abundance of other source materials available that cover the same temporal ground. But it is also, perhaps, one reason the subfield has found itself relatively isolated from historical archaeology, particularly in North America, where there has been a long and strong tradition of documentary archaeology, at least some of which has extended into 20th-century contexts, e.g., Cabak et al. (1999).

The controversial "Van" project (Bailey et al. 2009), see further discussion in Harrison and Schofield (2010:157–163), is a good case in point. This project involved the "excavation" of a 1991 model Ford Transit van by a group of archaeologists in Bristol. Much of the online discussion around the project focused on whether it should or should not be perceived to be archaeology, and whether such an exercise could be seen as worthwhile (Newland et al. 2007), and the authors themselves note that the aim of the exercise was to see what archaeological methods could contribute to the understanding of a modern object about which so much could already be assumed to be known. And while the project did, in fact, draw on both documentary and oral accounts in addition to archaeological evidence, the perceived need to justify such work has tended to force a focus on field-based archaeological methods fairly narrowly defined in exploring what is most distinctive about contemporary archaeology in and of itself. Nonetheless, there are a number of examples of archaeological work that focus on the present or recent past that do take a strong multisource approach. Laura McAtackney's (2014) work on the Long Kesh Maze Prison provides one example, weaving together and weighing against each other a range of documentary, oral historical, photographic, artifactual, and architectural source materials to explore the recent history and contemporary legacy of one of the most contentious material legacies of the Northern Irish Troubles. Her work on the prison and on associated sectarian landscapes has allowed her to interrogate and reinterpret the histories of the material realities of the Northern Irish peace process (McAtackney 2011, 2013).

In some cases it has also been possible to apply similar multisource approaches in contexts where documentary sources could be perceived to be extremely inaccurate, unrepresentative, or even nonexistent. Here there has been, perhaps, a greater emphasis on integrating archaeology and ethnography than in historical archaeology as it is generally practiced in Anglophone contexts. An example is the work of Jason De Léon and colleagues as part of the Undocumented Migration Project, which applies archaeological, ethnographic, and forensic methodologies to explore contemporary, undocumented migration flows in the Sonoran Desert of southern Arizona, northern Mexican border towns, and the southern Mexico-Guatemala border (De Léon 2012, 2013; Gokee and De Léon 2014; De Léon et al. 2015). Similarly, recent projects on the archaeology of contemporary homelessness on both sides of the Atlantic, e.g., Kiddey (2014a, 2014b), Kiddey and Schofield (2011), Zimmerman and Welch (2011), Zimmerman et al. (2010), and Zimmerman (2013), also employ strong multisource approaches to understanding questions of social inequality. Rachael Kiddey's work is particularly noteworthy in this regard, drawing closely on oral accounts and collaborative archaeological surface mapping and excavation of "homeless sites" with the assistance of homeless colleagues in Bristol and York.

As I have already noted, these projects show strong resonances with themes that have long interested historical archaeologists: in the cases above, questions of identity, conflict, and sectarianism, and the inequalities of capitalist economies, respectively. Another strong point of intersection between

contemporary and historical archaeologies is the shared desire to develop archaeological research on topics that might influence contemporary policy. Like the work on homelessness and migration discussed above, Charles Orser's work on the historical archaeology of race, e.g., Orser (2003, 2007), has shown a strong orientation toward the development of a historical archaeology that engages with issues of contemporary social and political concern—with power, poverty, prejudice, and inequality. Similarly, questions of the historical relationship of industry to processes of social and environmental change could be seen to underpin equally the work of historical and "contemporary" archaeologists. Stephen Mrozowski (2014) shows how his work on the environmental impacts of the rise of capitalist economies in historical New England is directly connected with contemporary ecological concerns. This resonates with the work of contemporary archaeologies on 20th-century industry, e.g., Stratton and Trinder (2000); conflict, e.g., Gonzalez-Ruibal (2008); and waste, e.g., Rathje and Murphy (1992); see also Edgeworth et al. (2014) on archaeology of the anthropocene. I use Mrozowski's (2014) work as an example here because it also engages work on the historical archaeology of colonialism, which has equally been concerned with contemporary social and political questions, e.g., Ferris et al. (2014), and, which, at least in the Australian context within which my own work in this area has been developed, e.g., Harrison (2004), is also very much an archaeology of the recent past.

