discussion article

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Surface assemblages. Towards an archaeology *in* and *of* the present

*Rodney Harrison**

Abstract

This paper explores a central paradox in the aims of the archaeology of the contemporary past as they have been articulated by its practitioners. On the one hand, its aim has been expressed as one of making the familiar 'unfamiliar', of distancing the observer from their own material world; a work of *alienation*. On the other hand, it has also aimed to make the past more accessible and egalitarian; to recover lost, subaltern voices and in this way to close the distance between past and present. I suggest that this paradox has stymied its development and promoted a culture of self-justification for a subfield which has already become well established within archaeology over the course of three decades. I argue that this paradox arises from archaeology's relationship with modernity and the past itself, as a result of its investment in the modernist trope of archaeology-as-excavation and the idea of a past which is buried and hidden. One way of overcoming this paradox would be to emphasize an alternative trope of archaeology-as-surface-survey and a process of assembling/reassembling, and indeed to shift away from the idea of an 'archaeology of the contemporary past' to speak instead of an archaeology 'in and of the present'. This would reorient archaeology so that it is seen primarily as a creative engagement with the present and only subsequently as a consideration of the intervention of traces of the past within it. It is only by doing this that archaeology will develop into a discipline which can successfully address itself to the present and future concerns of contemporary societies. Such a move not only has implications for archaeologies of the present and recent past, but concerns the very nature and practice of archaeology as a discipline in its broadest sense in the 21st century.

Keywords

archaeologies of the present; contemporary past; modernity; archaeological tropes; future

'Over your cities grass will grow': an introduction

This paper has been stimulated by questions which have arisen from the practice of the subfield of archaeology which has become known as the

*Rodney Harrison, The Open University. Email: rodney.harrison@gmail.com.

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'archaeology of the contemporary past', but addresses itself to issues which concern the very nature and practice of archaeology as a discipline in its broadest sense in the 21st century. I want to begin by reflecting on a sequence from the documentary film *Over your cities grass will grow* (2010, dir. Sophie Fiennes), which explores the work of the German painter and sculptor Anselm Kiefer at La Ribaute, his 35-acre studio complex at Barjac in southern France, and its subsequent abandonment. Kiefer's artistic practice is concerned with the past and its relationship with the present. He established his studio on the site of a disused silk factory in 1993, and consequently renovated it to build a series of workshops, spaces for the storage of archives and artistic materials, and sites for the display of his monumental sculptures and canvases, which often incorporate found industrial materials and other substances such as shellac, ash, clay and straw. One scene in the film shows Kiefer directing a large-scale mechanical excavation around a series of concrete pillars which have been poured into the earth to create subterranean catacombs – one of a string of excavations with which he created a network of underground tunnels and labyrinths below the surface of the studio and its grounds to house his paintings and installations. The final part of the film shows his creation of a series of hauntingly dilapidated concrete towers during his abandonment of the studio complex, which now stand as part of this deserted landscape of surface and subterranean ruins which he created over the course of his one-and-a-half-decade residency on the site (figure 1).

The scene in which Kiefer directs the excavation to create the catacombs as a 'modern ruin' caused me to reflect on the project of the archaeology of the contemporary past as it has tended to be articulated by its practitioners, its relationship to the project of modernity and what I have come to see as one of the central paradoxes of its practice (see also Hicks 2010; Voss 2010; Graves-Brown, forthcoming). On the one hand, the work of the archaeologist of the contemporary has been articulated as one of making the familiar 'unfamiliar', or one of distancing the observer from their own material world – the creation of modernity as ruin, and the proximal as distant; a work of *alienation*. On the other hand, archaeologists who work on the archaeology of the recent and contemporary past have also articulated their mission as being about closing the distance between past and present; about making the past more accessible and egalitarian; and about recovering lost, subaltern voices – the creation of the distant or unknowable as proximal or *known*. Archaeologists of the contemporary past, like Kiefer at La Ribaute, are engaged in the work of producing contemporary ruins to draw attention to the work of the present in the production of the past. This is because archaeology has been constructed as a discipline which concerns itself with the disused, the abandoned, and the 'past', and thus the application of archaeology to the present has the effect of instantly making it appear distant and redundant. Indeed, this active process of creating distance between the present and the past is precisely embodied in the oxymoronic phrase 'contemporary past'. I suggest that it is the existence of this paradox and the interplay of these two opposing aims which has led to a situation in which the archaeology of the contemporary is caught in a cycle of continual self-justification. I believe this is a function of archaeology's investment in modernist tropes, in particular excavation

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Figure 1 (Top) Sophie Fiennes on location at La Ribaute near Barjac, France, in 2008 during the making of the film *Over your cities grass will grow* showing part of the underground labyrinth built by Anselm Kiefer to house his paintings and installations. Photo by Remco Shaw, © Amoeba Film Ltd, Ribotte Paris 2010. (Bottom) Landscape of ruins – concrete towers built by Anselm Kiefer and left standing following his abandonment of the studio at La Ribaute. Still from the film *Over your cities grass will grow* © Amoeba Film Ltd, Ribotte Paris 2010.

and the depth metaphor for research and discovery. The simultaneous push–pull *of* and *with* the past is a symptom of archaeology's investment in the modernist trope of archaeology-as-excavation, and the modernist metaphor of excavation-as-investigation, alongside its construction as a discipline which is concerned with the abandoned, the disused and the dead. I suggest that it is only by moving away from the trope of archaeology-as-excavation and towards an alternative metaphor of archaeology-as-surface-survey and as a

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process of assembling/reassembling that we will be able to move forward in developing a viable archaeology in and of the present. This has important implications not only for the archaeology of the present, but for archaeology in all of its forms, as it would involve a fundamental reorientation of archaeology away from the past and towards the present and future which would see it forgo its search for origins to focus instead on the present and only subsequently on the circumstances in which the past intervenes within it; it would involve a complete disciplinary reshuffling away from an emphasis on particular archaeological periods to one in which the archaeology of the deep past is equally implicated within an archaeology of the present, and vice versa. Here I join other recent calls for a more present- and future-oriented archaeology (e.g. Dawdy 2009; Graves-Brown 2009) as a way both of making archaeology more relevant to contemporary society and of addressing some of the most negative aspects of its modernist, colonial origins. It is only by doing this that practitioners will be able to move away from the question of 'why' we should study the present, to focus on the question of 'how'. Such an approach would reorient the archaeology of the present so that it is no longer marginal but becomes fundamental to the discipline of archaeology as a whole in the 21st century, allowing it to take a central role in the development of innovative contemporary theory and social, economic and environmental policy. It is this broad intellectual project with which this article is concerned.

The archaeology of the contemporary past: a history of a subfield

A recent discussion on the Contemporary and Historical Archaeology in Theory (CHAT – see further discussion below) email discussion list about the position of the 'archaeology of the contemporary past' in relation to 'mainstream' archaeology suggested that although many archaeologists who work on the archaeology of the present and recent past still feel marginalized within archaeology as a whole, few could point to any published critique of the subfield. While many recounted the ongoing feeling that they needed to constantly justify their focus on the recent past, few could point to any specific published criticism of the subfield itself. In response to this discussion I decided to explore the ways in which the various key publications in the subfield have been received, and their formal reviews in archaeological journals, as a means of gauging the way in which the discipline has perceived the subfield as it has developed. In the first part of this paper, I will look briefly at the development of the subfield, drawing closely on the historical review first published in Harrison and Schofield (2010; see also Harrison and Schofield 2009). My intention is to demonstrate that, contrary to what many seem to express in their regular justifications of the subfield, there have been no significant intellectual grounds raised for the critique of an archaeology of the present and recent past, and no significant published critique of its pursuit as an archaeological subdiscipline. I will then go on to suggest that this asymmetry between the abundance of published self-justification and the absence of published critique derives from a fundamental paradox in its mission which is retarding the development of the subfield as an integral aspect of the discipline of archaeology itself.

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As Buchli (2007, 115) points out, archaeologists and anthropologists have long taken an interest in contemporary material culture, pointing in particular to Pitt-Rivers's studies of contemporary rifles while working as a military officer, and Kroeber's study of changes in contemporary women's dress lengths. Nonetheless, throughout most of the 20th century, archaeology concerned itself almost exclusively with the study of the deeper past (producing a definition of archaeology as something that should concern itself only with that which is ancient, or 'archaic'; see further discussion in Lucas 2004; 2005; 2006). The interest in ethnoarchaeology within the New Archaeology formed the background to what are generally acknowledged (Graves-Brown 2000a, 2; Buchli and Lucas 2001a, 3; Buchli 2007, 115) to be the first formal publications on the archaeology of the contemporary past, titled 'Modern material culture studies' (Rathje 1979) and *Modern material culture. The archaeology of us* (Gould and Schiffer 1981). 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 who employed traditional technologies in a contemporary setting, the student programmes developed at Tucson and Hawaii, and the projects outlined by Rathje in 'Modern material culture studies' and by contributors to *Modern material culture* were largely concerned with the description and analysis of contemporary material cultures in modern, industrialized societies.

We might imagine these works to have been received sceptically, but published reviews of *Modern material culture* were, if somewhat critical of individual chapters, overwhelmingly positive about the role of archaeology in modern material culture studies as a part of ethnoarchaeology, and about the importance of the study of the present to archaeology as a whole. For example, Schuyler (1982, 939) wrote in *American anthropologist*,

> *Modern Material Culture* ... is the first book to concern itself with the ethnoarchaeology of contemporary civilization ... it is a successful survey of what, based on initial offerings of scholars like Meltzer and Eighmy, might well expand into a significant area of scholarship.

In *American antiquity*, Stuart (1983, 646) went even further, to suggest that 'the study of modern material culture is an idea whose time has come; as a vision it is exciting, even though it has not yet matured into methodological clarity'. Neither of the two published reviews I was able to locate was critical of the 'idea' of applying archaeology to the study of contemporary societies, and both were enthusiastic about the prospects of the subfield.

At the same time, Rathje's provocative article 'Modern material culture studies' (which also appeared in revised form in *Modern material culture*) 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 behaviour or ideas, regardless of time or space' (Rathje 1979, 2), and as such, research on the recent past or present was as much a part of the

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archaeological mission as research into the deep past. He anticipated that 'the archaeology of today' (ibid., 4) could make contributions to the teaching and testing of archaeological principles and to the development of models that relate our own society to past societies. Further, it should be seen 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' (ibid., 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 by the establishment of further research projects. While research by Rathje (e.g. Rathje and Murphy 1992; 2001; Rathje 2001), Gould (e.g. 2007) and Schiffer (e.g. 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 re-emerged amongst British 'postprocessual' 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' (ibid., 172). In addition to particular postprocessual studies of contemporary material culture, another important aspect of postprocessualism 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*.

Again, it is worth reflecting on the central place that these three scholars and these two works subsequently established for themselves within mainstream anglophone archaeology in subsequent decades. Hodder's and Shanks and Tilley's explorations of contemporary material culture were seen as legitimate exercises in the development of broader social archaeological theory, and these three scholars have come to occupy a central place in contemporary archaeological scholarship. The idea of using archaeology to study contemporary material culture was not considered problematic, with the contemporary case studies appearing in both books alongside case studies

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in prehistory. Contemporary material culture was considered a legitimate topic for archaeological investigation, and while Johnson (1989), for example, criticized Shanks and Tilley's study of beer cans, his criticism rested on their treatment of agency as a concept, rather than on the contemporaneity of the case study itself.

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 towards a more specific focus on contemporary life, which 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 which 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 (2001a; 2001c; 2001d; 2001e) and their contributors pointed to the linked themes of production/consumption, remembering/forgetting, disappearance/disclosure, and presence/absence. A theme very prominent throughout *Archaeologies of the contemporary past* 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).

Once again, it is interesting to read the published reviews of this volume, as they are generally overwhelmingly positive about the idea of using archaeology to study contemporary societies. Reviews were published by Rothschild (2003) in *American anthropologist* and Claasen (2002) in *Journal of anthropological research* (interestingly, both authors had written chapters two decades before for *Modern material culture studies*). Claasen herself notes that the book is, for her (as someone who attended classes with Schiffer and Rathje) full of 'déjà vu experiences', but 'those of you who have come to archaeology since 1985 will find the admonishments and foci radical' (Claasen 2002, 554). Rothschild connects the editors' claim that archaeology can be brought to bear on issues of the present with the work of other established scholars such as Henry Glassie, Daniel Miller and Michael Schiffer, and cites

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the establishment of the *Journal of material culture* as another important step in the same direction. The only sceptical review of the volume I was able to locate came from outside the discipline of archaeology, in the *Journal of design history*, which notes that

> archaeology's returns diminish as one comes closer to the present and less and less new knowledge is uncovered … [although] the challenges of mediating between the recent past and contemporary society's need to understand are important, and there is no doubt that archaeologists can contribute (Wakelin 2002, 61–62).

Even more enthusiasm was shown for the overall project of an archaeology of the 20th century in reviews of Buchli's book *The archaeology of socialism* (2000), published at around the same time, which was deemed important enough to warrant a 20-page review feature in *Cambridge archaeological journal* with comments by Leone, Shanks, Olivier, Thomas, McGuire and Rathje and an overview and response from the author (Buchli 2002). While *Matter, materiality and modern culture* had an agenda which extended beyond archaeology to encompass cross-disciplinary material culture studies more generally, it also garnered reasonably positive reviews in the archaeological literature. In *Cambridge archaeological journal*, Johnson (2001, 135) noted,

> I came away excited and stimulated about the possibilities for more theoretically informed studies of modern material culture that explored themes of matter and materiality in ways that told us about contexts and topics in both modern present and historic and prehistoric past.

Whether such published reviews are indeed an adequate measure of how the discipline feels towards the subfield, which many practitioners still feel is treated unequally by other archaeologists and subjected to informal prejudice through its marginal placement at conferences and its absence from disciplinary self-representations more broadly, my point in this section is to note that no significant intellectual grounds have been raised on which to base a critique of the idea of applying archaeology to the study of the present or recent past. Despite some sense of unease both within the subfield itself and within archaeology more broadly, reviewers accept the fundamental premise that archaeology can contribute something to the study of the contemporary world. Most of the scholars involved in developing the subfield have gone on to assume important, if not central, places within archaeology, particularly in the development of archaeological theory. The idea that the archaeology of the present and recent past can and should form a conventional part of our archaeological practice which can help us understand not only the deep past, but also the recent past and the present in its own right, has remained unchallenged within western European and Anglo-American archaeological traditions for well over three decades.

The archaeology of the recent and contemporary past has seen a relative explosion over the past decade. Significant edited collections which deal

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specifically with the subfield have been published by McAtackney, Palus and Piccini (2007), Holtorf and Piccini (2009), Harrison and Schofield (2009; 2010), Schofield (2010) and Fortenberry and Myers (2010); along with noteworthy articles in a range of journals including *Current anthropology*, the *Journal of material culture*, *World archaeology* and *Archaeologies*; and even whole monographs dealing with significant contemporary archaeological projects (e.g. Andeassen, Bjerck and Olsen 2010). 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 rise of a field of forensic archaeology and anthropology in the US, the UK, Europe, Australia and Latin America that has seen archaeology develop as a way of documenting mass graves, war crimes, disappearances and state-sponsored repression (see extended review of this field in Crossland 2011). 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. Bradley *et al.* 2004; Schofield and Cocroft 2007; Penrose 2007).

And yet, while we have seen that the archaeology of the recent past and present has been accepted as a part of archaeology for three decades, and has undergone a veritable boom over the past decade, many archaeologists who work in this subfield have felt a need to continually defend the present or recent past as a subject for archaeological analysis. Indeed, when we wrote *After modernity* (Harrison and Schofield 2010), we still felt the need to provide a long justification for the very existence of the subfield. This raises for me an important question – why is it that the archaeology of the recent past and present has been seen to sit uncomfortably within the archaeological project as a whole by those very researchers who are engaged in it? In the next part of the paper I would like to argue that this is actually a symptom of the subfield's relationship with the past on the one hand and the project of modernity on the other.

Archaeology, alienation and the ruins of modernity

I have already noted that one oft-repeated aim of the archaeology of the present and recent past concerns making the familiar 'unfamiliar' (Graves-Brown 2000a; Hicks and Beaudry 2006; Hicks 2010; see discussion in Graves-Brown, forthcoming). This aim acknowledges archaeology as a discipline which creates distance between its object and the archaeologist-as-observer. Indeed, this role of archaeology as alienating is acknowledged by a number of contemporary artistic projects which play on archaeological metaphors to force the viewer to question their assumptions about themselves. At the 2010 London Frieze Art Fair, for example, the artist Simon Fuijiwara created a series of mock excavations titled *Frozen city* which purported to document a Roman settlement which had existed on the site during the period AD 43–190 which concerned itself exclusively with the production and trade

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Figure 2 Simon Fujiwara, *Frozen city*, Frieze Art Fair, London 2010. © Simon Fujiwara, courtesy of Simon Fujiwara and Galerie Neue Alte Brücke, Frankfurt am Main.

of art (figure 2). In the panels which accompanied a series of viewing platforms which looked across the subterranean archaeological excavations, he playfully satirized the excess and decadence of the contemporary art world using archaeology as a tool to simultaneously produce a sense of distance and 'otherness' by turning the archaeological lens on ourselves. A similar theme was evident in the artist Mark Dion's *Tate Thames dig* (Dion 1999; see discussion in Renfrew 2003, 84; and Harrison and Schofield 2010, 116). In a very real sense, this is what many archaeologists have sought to do through their work on the present – to draw attention to the everyday by making it 'uncanny' and to explore archaeology itself as a contemporary cultural phenomenon. One of the problems is that in doing so, archaeologies of the contemporary past have played out one of the fundamental modernist underpinnings of the discipline – the production of a past which is distant, alien and 'other' to ourselves (Graves-Brown, forthcoming). This has undermined any aim which the archaeology of the contemporary past might have of reducing the distance between past and present, and making the past more accessible, egalitarian or knowable.

Another aim of the archaeology of the contemporary past has been articulated most strongly by Alfredo González-Ruibal (2005; 2006a; 2007; 2008; González-Ruibal and Hernando 2010; see also Andreassen, Bjerck and Olsen 2010), and concerns its sustained attack on modernity. He argues that the role of the archaeology of the contemporary past should be to emphasize modernity as an 'unfinished project' (c.f. Latour 1993; Law 1994) by drawing attention to its fragile underpinnings. In González-Ruibal's work, ruin becomes a symbol of the failure of the modernist project, and drawing attention to ruin forces an engagement with the idea that modernity is not

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Figure 3 Robert Polidori, *Classroom, Pripyat, 2001*. © Robert Polidori, courtesy of Robert Polidori and Edywnn Houk Gallery, New York and Zurich. Published in Polidori (2006, cover and 41).

universal or inevitable. However, one of the problems with the way in which many archaeologists have tended to engage with modern ruins is that they have often been drawn into a mode of representation where modern ruins are aestheticized and equated with romantic notions of the ruin (e.g. Edensor 2005). The trope of 'modernity-in-ruin' places modernity itself in the past, making it appear both inevitable and uncomplicated, as yet another aspect of human social evolutionary history. One of the ways the archaeology of the contemporary past has implicated itself in this process is through its relationship with a particular mode of photography which presents ruin in an explicitly nostalgic manner, and in the process romanticizes it. This style of photography is perhaps exemplified by the work of photographer Robert Polidori (e.g. 1993; 2006; see figure 3), in which the elegance and romanticism of ruination is often emphasized, and where the modern ruin can be read as a reflection on the distance between the present and recent past and the speed of modern social and technological change (itself another form of modernist distancing – see Virilio 1986; Tomlinson 2007). This nostalgic mode of representation is part of a broader interest in the 'beauty' of modern urban ruination which also finds expression among contemporary 'UrbEx' or 'urban explorers' and other amateur and professional urban photographers (e.g. Romany 2010). Dawdy (2010) has noted the ways in which archaeologists have become deeply invested in the idea of a rupture between antiquity and modernity which such a mode of engagement tends to emphasize. This photographic trope of romantic, abandoned modern ruin

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appears in the work of many archaeologists of the contemporary past, not the least my own (see, for example, our image of the Star Wars film set in Harrison and Schofield 2010, 210; or the image of the abandoned theme park in ibid., 276). By representing modernity as past and in ruin, there is a danger that it is simultaneously domesticated and made to appear both inevitable and benign.

Thomas (2004; 2009; see also Olsen and Svestad 1994; Shanks, Platt and Rathje 2004) has argued that archaeology is intimately connected with modernity, indeed that archaeology could only have emerged as a distinct discipline under the particular social and intellectual conditions of modernity. He points not only to the connection between archaeology and the foundation stories of modern nation states, but to the reliance within archaeological thought on distinctively modern perceptions of the relationship between new knowledge and material things. He also notes the ways in which archaeology (and 'excavation' in particular) has continually been drawn upon by other modern disciplines as a metaphor for understanding the relationship between knowledge and its intellectual pursuit, through a string of linked images relating to concealment and discovery. He sees archaeology and modernity as connected by a series of preoccupations, including the ordering of time and the idea of a normative with which to contrast a non-normative (or 'other'), by ideas of human development, the relationship between historical change and human reason, and analytical and comparative perspectives (Thomas 2004, 224–26).