Toward an Archaeology of Emergent Presents and Futures

Having shown how historical archaeologies and archaeologies of the recent past and present share a number of thematic intersections, and that they are both equally interested in connecting archaeology to contemporary social, political, economical, and ecological concerns, I want to explore how a further step might be taken in orienting archaeology toward the *future*. I argue for the need to bring together what might be seen as the relative strengths of both historical and contemporary archaeologies in their varied approaches to multiple sources, and re-engage with the origins of archaeologies of the contemporary in ethnoarchaeology in a reflexive manner that is mindful of how archaeology is itself coproductive of the pasts and presents (and futures) it studies; see Lucas (2004, 2005, 2006, 2010). My approach here differs from other recent calls for a reorientation of historical archaeology toward the future, e.g., Wurst and Mrozowski (2014), in that it does not focus on "doing history backwards," but, rather, calls for a focus on an *archaeology of the present* as the temporal position from which futures are assembled (Harrison 2011).

I have already suggested that one of the key insights of an archaeological engagement with the present and recent past has involved an acknowledgment that archaeology constitutes a material and discursive intervention in the present (Olivier 2004, 2008; Shanks 2012). This observation has been critical for "historical" and "contemporary" archaeology alike. Logically, if there are many different archaeological engagements with the present, there are also, by inference, many different pasts that these different archaeologies produce. And, critically, in the same way that there are many pasts, there are also many possible futures bound up and realized by these pasts that archaeology makes in the present. So, while the idea of an archaeology that acknowledges its role as a creative and material-discursive intervention in the present has become central to a range of different contemporary archaeological endeavors, the potential for an archaeological engagement with the study of *emergent futures* has remained largely undiscussed. Yet, if it is argued that archaeology brings its own distinctive "sensibility" to its topic of study—compare Shanks (2012) and Olsen et al. (2012)—then it follows that archaeology might also provide a particular lens with which to shed light on the future or, indeed, through its engagement with the presents in which the future is made, on *multiple possible futures*.

In the space that remains in this article, I briefly consider a series of ongoing methodological experiments associated with a new research project, Heritage Futures, that attempts to develop an archaeological

approach to understanding a specific genre of future-making practices as an example of how an expanded field of historical archaeology might turn its attention to the study of emergent futures. While this work is still under way, I think it is, nonetheless, valuable in pointing toward the new direction that I suggest might constitute an expanded archaeology of emergent futures. In taking seriously the claims of a number of different fields of heritage practice to conserve objects, places, and practices "from the past, in the present, for the future," I want to consider the potential for archaeology to engage with the future-assembling capacities of a range of different kinds of heritage practices that take place across a broad range of heritage and heritage-like domains in comparative perspective. In relation to heritage, I suggest that it might be helpful to understand these practices as practices that share an orientation toward caring for (and hence producing) futures. In doing so, I draw on a range of conceptual influences, including Karen Barad's (2007) agential realism; in relation to archaeology, Alberti and Bray (2009), Alberti et al. (2011), Fowler (2013), and Marshall and Alberti (2014); Jane Bennett's (2010) vital materialism; Michel Foucault's notion of the *dispositif* (Agamben 2009); Deleuzian assemblage theory (DeLanda 2006); and various aspects of science and technology studies, e.g., Latour (1998, 1999), Law (2004), and Law and Urry (2004), in seeing heritage practices of various kinds as enacting new realities through contingent processes of assembling and reassembling bodies, techniques, technologies, materials, values, temporalities, and spaces. These issues are discussed further in Harrison (2013); for a general consideration of the value of networked approaches to historical archaeology, see Casella (2013, this issue). While these varied influences have quite different academic origins and applications, I see them, nonetheless, as connected by a concern with the performative aspects of human and nonhuman engagements *in* and *with* the world *as themselves co-constitutive of that world*. Within this framework, worlds and futures are not predetermined, but, instead, emerge from the engagements of a range of agents, including both humans and non-humans. Central to my focus on what might productively be termed *heritage ontologies*—by which I refer to the world-making, future-assembling capacities of heritage practices—is the recognition of *ontological plurality*: that different forms of heritage practices enact *different realities* and, hence, work to assemble *different futures*; see also Harrison (2015).

I make a couple of simultaneous moves here. Firstly, my focus is on heritage as one of many technical domains in which futures are made or realized. Equally, one might apply such methods to other technical fields: contemporary biotechnology (Rabinow and Dan-Cohen 2006) and architecture (Yaneva 2013), for example. Heritage functions here as a case study that presents a series of overlapping technical fields concerned with future making through active conservation of particular objects from the past, in the present, in anticipation of (and hence working to produce) particular futures. Heritage is selective, and active, in the pasts, presents, and futures that it makes. Secondly, I do not limit my focus to archaeological heritage alone, but consider natural and cultural heritage, broadly defined. I do so to suggest part of the value of an expanded historical archaeological engagement with the present and its nascent futures is precisely in its capacity to provide comparative perspectives that might open conversations across quite different fields of practice to work toward the production of *shared futures*. I discuss this in more detail in the next section of the article.