For Gavin Lucas, the central problem of modernity revolved around the search for a new authority on the past, and the creation of a field of prehistory which was defined as the study of material culture which had been removed from the realm of tradition and which sat outside it:

> The core dilemma of modernity was how to understand the world without turning to tradition – how to find a new authority which resided outside of tradition – effectively, outside of time. As part of this search for a new authority in studying the past, archaeology developed the analysis of material culture which subsequently produced in the nineteenth century the concept of a new past. Prehistory was this new past, unrelated to tradition and paradoxically a *very modern* past (Lucas 2004, 118, original emphasis).

Lucas suggests that the archaeology of the very recent past should be seen as an engagement with an unconstituted present. This forces us to pay attention to the way in which archaeology is a mode of cultural production in the present (Lucas 2004, 118). I would like to add something to Lucas's discussion by suggesting that by undertaking an archaeology of the present, we not only draw attention to archaeology as a mode of cultural production, but we also address ourselves directly to the project of modernity and explore the processes by which it might be argued to be *incomplete* (after Latour 1993; Law 1994; Scott 1998). This shifts us away from an idea of the archaeology of the present as an investigation into modernity 'in decline' (Harrison and Schofield 2010), and instead towards the archaeology of the present as an investigation into modernity as partial, fragile and unfinished. However, to

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do this we must engage with modernity in very particular ways – not as something which is romantically falling into ruin, and hence both inevitable and anaesthetized against its influence in the present, but rather the opposite, as an unrealized social and material project. Only in this way can we fulfil the potential for archaeology to undermine the modernist project by drawing attention to its failings and fragile underpinnings (see also González-Ruibal 2005; 2006a; 2007; 2008; Dawdy 2010). By focusing on modernity as an active and unfinished project, we raise the spectre of an archaeology which engages explicitly with the future (see also Dawdy 2009). In this sense, such an archaeology could realize ontologies of the future of the sort which have been advocated by contemporary cultural critics such as Frederic Jameson (2005) and others (e.g. Augé 2004; see also Graves-Brown 2009).

Such an approach seems, to me, to be beyond objection. In addition to undermining modernity itself, it would allow us to engage with various aspects of the modernist project in which archaeology has become deeply implicated, in particular its association with the foundation stories of modern nation states (Appadurai 2001; Schnapp, Shanks and Tiews 2004, 1), its mobilization of a unilinear discourse of human development (Thomas 2004, 225), its production of otherness (e.g. Thomas 2001) and its yearning for the reconstruction of completeness (Hamilakis 2004, 55). However, I agree with Thomas (2004, 224) that this is not about abandoning archaeology entirely, but a project of reworking archaeology so that it produces a more embodied, diverse, even egalitarian engagement with the everyday past, highlighting its imminence and our role in its production in the present. Our aim should be to foreground the archaeology of the present within our discipline to produce an archaeology of everyday presents and possible futures; an archaeology for and of 'now'. This does not require us to look outside archaeology for a new series of metaphors or tropes. Indeed, these are to be found in an emphasis on the trope of archaeology-as-surface-survey in preference to the trope of archaeology-as-excavation, and by drawing on the idea of archaeology as a process of assembling and reassembling. I outline these alternate metaphors for an archaeology of the present in more detail below.

The tropes of archaeology: excavation, surface survey and assemblage analysis

So far I have argued, following others (Thomas 2004; Shanks, Platt and Rathje 2004; Lucas 2004; 2006), that archaeology, as a modernist discipline par excellence, has consistently appealed to a series of linked metaphors – excavation, stratigraphy, typology, discovery and the search for origins. In doing so, it has sought to produce a present which is disengaged from the past. I want to suggest here that if we were to reimagine an archaeology of the present which eschews this obsession with stratigraphic depth for an emphasis on the present and its surfaces, we might help create a more socially useful and future-oriented archaeology. Drawing on Lucas's discussion of archaeology as an engagement with an unconstituted present (2004), I suggest that an archaeology in and of the present must be viewed first as a critical engagement with the present and only subsequently as a consideration of the spaces in which the past intervenes within it. As I explain below, this means a shift

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away from the idea of an 'archaeology of the contemporary past', towards an 'archaeology in and of the present'. To utilize a familiar archaeological metaphor, I suggest that we think about the present as a surface – a physical stratum that contains not only the present, but all its physical and imagined pasts combined (see also Olivier 2000; Witmore 2004; Gonzáles-Ruibal 2008, 262; Schnapp, Shanks and Tiews 2004, 10; Harrison and Schofield 2010, 283). In focusing our attention on the present and its surfaces, I suggest two alternative metaphors to excavation which derive directly from archaeology itself – surface survey and the assemblage – to help frame this model.

Archaeology as surface survey Lucas (2001; see also Trigger 1996; Lucas 2005) has shown how the invention of stratigraphic excavation as a field method was central to the development of evolutionary models in archaeology. Thomas (2004) writes that the depth/surface metaphor of archaeology was subsequently drawn upon to provide an allegory for the modernist pursuit of knowledge more generally, exploring Freud's work as an 'archaeology of the mind' by way of example (see also Thomas 2009). From this discussion he concludes,

> It could be argued that the disciplinary orientation towards depth, concealment, mystery and revelation is quite obstructive, for it enhances a belief that the past is entirely separate from the present: it is 'somewhere else' that needs to be accessed in a particular way. This essentialist view of the past could be compared with the post-Cartesian view of the mind, hidden away in the interior of the person. In the same way, it is unhelpful to imagine that the past is a substance that is secreted in dark places awaiting its recovery. The remains of the past are all around us, and we *inhabit* the past in important ways (Thomas 2004, 170; original emphasis).

While excavation is perhaps best known as a metaphor for archaeological investigation, surface survey has always played an important role in the discipline. Field walking, surface site distribution mapping and aerial reconnaissance have played an equally important role alongside excavation in the production of archaeological knowledge. If we begin to think of the surface as a metaphor for an unconstituted present, a space in which the past, present and future are combined and are still in the process of *becoming*, archaeological surface survey emerges as an allegory for a creative engagement with the present and the spaces in which the past intervenes within it. Like the traces of field ditches and embankments which archaeologists reconstruct from aerial surface survey, archaeology can only engage with the past where it is visible at the surface, refracted through the lens of the present. In this way, archaeology becomes a discipline which turns its attention to the surfaces of things, to the 'here' and 'now'. Archaeology is no longer a trope for alienation and estrangement, but becomes present- and future-oriented. It is no longer about an 'other', but instead about 'us'.

Archaeology as the study of surface assemblages and a process of assembling/reassembling In thinking of the trope of archaeology-as-surface-survey, it is

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also helpful to consider another metaphor of the *assemblage*, a conventional way of thinking about the material remains which are found together on the surface of an archaeological site. Indeed, I want to go further to explore the trope of archaeology as a process of the study of surface assemblages, and of assembling and reassembling. Doing this helps shift the emphasis away from the metaphor of stratigraphic depth to focus our attention on the present and its material remains, to 'flatten' our engagement with the surface, both in terms of stratigraphy and in terms of the asymmetries in our practice which emphasize the agency of humans over the agencies of other elements of the material world. In doing so, I refer to a notion of assemblage which is specifically archaeological but which simultaneously draws on a Deleuzean notion of the assemblage by way of Manuel DeLanda's 'assemblage theory' (2006; Bennett 2010; see further discussion in Harrison in prep. a) and which incorporates a sense of the symmetrical relationships between people and things (after Latour 1993; 2005; Murdoch 1997; Serres 2008; see Olsen 2003; 2010; Witmore 2006b; Webmoor 2007; Webmoor and Witmore 2008).

The first way of understanding the term 'assemblage' is a familiar archaeological one, in which the assemblage is defined as a group of artefacts found in association with each other in a single context. The formation of an archaeological assemblage is perceived to be the result of both natural and cultural processes. Michael Schiffer (1972; 1976) famously described the taphonomic processes by which a group of things are transformed into an archaeological assemblage by way of cultural ('C-transforms') and natural ('N-transforms') transformations. He referred to this as the movement from the systemic context (the original set of relationships between human behaviours and material things) to the archaeological context (the archaeological assemblage which is studied by the archaeologist). 'C-transforms' include a range of cultural processes, such as intentional or non-intentional discard, recycling or reuse, while 'N-transforms' include processes such as biological and chemical weathering and decay. In surface survey, the context is more complex than in stratified deposits, and in the case of a deflated surface, the surface assemblage might contain a mix of artefacts from a number of different time periods. Such archaeological sites might be understood as palimpsests, the assemblages at the surface of which are mixed and contain traces from a number of different occupations which are jumbled together. Implicit within an archaeological use of the term is the idea of the assemblage as a contemporary construction, i.e. the assemblage is created as part of an engagement of an archaeologist's contemporary classificatory gaze with a series of material remains from the past. It arises out of the relationship between past and present, and between a contemporary external observer and a set of activities carried out by particular people and particular 'things' in the past (e.g. Shanks 1992; Shanks and McGuire 1996; Pearson and Shanks 2001).

The second notion of the assemblage draws on Manuel DeLanda's (2006; see also Bennett 2010) articulation of Deleuze and Guattari's 'assemblage theory'. Deleuze and Guattari (e.g. 2004) used the term 'assemblage' to refer to a series of heterogeneous groupings in which the grouping itself could be distinguished as a whole from the sum of its parts. Importantly, such

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groupings are mixed, and social or cultural groupings are not distinguished from natural ones (or vice versa). Assemblage theory exists as an alternative to the metaphor of society as a living organism which dominated social theory throughout the 20th century. In perceiving social structures as assemblages as opposed to organisms, DeLanda (2006) indicates that the properties of such natural/cultural groupings are not the result of the functions of the components themselves, but instead exist as the product of the exercising of their capacities – they are not an inevitable outcome of the function of their components (i.e. they are not logically necessary), but a product of their particular histories and their relationships with other parts of the assemblage (i.e. they are contingently obligatory) (ibid., 11). Unlike organisms, assemblages are not governed by a central 'nervous system' or head. In this way, agency is distributed across and through the assemblage, as well as within it.

Far from simply being a semantic point, DeLanda (2006) shows how replacing the organismic metaphor with that of an assemblage has a series of implications for the way in which we study material and social relationships in the past and present. Thinking of assemblages as heterogeneous groupings of humans and non-humans has the effect of flattening the hierarchy of relationships which exists within post-Enlightenment modernist philosophies which separate matter and mind (e.g. Latour 1993; 2005; Viveiros de Castro 2004; Harvey 2005; Serres 2008). This progresses an earlier stated aim of moving away from an idea of the past and present as stratified, towards a notion of the past and present as a single surface. In the same way that the past is immanent within the present on this surface plane, all of the components of the assemblages at the surface are equally implicated in the production of the past and present. Bennett's (2010) discussion of assemblage theory also draws out another key issue. In thinking of the present as a series of heterogeneous socio-technical assemblages, unlike the organismic metaphor, we are able to identify both relationships of functional flow and more volatile relationships of friction and conflict (ibid., 23). In perceiving social groupings as organisms, we tend to emphasize the relationships which lead towards the functioning of the whole. The notion of an assemblage allows for relationships which are not necessarily directed towards the functioning of the whole, but which might indeed cause a network to stall or even cease functioning. In relation to this point it is important to emphasize the ways in which agency is distributed throughout the assemblage, which functions as a 'federation' of actants, in which all material and non-material things are participants (Bennett 2010). Indeed, Latour speaks of a 'parliament of things' (1993, 144–45) to describe such collectives (see further discussion in Olsen 2010).

I want to stress here that my emphasis on surfaces, surface assemblages and the process of assembling and reassembling as opposed to that of stratigraphic excavation and depth is not intended as a criticism of archaeological method, but of the way in which we represent what archaeology *is* and *does*. Clearly, excavation is an important archaeological field methodology, but even excavation can be rethought not as a process of retrieval from obscured depths, but indeed as a process of creating and exposing a series of archaeological surfaces. Similarly, the concept of assemblage plays an

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important role in excavation as well as surface collection, in the sorting and classification of finds, the filing of records, and the organization and reorganization of data and all of the other forms of information which are produced as a result of this process. I am influenced here by the insights produced by reflective attention to the 'craft' of archaeology (c.f. Shanks and McGuire 1996; Gero 1996; Hodder 2000; Hodder and Berggren 2003) and ethnographies of archaeological practice which explore archaeology and its relationship with other modern scientific fields and laboratory practices (e.g. Edgeworth 2003; 2006; Yarrow 2003), drawing on the work of science and technology studies more generally (e.g. Latour and Woolgar 1979; Latour 1987; 1993; Woolgar 1988). This distinction is fundamentally a metaphorical one, and is not intended to restrict the sorts of field or laboratory practices which we employ to pursue our aims. Nonetheless, the distinction has far-reaching implications for the way we conceptualize the role of archaeology and how we present it to the public.

Discussion: from 'the archaeology of the contemporary past' to the archaeology of the present

To think of archaeology as the study of surface assemblages emphasizes archaeology not only as a creative act in the present – a process of assembling and reassembling – but as a discipline which is concerned explicitly with the present itself. This present is not fixed or inevitable, but is still in the process of becoming; it is active and ripe with potential. An archaeology of the surface thus becomes a study of assemblages of humans and non-humans which are the product of a series of historical processes by which they are jumbled together in the present. To name these collectives 'assemblages' recognizes explicitly the archaeological act of classification, the application of an archaeological gaze to the surface. It also explicitly recognizes the heterogeneity of the collectives, the fact that they represent multiple, palimpsest pasts and have implicit within them multiple potential futures, and flattens not only our perception of stratigraphic depth, but also the common practice of giving priority to humans over non-humans in these collectives. To study surface assemblages in the present means to recognize the agency of humans, non-humans and the collectives themselves as charged with latent potential, as generative of new pasts and futures in the present.

I have already implied that part of what holds archaeology back from directing its attention to the present and the future is its relationship with the past, and its construction of the present as 'contemporary past'. While archaeology as an academic discipline has been defined as the study of things which have ceased to function (see also Lucas 2004), an archaeology in and of the present should not be limited to those things which have ceased, which have been abandoned, closed down or discarded, but should also be concerned with the study of contemporary objects and places which are still in operation, which are themselves still actively operating and form part of the assemblage on the surface of the world (Harrison and Schofield 2010). Thinking of the metaphor of assemblage allows us to conceptualize archaeology as a discipline concerned with surface collectives that include people and things, the living

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and the dead, the operative and defunct. It is not important whether these coincident persons and non-persons all belong to the same context or time, their coincidence is *itself* creative and generative of possible futures.

From the past to the future for the archaeology of the present

I have so far argued that the 'archaeology of the contemporary past' has been hindered by the pervasive modernist trope of archaeology-as-excavation, as alienating and distancing from the present. I have suggested that to move the issue forward we should emphasize instead the trope of archaeology-as-surface-survey and its concern with assemblages to refocus the discipline on the present and future. Doing so will allow us to move beyond questions of 'why' archaeology should refocus its attention on the present, to consider 'how' we might do this. Part of this process involves abandoning the 'contemporary past' itself as an unhelpful and potentially alienating notion. Indeed, I would argue that archaeologists have become implicated in a 'crisis of accumulation' (cf. Nitzan 1998) of the past (Harrison in prep. b; see also Augé 2004; Connerton 2009). Rather than managing the past, as the familiar phrases 'Cultural Heritage Management' or 'Cultural Resource Management' might imply, we have been involved in what seems like an unending production of the past which has led to the heterogeneous piling up of multiple, overlapping pasts in the present. Clearly, not all potential pasts are equally useful. This does not mean to say that those pasts are not still contained in the present. Indeed, as Birth (2006, 169) notes, 'the immanent past can influence the reproduction of knowledge and subjectivity, as much as present concerns can shape the past'. But we must be much more selective about the usefulness of these pasts we are implicated in creating.

Perhaps more importantly, such a move would have broader implications in forcing a reorientation of the discipline as a whole towards the application of archaeological techniques to the present and future, and a consideration of the past only where it intrudes in this present. Shannon Lee Dawdy has already argued powerfully in this journal that archaeology should turn its attention more explicitly to the future through an engagement with 'specific social and environmental problems of the present day' (2009, 140; see also Shanks and Witmore 2010). Work on the archaeology of contemporary homelessness (e.g. Zimmerman, Singleton and Welch 2010), to take one example, shows how archaeological methods might be applied to the present to help develop future social policy. The work of the Garbage Project (e.g. Rathje 2001; Rathje and Murphy 2001) is another example. But what we need more than anything is for the potential of the archaeology of the present to be truly demonstrated by way of a series of detailed, longitudinal studies which can really reveal its capability to engage not only with issues of present social concern, but also with all of the pasts which are implicated in that present. We would no longer think of archaeology as the pursuit of origins or as focused on particular time periods at the expense of others, but rather as a process of working from the present and its surface assemblages longitudinally across all of the pasts and potential futures which it contains. Archaeology would abandon its focus on particular periods to work more fluidly across time and space, with a focus on the production of an intimate present and future, rather than a distant,

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Figure 4 (Top) Anselm Kiefer painting at his studio La Ribaute near Barjac, France. (Bottom) Anselm Kiefer in front of painting. Stills from the film *Over your cities grass will grow* © Amoeba Film Ltd, Ribotte Paris 2010.

unknowable past. Rather than the ephemeral nature of some of the work that has been done on the recent past and present in archaeology, we need a commitment to the sort of comprehensive, long-term, comparative studies which could help this field of research take centre stage in a renewed vision of archaeology of and for the 21st century. In doing so, we would work towards the development of an archaeology *of* the present, *for* the future. It is our responsibility to advance research programmes which demonstrate this potential which has remained largely undeveloped over the last three decades of the subfield and to rework the tropes of archaeology to allow us to do this.

Conclusion: archaeologies *in* and *of* the present

In conclusion, I would like to return to the studio in Barjac, and an image of Kiefer working the surface of one of his paintings in the film (figure 4). I have explored at length a metaphor which is based in the visual representations and practical experience of archaeological fieldwork itself. In doing so I have been influenced by various scholars who have written on visual images in archaeology and ways of thinking in and through 'things' in archaeological practice (e.g. Cochrane and Russell 2007; Olsen 2010; Pearson and Shanks

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2001; Shanks 1992; Witmore 2004; 2006b). However, it strikes me that the artist's studio also provides a rich visual/material metaphor with which to 'frame' this discussion of archaeological tropes, with the potential to reinforce some of the issues which I have already discussed. As Kiefer works his brush across the painting, he engages actively in the creation of a surface by the simultaneous application and removal of material which is assembled and reassembled on a visual plane. Archaeology involves the same kind of creative engagement with the surfaces of things – the making and remaking of material palimpsests which mediate the production of the past, present and future. These are tactile planes, thick with the traces of assembling and reassembling materials in a number of different ways. The traces of these processes remain on the surface in the form of brush marks which reveal the artistic process. For archaeologists, these traces remain in the physical records we produce – from the artefacts themselves to site reports and other forms of knowledge which are made and remade as a result of this engagement with the surface. Like the act of painting, the archaeological act thus becomes an engagement with the present's surface: the mediation of the past as a creative engagement with the present and future.

The archaeology of the contemporary past has existed as a subfield of archaeology for well over three decades, and yet it has failed to realize its potential due to its investment in the modernist trope of archaeology-as-excavation and the idea of the archaeological process as distancing and alienating. I argue that by investing in an alternative trope of archaeology-as-surface-survey and the accompanying trope of the archaeological record as surface assemblage, we can reorient the discipline to address itself to the present and future. To do so requires us to abandon the idea of the 'contemporary past' to focus instead on an archaeology *of* and *in* the present; to shift archaeology away from the study of the ruin, the derelict and the abandoned to become a discipline which is concerned with both the 'living' and the 'dead'. Indeed, our failure to do this hitherto has led to an obsession with the novelty of the application of archaeology to the present itself, producing a field of research which has appeared at times both superficial and piecemeal in nature. I argue that what we need more than anything else is a series of detailed, long-term, longitudinal studies which demonstrate the actual contribution archaeology can make to understanding the present, rather than a series of justifications for it. By reorienting our work in this way, the archaeology of the present and future will take a central place within the discipline as a whole, and allow archaeology to engage with issues of contemporary and future social and ecological concern.

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Compelling futures and ever-present pasts. Realigning the archaeology of us

*Audrey Horning**

Rodney Harrison's recasting of contemporary archaeology as an archaeology in and of the present serves as a very welcome and overdue corrective to a subdiscipline which has been disparagingly described as 'well-meaning and superfluous' (Hummler 2010, 922) and, rather more crudely, as in danger of 'disappearing up its own arsehole' (Devlin 2006). I should confess at the outset that over the last decade I have gone from being excited and enthused about the florescence of interest in the contemporary and recent past to often feeling cynical and uninspired. I have sat through too many earnest conference papers that in effect do no more than demonstrate that yes, indeed, it is possible for archaeologists to analyse the contents of their own closets/offices/attics. As an anthropologically trained archaeologist, it never occurred to me that we were not supposed to study the present, so I do not need to be told that it is possible – for me, that is self-evident. Instead, I want to be challenged by the insights derived from archaeological studies of the present. I want there to be a point.