Heritage as a Series of Future-Assembling Practices

Heritage is often conceived as a single field; however, I would suggest that it is more helpful to understand it as an heterogeneous and discontinuous series of domains of practice. I use the term "domains" to draw attention to a tendency for different fields of heritage practice to operate relatively autonomously, with each of these domains specifying particular objects of conservation and accompanying methods of management. Examples of such domains include the fields of biodiversity conservation, built-heritage conservation, and endangered-language preservation, each of

which identifies a specific risk (respectively, loss of biological diversity, loss of cultural patrimony, and loss of language and "culture") and an endangered object ("biodiversity," "built heritage," and "language diversity"). Each of these domains applies its own specific techniques for identifying, collecting, conserving, and managing the endangered object and the factors that are perceived to threaten it (Rico 2014; Vidal and Dias 2015). Insofar as heritage is generally tasked with preserving its endangered object for the "future," and each of these domains is concerned with establishing its respective conservation targets as both objects of knowledge and fields of intervention, these different heritage domains can be said to be actively engaged in the work of assembling and caring for the future. But this work of assembling and caring for the future does not only take place within heritage domains as conventionally understood. Outside mainstream definitions of natural and cultural heritage, too, are domains that are similarly concerned with categorizing, curating, and conserving for the future. One might think here, for example, of nuclear-waste disposal. This field, not conventionally conceived to be a "heritage" domain, is, nonetheless, also concerned with specifying risks (nuclear radiation), identifying endangered objects (biological organisms), and devising methods for their conservation (appropriate methods of nuclear-waste disposal), and does so within a broader framework of working toward sustainable futures.

In speaking here of multiple worlds and multiple futures, I draw on what Martin Holbraad, Morten Axel Pedersen, and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (2014:1), in discussing Povinelli (2012), referred to as an anthropological sense of ontology, "the multiplicity of forms of existence enacted in concrete practices, where politics becomes the non-skeptical elicitation of this manifold of potential for how things could be." They go on to suggest that an ontological politics assumes the task of "generat[ing] alternative vantages from which established forms of thinking are put under relentless pressure by alterity itself, and perhaps changed" (Holbraad et al. 2014:1). If heritage can be understood as a series of material-discursive practices that are oriented toward building the future, an archaeological engagement with heritage in the present might also provide a lens through which to understand emergent, possible futures.

The Heritage Futures research project asks what it might mean to consider the futures that are arranged or assembled across a series of different fields of practice—in the decision-making processes involved in nuclear-waste disposal, in the processes of conserving endangered languages, in global seed banks, in the care and management of local parks, and in household practices of curating heirlooms—in comparative perspective. How could this comparative perspective, which considers not only formal heritage practices, but also a range of alternative forms of caring for the future, help in understanding pathways toward an archaeological engagement with emergent futures?

The project is guided by a series of questions. Where and how are pasts given a presence in contemporary societies? What are the networks that facilitate this process? What temporalities are produced by different forms of heritage, and how do these articulate with the production of particular futures? What are the implications of the different modes of engagement with the past, present, and future that are generated across these various domains? Further, it considers a number of applied research questions: Which models of assembling, valuing, and caring for the future, native to one cultural context or domain of practice, could be productively applied to others? How might this transportation of new models of heritage making from one domain to another point toward more sustainable practices of managing heritage? Could an emphasis on process, rather than permanence, help in the rethinking of the dominant paradigms of conservation and preservation?

We on the project team aim to work across a broad range of heritage domains—cultural, natural, biological, geological, even cosmological, including, e.g., museums, landscape parks, seed banks, "ruins" and archaeological heritage sites in both rural and urban settings, archives, lists of endangered heritage practices and languages relating to ethnic "minority" communities, conservation laboratories, indigenous heritage centers, nuclear-waste

disposal facilities, and frozen-zoo projects in different parts of the world—and to consider how the varied practices of value generation and models of caring for the future that are native to one domain might productively be redeployed within other contexts.