Thankfully, Rodney Harrison delivers a number of points in this discussion article, arguing for a promising new orientation for contemporary archaeology, one that moves beyond self-justification and contributes to a broader re-envisioning of archaeological practice. While there are some contradictory statements, there are also key critical observations, the most basic of which is the recognition that an 'archaeology of us' is hardly as new, innovative and radical as many of its proponents would appear to think. I very much hope that Harrison's clear presentation of the general support for and interest in contemporary archaeology over the past 30 years pushes the discipline beyond an obsession with justifying the value of looking at the present and

*Audrey Horning, Queen's University Belfast. Email: a.horning@qub.ac.uk.

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towards exploring what we can actually learn and what we can actually influence. At the very least, it ensures that no one has an excuse to pretend that another study of contemporary graffiti or a temporary campsite is particularly novel or radical because of its subject matter rather than its insights.

Perhaps what contemporary archaeology needs most is a reminder not to dismiss our own disciplinary past. I fear this situation may exist because those of us who are educators do not do as good a job as we should of ensuring that students gain a solid grounding in the historiography of archaeology. In our haste to self-present as up-to-date by referencing the latest texts, it is too easy to forget how nourishing more vintage works can still be. There is much still of value in formative publications. To expand on Harrison's examples, as early as 1974 a case was made by Reid, Rathje and Schiffer (1974, 125) that 'archaeologists can apply their method and theory to the study of material culture in modern industrial societies for the purpose of deriving explanatory statements of modern human behaviour'. The fact that we no longer seek universal explanatory statements is no excuse for ignoring these early discussions. I am reminded of W.W. Taylor's acerbic take on the New Archaeology – 'Old Wine in New Skins' – where he found nothing new in the New Archaeology he himself helped to create (Taylor 1972; see also Taylor 1969, 383). Similarly, I would suggest that in addition to having a better grounding in the origins of contemporary archaeology, practitioners might benefit from more thorough immersion in material culture study earlier than the 1990s. By way of example, nearly 30 years ago the art historian Jules Prown (1982) set out a framework for material culture studies that paid overt attention to emotion and embodiment – foci that most archaeologists attribute to the postprocessual critique (Harris and Sørensen 2010).

Before getting to the core of the discussion article – a new focus on assemblage and surface to produce a more meaningful archaeology – I would like to divert briefly towards a consideration of the interface between contemporary archaeology and the disciplines of British post-medieval archaeology and anthropologically based historical archaeology. I cannot help but think that the insecurity of British contemporary archaeology is in part related to lingering perceptions of post-medieval archaeology as a poor stepchild of prehistory, related to what Harrison sees as the 'modernist trope of archaeology-as-excavation' (p. 143). Post-medieval archaeology in the UK has traditionally focused upon finds research, standing-buildings analysis and mortuary studies rather than on extensive excavation. As such, the surface focus of contemporary archaeology represents a logical continuation in practice, but brings the burden of inherited insecurities. By contrast, I do not get the same sense of a constant need for self-justification coming from North American and Australasian historical archaeologists, perhaps because of their greater reliance on excavation but also, critically, because of the anthropological roots of historical archaeology. Mark Horton (2011) recently expressed his worry that the 'distinction between being an anthropologist and a contemporary archaeologist is somewhat fuzzy', but I do not see that as a problem. For me, anthropology is the key ingredient here – to again cite Reid, Rathje and Schiffer (1974, 125–26), 'the archaeologist as anthropologist possesses a developed body of concepts and techniques suited

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to the investigation of material culture and human behavior, regardless of traditionally conceived temporal and spatial boundaries'.

Turning from the perils of disciplinary ignorance and the oft-debated relationship between archaeology and anthropology, I am intrigued if not wholly convinced by the suggestion that we need to focus on the 'surface' as part of a 'sustained attack on modernity' (p. 150). It is impossible to disagree with the observation that archaeology is a product of modernity through the 'production of a past which is distant, alien and "other" to ourselves' (p. 150). This notion of 'perspective distance' (Rowe 1965, to cite another vintage work) lies at the core of all archaeological and anthropological inquiry. Few archaeologists would now subscribe wholeheartedly to a belief in scientific objectivity, instead acknowledging our own positionality and immersion in modernity and modern life as we endeavour to understand the reflexive relationship between material forms and lived experiences. The 'sustained attack on modernity' celebrated by the author is itself wholly dependent on another form of 'perspective distance': that somehow we as scholars are capable of standing back and recognizing the 'fragile underpinnings' (pp. 150, 153) of the very worlds we inhabit, akin to Neo swallowing the red pill in *The Matrix*. Far from modernity being 'past and in ruin' (p. 152), then, the notion that contemporary archaeologists can simultaneously understand, deconstruct and realign the future of the modern world suggests to me that reports of the death of progressive modernity, as it underpins our own 'fragile' discipline, are very much premature. Following on from that, I query the description of modernity as an 'unfinished project' (pp. 150, 153) not because I think the author is incorrect in the observation that modernity is not 'past', but because the very terminology implies directionality to some sort of plan yet to be completed.

Challenging linear temporalities and acknowledging the physical entanglements of human histories in our present, on the other hand, is a different issue. Here the metaphor of an assemblage employed by Harrison represents a particularly helpful way to destratify our understandings of being in time with past, present and future. The pasts that we construct as archaeologists always exist in the present, as do the many and varied pasts and memories constructed by others as we all negotiate the extant, physical traces of lives past in our todays. Such traces are by their very existence neither 'out of time' nor 'out of context', even if the convoluted character of their temporo-spatial relationships cannot be easily reduced to expression on a Harris matrix diagram.

So, then, 'why' should we do contemporary archaeology? On the one hand, Rodney Harrison argues that we need to 'move away from the question of "why" we should study the present, to focus on the question of "how"' (p. 144). Yet he contradicts this recommendation in his conclusion, making a strong argument not about the 'how', but about the 'why': to 'engage not only with issues of present social concern, but also with all of the pasts which are implicated in that present' (p. 158). Such a reorientation would force contemporary archaeologists to consider the utility of our studies. This is a far cry from contemporary projects such as the oft-cited Van project (Myers 2011), with its easily attained goal of sparking debate over the meticulous

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application of archaeological techniques to a contemporary object, or, as recently considered on the CHAT email discussion list (30 April–2 May 2011), an archaeology of the Royal Wedding that would seem to serve only to supply a thin veneer of academic legitimacy to those 'participant observers' who hung out the bunting or 'ironically' purchased a commemorative mug.

Here Harrison aligns himself with other scholars (citing Dawdy 2009; and Zimmerman, Singleton and Welch 2010; see also Voss 2010, 187) who have argued for a 'useful' archaeology, whatever the 'use' might be. While usable pasts are by their very nature unstable and dangerous pasts, it is here I find myself most sympathetic to this new formulation. My own research (Horning 2011) is bound up in the inextricable linkages of colonial pasts and presents, particularly as they express themselves in Northern Ireland. I have no choice but to engage with 'all of the pasts which are implicated in the present.' They are many, they are contradictory, and they are often ugly. Mere engagement becomes political. But any meaningful archaeology in and of the present will inherently and inevitably be political (Hall 2010, 7). To reimagine contemporary archaeology as a discipline that addresses the present and future by interrogating the presence of the past assigns a welcome seriousness of purpose through forcing its proponents to take a stand and to make a point – and, of course, to face up to the consequences.

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In praise of depth

*Alfredo González-Ruibal**

I am totally for the archaeology in and of the present that Rodney Harrison defends in his powerful text. In fact, I have defended a similar idea elsewhere, although in a rather less eloquent and straightforward way. I have suggested that we could transform ethnoarchaeology, an archaeological subdiscipline that already deals with the present, into a true 'archaeology of the present … that … deals with people that are alive and things that are in full use, and which accepts that all presents are entangled with a diversity of pasts in a percolating time' (González-Ruibal 2006a, 112). With the author, I think that archaeological engagements should not be reduced to the past – understood as something remote and finished: archaeology can be a very creative way of dealing with the present, and even of transforming it. I also coincide with Harrison in considering that the archaeology of the contemporary past is less harassed than we tend to think and that we should be less anxious in defending ourselves against possible attackers and focusing more on creating exciting work.

*Alfredo González-Ruibal, Spanish National Research Council (CSIC), Spain. Email: alfredo.gonzalez-ruibal@iegps.csic.es.

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Having said that, I would enter a double caveat: first, although the subdiscipline is becoming more and more accepted and even well regarded by our colleagues, this does not necessarily mean that it is solidly established from an academic point of view. It would be worth studying how many people are actually accessing teaching or research positions in academia with a contemporary-archaeology profile and how easy it is to obtain funding for archaeological projects dealing with the 20th and 21st centuries – in comparison with the archaeology of earlier periods.

Second, the situation Rodney Harrison depicts fits well the Anglo-Saxon world (and especially the UK), but I wonder how true it is in other countries and research traditions. In Spain, for instance, post-medieval archaeology in general is yet to be accepted. The immense majority of university and research positions are occupied by prehistoric and classical archaeologists and there are virtually no journals (except very local ones) where post-medieval (not to say contemporary) archaeological research can find a place without creating a scandal. I have the impression that the situation is not very different throughout most of continental Europe: the archaeology of the contemporary past does not seem to be well accepted in places like Germany or France, at least in academia. Heritage managers and contract archaeologists seem to be more progressive-thinking in these countries. Thus in a recent volume on the archaeology of modern and contemporary France, the majority of case studies for the more recent past come from rescue excavations conducted by the INRAP, which sponsors the publication (Bellan and Journout 2011). My impression, then, is that academic archaeologists have to keep making the point. Rodney Harrison, however, shows us the way to follow: less self-exculpatory, more assertive and thoughtful.

I would like to focus the rest of my comment on another issue: the surface/depth dichotomy. I think that Harrison's stance and mine are ultimately very close, but we emphasize different tropes, which are coherent with the kind of research that each of us develops. Tropes are not innocent, as the author clearly shows: they shape the way we think and act. For this same reason, I would not reject the notion of depth too hastily. We could start by saying that the surface/depth dichotomy, as any other modernist dichotomy, is flawed and that it is better to bypass it and talk in other terms: in topological terms, for instance (Witmore 2007). The author, in fact, believes that already, as is clear when he argues that the present is a 'physical stratum that contains not only the present, but all its physical and imagined pasts combined' (p. 154). Surfaces are deep, then, and multilayered: Harrison also admits that surfaces are 'thick' ('tactile planes, thick with the traces of assembling and reassembling materials' – p. 160). My intention here is not just to bypass the surface/depth dichotomy, but to argue for the relevance of the second concept.

I think depth is still fundamental to what we do, as archaeologists and as social scientists. In the first place, a call for working on surfaces and assemblages does not seem to me to be very urgent, at least in Anglo-Saxon archaeology, where most practitioners are engaged in surveys, field walking and creative activities of one kind or another; excavation – at least in the conventional way – is not the primary means of working with the contemporary past or the present (cf. McAtackney, Palus and Piccini

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2007; Holtorf and Piccini 2009; Harrison and Schofield 2010) and the tropes of stratigraphy, disclosure and depth do not seem to be the most relevant. This is not to say that Harrison's article is unnecessary: just the opposite. It provides a badly needed serious theoretical grounding to many archaeological engagements with the present and the recent past. However, too much emphasis on surfaces should not detract from literally exploring depth through archaeological excavation. Harrison is careful not to dismiss it, although he prefers to see excavation as a method for exposing surfaces rather than for exploring depths. I would reverse the trope and argue that even when we do survey, we are metaphorically excavating the present. Excavation is for me still the primary trope of archaeology (on the epistemological relevance of excavation see Edgworth 2011). It is the only thing that archaeologists alone can do – at least *real* excavations, not mock ones. Artists do surface collecting (Mark Dion); cultural geographers and urban explorers investigate derelict places (Edensor 2005; DeSilvey 2006); photographers document material traces, both massive and subtle (Vergara, Burtynsky, Sternfeld, Bernd and Hilla Becher). They all work on the surface. Only we archaeologists (and those who have learned from us, such as forensic scientists) have developed a whole methodology to see what is beneath the surface. Furthermore, this methodology is powerful not only epistemologically, but also politically: we can find horrible things digging, such as mass graves and torture centres (Funari, Zarankin and Salerno 2009). Excavation is something so unique and revelatory that it has managed to fascinate philosophers for over a century and frighten violators of human rights all over the world.

Harrison's misgivings with the trope of depth in archaeology, however, have less to do with physical depth and the method to explore it (stratigraphic excavation), than with the modernist concept of depth, which, according to him, distances us from the past. In that, he follows Julian Thomas, who criticizes the concept as an allegory for the modernist pursuit of knowledge. I have to say that I do not feel the need to throw away all modernist concepts. Some of them are obviously problematic and even harmful (progress, for one). Others, instead, can be crucial in epistemological and political terms and should be, in my opinion, preserved, although not in their dichotomic form. I think that it is worth keeping the idea of depth as a metaphor of the quest for knowledge, but not merely as opposed to surface. With Lévi-Strauss, a great modernist himself, I believe that 'the true reality is never the most manifest one; and that the nature of truth is already shown in its care to hide itself' (Lévi-Strauss 1955, 62). This is the motto, in fact, that has guided, consciously or unconsciously, most prominent thinkers of the 20th century, some of them as post-structuralist as Michel Foucault and Bruno Latour.

Besides, I am not sure that working on the familiar (as opposed to the unfamiliar) necessarily allows for a more egalitarian and accessible archaeology of the present. I think that alienation and depth should not be confused with distancing. According to Harrison, by emphasizing otherness and the uncanny, people might end up feeling the recent past remote and inaccessible. This might be so in some cases, but not always. On the contrary, defamiliarization can force us to feel the past closer than ever. Consider the archaeological practices developed in Germany in the 1970s and early 1980s, in which former Nazi spaces were discovered and conspicuously marked out

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Figure 1 On the surface, from the depths: the moment of discovery of a helmet during the excavation of a trench from the Spanish Civil War (1936–39).

in the familiar urban landscape by civic groups – and, in some cases, excavated (Bernbeck and Pollock 2007). This was conducted in a very democratic way by grass-roots associations and was lived as a revelation by many Germans who found that their everyday environment was full of abject traces (Koshar 2001). By revealing an uncanny recent past in the neighbourhood, rather than separating it from people the new history movement was bringing it close to them (perhaps unbearably close!): it can be argued that the abolition of distance was the main aim of the practices carried by the movement, which 'rejected historiographical distance and placed fascism firmly within West German society' (ibid., 241) – through the material traces of the past in the present. This abolition of the past as purely past is clearly observed in the Topography of Terror (Bernbeck and Pollock 2007). The promoters of this initiative wanted their excavation of the Gestapo headquarters in the centre of Berlin to be an 'open wound' (Koshar 2001, 228), a reminder that the past was not (and could not be) closed and separated from the present. There is nothing more present- and future-oriented than an open wound. My experience working with the remains of the Spanish Civil War and dictatorship is quite similar to the German one. Far from creating distance, the revelation of uncanny traces of the recent past produces just the opposite: great fascination (figure 1). Dealing with recent traumatic issues implies working in the threshold between alienation and sameness: it is precisely the ambiguity of this liminal space that produces a sense of the uncanny.

Preserving the idea of depth does not mean understanding it as opposed to surface. As I have already said, surfaces are deep, and, likewise, depth is on the surface. That is something that Julian Thomas does not seem to be grasping in the paragraph that Harrison quotes. According to Thomas (2004, 170), the orientation towards depth, concealment and mystery buttresses the belief that

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the past is separated from the present, whereas the truth is that the remains of the past are all around us: the past is not a substance secreted in dark places. What Thomas and Harrison seem to be forgetting in their critique is that, for Freud, the past is around us *and* in dark places at the same time (like the Nazi remains in Berlin): the past is in the present, but we still have to dig it to disclose it. If Freud (2006, 544) is able to 'unearth the missing fragments of an infantile experience', it is because their traces exist (and are at work) in the present, as fragments of memory, denials, lapses and unintentional gestures (ibid., 111): signs that have been left behind in historical processes (ibid., 79). 'Even things that seem to have been totally forgotten *are present* somehow and somewhere', says Freud (ibid., 80, my emphasis). Laurent Olivier (2008, 87) follows this path when he writes that 'it is possible to do archaeology more deeply [*plus profondément*] than usual by simply observing things around oneself'. Surface and depth, present and past, are on the same ontological level. If for Freud the past was something separate, dead and finished, his entire project would have no reason of existence at all. What the Freudian perspective implies is a complete rearrangement of temporality, which is at odds with modernist historicist time, but in keeping with archaeological time (cf. Olivier 2008). Besides, Freud did not consider that he was just revealing the past exactly as it was. There was a creative element in excavating the mind: it is not by chance that he talks about 'constructions' in psychoanalysis (Freud 2006, 77–89). As surface and depth should not be opposed, neither should truth and rhetoric. Naturally, not all archaeology of the present has to follow the Freudian model. The tropes of depth, concealment and repression undoubtedly work best for those archaeologies interested in deconstructing and exposing power and the effects of power, including trauma. But it is certainly not my intention to make an archaeology of the darkest aspects of modernity the only possible archaeology of the recent past and of the present: as Harrison and others have demonstrated (see Pearson and Shanks 2001; Holtorf and Piccini 2009; Harrison and Schofield 2010), this is only one among the many possible archaeological engagements with the materiality of the present. Surface assemblages, as Harrison proves, offer all sorts of exciting possibilities – provided that we do not forget their depth.

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Archaeology. A career in ruins

*Paul Graves-Brown**

I find myself largely in sympathy with what Rodney Harrison is trying to do. In applying an archaeological sensibility to the contemporary world, it becomes increasingly clear that the habitual tropes of archaeological practice either do not work, or need to be rethought and reconfigured. Equally, I think

*Paul Graves-Brown. Email: slightly.muddy@virgin.net.

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that this reassessment of archaeological theory and methodology can have a wider epistemological value for the discipline in general. The tropes of ruin and excavation are particularly salient in this context, in that they do not entirely work in the understanding of the contemporary. However, there are points at which I diverge from Harrison, particularly with respect to what we mean by modernity, and especially in terms of the limitations of his concern with surfaces.

For my own part, having begun with an interest in modern material culture, I did not think in terms of excavating the present. Used to the kinds of artefact studies familiar to prehistorians, it did not occur to me to attack the modern world with a shovel! However, it has been all too easy for us to accept that a concern with modern ruins and the excavation of modern 'sites' were the obvious ways to *do* the archaeology of the contemporary. Indeed, one might argue that the site and the digging thereof are what we have needed, subconsciously, to legitimate our practice. In justification, we might point out that the various 'posts' that we inhabit – postmodern, postindustrial and postcolonial – tend to emphasize the sense in which we are living in the aftermath of history.

Conversely, particularly through cultural resource management, archaeologists have come to recognize that change is an inevitable part of the archaeological 'record', in terms of both the subtractive effects of decay and the additive production of a living society (cf. Bradley *et al.* 2004). Whilst the recent and the contemporary have often been viewed as a 'pollutant' of a static, traditional heritage, we are trying to come to terms with the fact that these pollutants are of interest in their own right. The problem is that whilst the past can generally be conceived of as static and thence amenable to study through excavation, the contemporary presents us with a moving target. You cannot really excavate something that is still happening.

Archaeology is itself the product of modernity (Thomas 2004), but I think there is some confusion in the elision of modernity and modern*ism*. If, for the sake of argument, we take modernity as the product of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, of the emergence of the individual from the collectivity of medieval feudalism, then it is true that 'moderns' define themselves in terms of their difference from the past. Yet until the very end of the 19th century, if not to this day, Western societies have measured themselves against the past and its traditions; we need look no further than the innumerable neoclassical buildings that populate our cities. For the most part, archaeology has participated in this process of defining the present in relation to the past, albeit often in terms of contrast.

Modernism takes a quite different stance in its total rejection of the past. It is not concerned with realistic re-presentation, so much as with reality itself (Orvill 1989). Whilst this episteme was firmly established by architects, artists and writers in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, it might equally be argued that its origins lie in the empiricism of Roger Bacon. Modernism makes its judgements not on what tradition tells us about things, but on what we can empirically find out about them, and herein lies its radical challenge to the authority of the past. Whilst archaeology has generally embraced this empiricist logic in its practices, dare I call it science (?), it has continued to do

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so in the context of a value system based on tradition. One might almost say that the methods of modernism have been used to legitimate the value of a traditional heritage. Marinetti's (2005, 8) contempt for 'Homeric cheeses and legendary wool-winders' might seem entirely antithetical to the programme of archaeology – he did, after all, want to burn down all the museums – but the study of the contemporary forces us to confront modernism, to embrace the aesthetic of manufactured and mass-produced objects as against the handmade products of craftsmen, and to recognize change and ephemerality as a normal part of lived experience. According to Marshall Berman (1982, 345–46),

> To be modern is to experience personal and social life as a maelstrom, to find one's world and oneself in perpetual disintegration and renewal . . . To be a modernist is to make oneself somehow at home in the maelstrom, to make its rhythms one's own.

I do not think it is too much of an exaggeration to suggest that archaeology is often adopted as a refuge from this maelstrom.