The project's focus on heritage practices as sociomaterial engagements directed toward assembling futures calls for forms of methodological experimentation. Although members of the research team come from a variety of different academic backgrounds (archaeology, geography, history of science/science studies, intermedia, social anthropology), our approach is broadly ethnographic, drawing particularly on material, visual, and sensory ethnographies, e.g., Pink (2009, 2012), with a focus on sociomaterial worlds, emergent practices, and the "happening of the social" (Lury and Wakeford 2012). We aim to contribute to the development of archaeological ethnography as a distinctive set of methodologies; see also Meskell (2005, 2012), Castañeda and Matthews (2008), Hamilakis and Anagnostopoulos (2009), Hamilakis (2011), and González-Ruibal (2014). To do so, we draw on a range of previous experimentation in more-or-less materially focused ethnographic methods across our research team, e.g., Holtorf (2004), Harrison (2002, 2004), DeSilvey (2012), Bond et al. (2012), Macdonald and Basu (2007), Pink and Morgan (2013), and Pink et al. (2014).

I use the term "archaeological ethnography" here to describe a series of materially focused ethnographic engagements with a distributed network of both humans and other-than humans (agentive objects, places, practices, animals) in the "now" (Harrison 2002, 2004, 2011), mindful of the ways in which both pasts and futures are folded together and encompassed within those different "nows" in which these engagements occur. I do not necessarily see this as the sort of work that might be most helpfully undertaken by a sole ethnographer-fieldworker; see, also, Rabinow (2011) and González-Ruibal (2014); in our case, our work is undertaken collaboratively, and I see the data that our research team collects as emerging from the nexus of our interactions both with one another and with the sociomaterial worlds that we study. In keeping with a tradition of anthropological fieldwork, which has its genealogy in the work of W. H. R. Rivers (Kuklick 2011), our bodies remain important instruments in our field practice, as do the mediations of our engagements with the field by way of the instruments—still and moving film cameras, sound recorders, tape measures, drawing tools, trowel, laptop, tablet, paper, and pen—we use to observe and, hence, intervene within it. Like González-Ruibal (2014), we acknowledge that the rhythm of fieldwork might be more punctuated and might involve more rapid and/or directed methods that resonate with traditions of directed observations of material practices in ethnoarchaeology, in which participants are asked to reenact particular quotidian processes, and these are recorded using film, audio, or other graphical methods in ways that allow both informants and researchers to reflect directly on them. I have previously used such methods in asking informants to reenact and assist with mapping remembered ways of moving through and engaging with recently abandoned archaeological landscapes in Australia, and in exploring the production of knapped-glass artifacts, e.g., Harrison (2004). The work of Sarah Pink and colleagues on the use of short-term multi-researcher ethnography within the field of health care provides another example of intensive, materially focused, "applied" ethnographic research with significant implications for the kind of work we are undertaking (Pink and Morgan 2013; Pink et al. 2014). Our project team remains open to the different qualities of the data that such engagements might produce. Importantly, we also aim to move beyond theoretical and conceptual perspectives that have been developed in other contexts, to explore the ways in which the various practices of heritage examined might themselves be generative of new and distinctive theoretical approaches to understanding the ways in which the future is cared for and curated across varied contexts. In order to facilitate such co-created knowledge, e.g., Fleming (2013a, 2013b), we are engaged in designing contexts and forums within which to exchange knowledge of heritage practices and processes across the different domains of practice in which we work, with the aim

of developing shared solutions to common problems. Here archaeological ethnography might be seen as its own sort of diplomatic (compare Latour [2004, 2013]), future-making practice in facilitating engagements that may cross ontological boundaries.

Conclusions

As I write, our project team is only just beginning work on this project, and, yet, it is clear that the implications of an archaeological engagement with heritage as a form of future making extends beyond the study of heritage to other emergent sociomaterial practices. I have argued that "historical" and "contemporary" archaeology have much to learn from one another. I suggest that the "future" of historical archaeology lies precisely in what has traditionally been an area of strength—a strong multisource approach—whilst calling for an expansion of the sources on which it draws to engage more thoroughly with ethnographic and ethnoarchaeological data, and with contemporary fields of practice in which futures are assembled, nurtured, and realized. Such an expanded field of contemporary and historical archaeology would be strongly attuned to the sociomaterial aspects of a range of different future-assembling practices. I have discussed the possibilities for the study of heritage here, but there are many other possible domains on which such an archaeology might be brought to bear. I argue that it is only in doing so that an expanded field of contemporary and historical archaeology might become an agent for change in relation to present and future issues of ecological, economic, political, and social concern.

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Rodney Harrison
UCL Institute of Archaeology
University College London
31–34 Gordon Square
London WC1H 0PY
United Kingdom