In a recent radio news broadcast, it was reported that excavations around Shakespeare's house in Stratford-upon-Avon were to go deeper, and that hence more was likely to come to light about the life of the Bard. Clearly there is no place for depth in a world of 'perpetual disintegration and renewal'. The study of the contemporary is, quite often, about what is happening rather than what has been left behind and there is, as Harrison points out, a certain absurdity in the equation of depth with profundity. However, I am not, consequentially, content to remain on the surface. According to Heidegger (1977, 91),

> If we attempt such a penetration by breaking open the rock, it still does not display in its fragments anything that has been disclosed. The stone has instantly withdrawn again into the same dull pressure and bulk of its fragments . . . Earth thus shatters every attempt to penetrate into it.

Yet it seems to me that in the act of breaking the rock, we learn something about its inner nature. Ingold argues that the 'surface of materiality, in short, is an illusion. We cannot touch it because it is not there. Like all other creatures, human beings do not exist on the "other side" of materiality but swim in an ocean of materials' (2007b, 7).

I am not sure that we can maintain that surfaces are entirely illusory, but I agree with Ingold that we experientially inhabit the world, rather that objectively contemplating its surface. Indeed, this is particularly true of studying the contemporary, the 'archaeology of us' in which we inhabit the very society we are studying. Granted that we may want to say, metaphorically, that however far we imagine we are digging into the past, what remains is still on the surface of the present, there is a distinction to be made between depth as distance and that which is inside and hence not ostensibly perceptible.

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In trying to make the 'familiar unfamiliar' I mean something quite opposite to the metaphor of depth and distance (Graves-Brown, forthcoming). It is rather a strategy aimed at a changed perspective in which, as Cornu (1990) suggests, we can, paradoxically, learn to see the invisible. In this sense the surface *is* familiarity – that which occludes a clear view precisely because it is so obvious. Here, however, there is a lesson for archaeologists in general and probably for many other disciplines as well: to follow Ingold's argument, in action we see through the surface of things, but the problem is that actions do not always translate readily into words (Gatewood 1985). One might almost argue that modernism's pursuit of 'reality' implies the acceptance of tacit knowledge (*sensu* Polanyi 2009), as against an Enlightenment modernity which has sought to formalize and codify 'realism'.

Taking up the concept of the assemblage, I find myself back with what I learned as a prehistorian. In one sense a lithic assemblage is the kind of heterogeneous surface scatter that Harrison envisages. It often involves a complex set of non-hierarchical relationships. But as well as assembly/reassembly, which is what the archaeologist does, there has also been an original disassembly, a pursuit of what is inside, as described by Heidegger. A lithic core can be reassembled in order to understand the process of knapping, in effect a form of reverse engineering. In order to do this one needs a tacit knowledge of how to knap, an implicit know-how that derives from action. Whatever the assemblage concerned, we still 'swim' in the same 'ocean of materials' as the people who made it, and to that extent can share what they found in those materials. The advantage for contemporary archaeology is that the present has not yet been disassembled; it is not a ruin. In order to understand the AK-47, I could and did go and take one apart, learning what I could from my own tacit knowledge of machines and engineering (Graves-Brown 2007). Existing in the here and now, such objects/assemblages do not resemble the excavation, in that they are their own context. Exploring the inside of material culture is not about depth and distance, but rather about greater proximity, an experiential symmetry between the archaeologist and the authors of the artefacts she/he studies.

The job of archaeologists is to try to get inside past societies, but in a sense they are always frustrated by depth. As Ingold (2007b, 9–10; see also Ingold 2010) points out, studies of material culture usually begin with consumption, 'Experienced as degradation, corrosion or wear and tear', rather than with the materials themselves and their use in production. Seen purely as surfaces and assemblages, we have no insight into the inside of things, of what the experiential 'qualities' of materials meant to the people that used them to make things. For archaeologists concerned with the past, such questions must remain partially obscure, and they have no choice but to excavate static ruins. But for archaeologists of the contemporary we have the opportunity to study a world in production, to see material culture before it is degraded and corroded and turned into ruins. Here I can only agree with Rodney Harrison that what is needed (at least as far as I am concerned) is an 'archaeology in and of the present' (p. 141). My only proviso is that we should exploit the experiential opportunities of that present, rather than just contemplate its surfaces.

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Art and archaeology. A modern allegory

*Ian Alden Russell**

Following the recent discussion of excavation in *Archaeological dialogues* (18(1)), Rodney Harrison's questioning of the viability of excavation and depth as viable tropes for conceptualizing and communicating archaeology's epistemological processes is both timely and pertinent. Beginning where Harrison finished, his use of Anselm Kiefer's artistic work as a 'framing' device, brings me to some intriguing critical trajectories for understanding archaeology's modern condition and the possibilities for it at this moment through deeper engagements with contemporary art, and visual and material gesture and culture.

Many have argued that art and archaeology share a disciplinary history and a sensibility, rooted in predisciplinary practices of antiquarianism (Cochrane and Russell 2007; Ingold 2011; 2007a; Renfrew 2003; Renfrew, Gosden and DeMarrais 2004; Russell, forthcoming; 2008; 2006; Shanks 1991; Smiles and Moser 2005; Wickstead 2008). The more I reflect on this assertion, though, the more I think that there is a misconception in this proposition that points to a fundamental problem both in the way archaeology is encountering art and in how archaeology (as well as, perhaps, other academic subjects) conducts itself as a discipline. It is certainly true that archaeology is as much a mode of material and visual expression as contemporary art is, and it is indeed critical for archaeologists to be reflexively aware of their roles as cultural producers in contemporary society. There is, however, a critical difference between archaeology and art that is rarely discussed within the emerging discourse of art–archaeology partnerships. In art, the artists or 'makers' are neither the authorizers of the critical discourse which interprets their work nor the authors of the discipline's history. In archaeology (and indeed other academic subjects as well), these roles are not clearly established. The producers of archaeology are also themselves the authors of the critical discourse which interprets the material and visual expression of archaeological practice and the authors of their own history. Perhaps some might argue that this is a more holistic approach to cultural production, and this may be the case if we approach archaeology as a separate and distinct discipline and practice. In the creation of 'art–archaeology' analogies and the searching for models of working and expression within artistic practice, I would argue that this leads, however, to either a decontextualization of artistic practice (i.e. abstracted from its own critical discourse) or a reification of the archaeologist as a universal arbiter in the discourses of materiality and time or both.

I commend Harrison in his identification and filling of an urgent absence of critical context for the developing practice of archaeology

*Ian Alden Russell, John Nicholas Brown Center for Public Art and Cultural Heritage, Brown University, Providence, RI, USA. Email: ian_russell@brown.edu.

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of the contemporary past, and I also commend him for his interpretive engagement with artists' work in the process of his intellectual inspiration. I do not wish to invalidate these efforts. Rather I hope to continue in their spirit to provide critical context to his engagement with artists' work to demonstrate how deeper critical engagements with artists as cultural producers within wider critical discourses can enhance such interdisciplinary conversations. Furthermore, while Harrison intended to propose a new trope for 'archaeology-as-surface-survey and assemblage', I propose that his paper is also an example of an emerging discursive trope of 'archaeology as art'.

It is not surprising to read archaeologists responding to and being inspired by Anselm Kiefer's studio complex at Barjac in southern France, especially given the currency of Sophie Fiennes's documentary of the site in *Over your cities grass will grow* (2010). Its scale is sensational and evokes a sense of the Romantic sublime as a way of engendering a humility within our contemporary sociocultural moment. Though Kiefer's project may evoke a certain humbling in its visitors, it also requires an artistic hubris not dissimilar to that of John Ruskin and his aesthetics of ruins. In this way, it does speak very directly to the sublime qualities of modern archaeology as a means of placing contemporary society at a humble position within the grander cycles and processes of time. It also reveals perhaps an attraction within archaeology to the independent agency of the artist as the maker of worlds.

Harrison admits that his use of Kiefer's Barjac studio complex is primarily a narrative device and a point of inspiration. So while this leads to a cursory engagement with Kiefer's artistic career and work, it creates an opportunity for an interesting critical conversation. Beyond Barjac, Kiefer's work and artistic process are very appropriate for a critique of archaeological epistemologies. Working unconventionally with the traces and fragments of industrial and craft processes (straw, ash, clay, lead, shellac and so on), Kiefer is perhaps best known for richly worked painted surfaces which operate as meditative mediations of memory through materials.

His paintings are often interpreted as unfinished; that is, they do not represent permanent or fixed ideas or material realities. Rather, Kiefer imbeds time as a medium in his works. The material fragility of the substances he incorporates into his paintings shifts and changes almost imperceptibly over the *longue durée*, yielding a tense durationality and awareness of not only the fragility of the contemporary moment but also its inevitable transformation over time. His work grapples to manifest an ephemerality of the material object, the monumental and the artistic gesture that transcends the duration of a human life.

In his paintings, Kiefer locates himself as a processer of history through the working and reworking of materials and symbols. Plain or everyday materials are transformed into symbols of historic moments, places and meanings through a literal imbedding within a 'new' ground of thick painterly surface. This conscious reworking of historic memory and symbols of place through a construction of internal logic and meaning links Kiefer's work to what some have termed a style of 'new symbolism', with Kiefer said to be its master.

Though working with materials, Kiefer avoids an objective deployment of things and rather approaches history as subject and historical memory as

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medium, implicating the viewer in the resolution of the material language of his paintings. His aesthetic, in its destructive and perhaps depressive qualities, elicits emotional responses from the viewer. This is perhaps where his Barjac studio project and his paintings unite in relation to a critical encounter with archaeology. Less concerned with objective narrative, Kiefer utilizes affect as a primary interface with the materiality of his work.

This is perhaps what both separates and unites archaeology and contemporary art. The discourses of aesthetics and beauty foreground the importance of rigorously engaging with affect as a serious component of work. In archaeology, issues of disciplinary aesthetic and critical affect are, at best, secondary to the production of objectives of archaeological excavation, documentation, survey, recording, reconstruction and representation. Archaeology's epistemological intentionalities are firmly grounded in objectivity and positivism, while art (at least as far as Kiefer is concerned) is largely based in affect. Thus it is understandable how archaeologists in their self-authorized renderings of objective material worlds would find it attractive to establish an analogous relationship between the artist and the archaeologist. Doing so establishes the archaeologist as a critical authority over the objective materiality of the contemporary world while simultaneously allowing for an uncritical utilization of affect in the perpetuation of the aura of modern archaeological process.

Harrison has rightly indicated that the trope of archaeology as excavation is problematic as it has the tendency to impose an incorrect distance between the contemporary agency of archaeology and the rendering of the past. While I am intrigued by his proposition of a new trope of archaeology-as-surface-survey and assemblage, I am hesitant to wholly disregard the archaeological depth metaphor. The archaeological metaphor is perhaps the most immediate and obvious conceptual bridge across numerous modern disciplines. So while I agree that the use of the depth metaphor as an interpretive trope is problematic, I propose that the tremendous social and cultural currency of the depth methaphor has extended the metaphor of modern archaeology to the extent that we should consider it a modern allegory.

The implication of considering archaeology as allegory is that it shifts critical engagement with the rhetoric of depth and layers from objectivity to affect and meaning-making. For example, *Frozen city* (2010) by Simon Fujiwara proposed, through a fabricated archaeology, to reveal the city beneath Frieze Art Fair. Fujiwara's installation leverages the value of the modern archaeological allegory to render a comment on contemporary art societies and markets. It is a testament to the ongoing fascination within contemporary art with the epistemological structures and conceptual propositions of modern science and the capacity of archaeology to provide visual and material objects as representational expressions of modern society and culture. A decade earlier, Mark Dion's *Tate Thames dig* (1999) similarly utilized the allegorical value of the aesthetic of modern archaeological process. Taking the form of a mass, participatory 'excavation' of the Thames riverbank in London and the formal typological arrangement of the 'finds' in turn-of-the-century exhibition cases, Dion effected a proposition of the structures of mediation within archaeology as a formal aesthetic. And perhaps most

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sensational was the excavation and removal of painter Francis Bacon's studio from London and its reconstruction in Dublin by curators and conservators at the Dublin City Gallery, the Hugh Lane and archaeologists from Margaret Gowen and Company Ltd in 1999 (see O'Connor 2008).

These appropriations of modern archaeology as aesthetic form and allegory point to a currency of the modern discipline. Unfortunately, it is a currency which has mostly been used by contemporary artists, eliciting provocative responses within the archaeological community, some of whom have voiced concerns over the appropriation of the discipline within artistic practice (see Renfrew 1999; Bailey 2008). However, I would argue that this is not a one-way process of appropriation. The utilization of artists' processes (especially when abstracted from their critical context) within archaeological discourse is equally an extension of a metaphor for subjective, affective and aesthetic creativity and thus equally a modern allegory. Whether it is Richard Long and Antony Gormley for Colin Renfrew, Anselm Kiefer and Simon Fujiwara for Rodney Harrison or Didier Appelt and Roman Ondak for myself, the appropriation of the artist or their work as an affective framing device for discourse is an allegory for the negotiation of the objective/affective schism within modern archaeology practice.

The assertion of the maintenance of the depth metaphor as allegory in no way precludes the critical development of other modes of discourse such as Harrison has argued in his paper. Rather, it requires that ongoing critical discourse be continued and enhanced. What I would suggest is, rather than asserting a 'modern' (i.e. 'new') solution to how we should self-conceptualize, that we engage in a sustained critical analysis of the strategies we deploy in establishing our discipline's epistemological authority and to what extent we are implicated in perpetuating modernity's ontological foundation in the notion of 'progress'.

Currently within contemporary art practice, an increasing number of artists are exploring lateral dynamics for disciplinary development, and specifically the possibility for a transgress-based ontology rather than a progress-based ontology. Debates over what may or may not be 'movements' have been attempted under the terms 'relationalism' or 'altermodernity' (e.g. Bishop 2004; Bourriaud 2002; 2009). Suffice it to state here that artists are now realizing work which actively resists categorization and transgresses disciplinary boundaries. That said, this transgression does not flatten artistic discourse to a two-dimensional navigation of a contemporary surface. Far from it; artists are more deeply exploring durationality, the cinematic and time itself as media within their work, exploring the malleability and tractability of time within artistic gesture. Thus it is not a dismissal of bounded depth for mobility on surface. It is a four-dimensional transgression between depth and surface resulting not in fixed gesture but in percolations of time and material (e.g. Witmore 2006b).

I wholeheartedly agree with Harrison's assertion that 'what we need more than anything else is a series of detailed, long-term, longitudinal studies which demonstrate the actual contribution archaeology can make to understanding the present, rather than a series of justifications for it' (p. 160). As with artistic practice, it is critical that we continue to make work and that our

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work engage with our contemporary moment. While I would not call for justifications as well, I would encourage that we simultaneously develop a sustained critical discourse around the intellectual strategies, narrative tropes and aesthetic forms and affects we deploy in our work. While inspired by the rigour and skill with which contemporary artists negotiate material, time and affect, we must not allow ourselves to assume an analogous positioning of the archaeologist within society, without responsibility for critical reflexivity or historical context. While complex and at times overwhelming, archaeologists are creators, authors and critics who work with rich and potent affective allegories of modern objectivity to produce narratives, visuals, performances, gestures and material expressions of human agency over time. In occupying our own historical, intellectual, social and cultural context, we can at best hope to know ourselves and our intentionalities and to reveal both by being fully present within the manifestation of our archaeological agencies.

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Archaeological intervention in the past, present and future tense

*William Rathje**

I was trained as a processual archaeologist in the 1960s, and as a result my interests and research, along with the vocabulary I have used to express these, have followed a different trajectory from those paths that have emerged out of what we once called postprocessual archaeology. This is not to say that we do not have common beacons. I believe we certainly do. To this end, I am writing this dialogue with Harrison's piece to rename the 'archaeology of the contemporary past' as 'archaeology in and of the present' and 'for the future'. I like the new name for contemporary past archaeology, but archaeologists in and of the present should not forget about their own past.[1]

Grounded in the then contemporary methods and theory of archaeology, the Garbage Project has recorded data in great detail on 192.2 tons of fresh garbage collected from 20,416 individual households in seven different metropolitan areas, and has excavated and recorded 45.3 tons of refuse dating from the 1920s to 1991 from 19 landfills and four open dumps in 15 North American cities. The majority of Project data sets record item-by-item inventories (by more than 150 item categories, original item weight and volume recorded from packaging, item cost (if available), weight of any waste, brand name, specific type and material composition) of assemblages of fresh garbage placed out for disposal over the last quarter-century by individual households in census tracts with known sociometric characteristics and geographic coordinates. Several Garbage Project data sets even record garbage, sociometrics and interview-survey responses to questions

*William Rathje, Stanford Archaeology Center. Email: rathjewl@aol.com.

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about behaviour and lifestyle, all collected with permission, from the same individual households.[2]

During the past 32 years, the Garbage Project's data sets and associated analyses have literally defined what has come to be known as 'garbology' (see the *Oxford English dictionary* and the *American heritage dictionary*, any edition of either after 1985) as the behavioural science focused on the study of contemporary garbage (see Rathje 2001). The variety of refuse data collected by the Garbage Project, combined with sociometric data and respondent reports of attitudes and behaviours, makes this database of assemblages a unique tool for posing and answering important behavioural questions facing behavioural scientists, government policy-makers, industries and individual families today. Therefore I totally applaud Harrison's view of archaeology creating assemblages in and of the present and future that can be revised and reassembled by archaeologists, professionals in other disciplines, policy planners, and the public. To put it another way, the garbology project was, from the beginning, explicitly focused on the future through an engagement with 'specific social and environmental problems of the present day' (Dawdy 2009, 140; also see Shanks and Witmore 2010). This is not new and we have a mountain of garbage to prove it.

I never apologized for this work. Perhaps one of the reasons that this is typical of archaeologists' research in the US (versus the UK) is that UK archaeologists are usually in their own archaeology departments separated from departments of social/cultural anthropology, while archaeologists in the US are usually based in anthropology departments which include social/cultural anthropologists, physical anthropologists and linguists. Social/cultural anthropologists in US institutions are typically pleased with the new kinds of data on behaviour in and of the present that their archaeological colleagues provide.

Furthermore, from the beginning, the goal of the Garbage Project was to inform householders about their beliefs and attitudes, material-culture use and waste behaviour. This intersects well with notions of 'alienation', 'the abject' and 'the Other', but these are terms that never crossed my mind. I simply wanted to make people aware of how their actual behaviour differed from what they thought they were doing. This disjuncture between what people do and what they say they do happens to be a fundamental characteristic of modernism (Witmore 2006a). The goal was always an understanding of how beliefs, behaviour and material culture interact in unsuspected ways that people could change if they became more aware of the material outcomes of their interactions. Once more we find a perhaps unacknowledged line of convergence. Here again, I totally agree with Harrison that archaeologists should focus archaeology on the present and for the future.

About acceptance by other archaeologists: I clearly remember when I learned the affects that certain terminologies can have. I was giving a talk about the Garbage Project to a seminar at Stanford. There was an esteemed European theorist in the audience who broke out in laughter several times when I was talking about analysing garbage and the conclusions that produced. I admit that I was shocked and mystified by the laughter when I was

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talking about huge amounts of household food waste, about the way informants misreported their diets that could seriously affect their health, about how little people recycled compared to what they reported recycling, and about all the hazardous household wastes that were thrown in home refuse. When I questioned one of my student–colleagues, he informed me that the humour was that the Garbage Project studies were sanitizing an 'abject/Other' by transforming refuse into a familiar information source. Suddenly I understood. And later the same laugher asked to reprint one of the Garbage Project's papers in a respected archaeological journal in Europe (Rathje 2004).

Harrison correctly states that the Garbage Project and similar studies that came after were never directly criticized in published articles. But since he was not around at the time of the founding of the Garbage Project he did not hear or see unpublished comments from colleagues. I well remember an archaeologist approaching me at a national meeting of the Society for American Archaeology and saying, 'How can you live with yourself? Ancient sites are being vandalized every day, and all you do is pick and paw through fresh garbage.' And a few years later I vividly remember an evening I spent with David Hurst Thomas in 1979, when we amicably dialogued for hours about whether or not the Garbage Project should be included in the next edition of his popular introduction-to-archaeology textbook. I am pleased to report that Thomas's next edition included a substantial and very fair description of the Garbage Project, as have the versions since. I also remember some early national US television appearances, such as the *Today show*, where the 'super' under my name was 'archaeologist'. In response I received several anonymous mailings which said something like, 'Why don't you say what you really are? A sociologist, a nutritionist, a specialist in household hazardous waste, but not an "archaeologist"'. These messages made me feel estranged from my discipline.

But 15 years later, when the 'garbage barge' sailed down the East Coast of the US and into the Caribbean in search of a place to dump its cargo, a national 'Garbage Crisis' was front-page news. By then, the term 'garbology' had been coined and I was identified by TV 'supers' as a 'garbologist'. I was surprised, as you might expect, to receive mail saying, 'Why don't you tell people what you really are – an "archaeologist"?' At that point I felt as if I were back in the fold.

If Harrison wants to give the archaeological study of contemporary society a new vision, I believe that he should focus not on just a name change, but on 'intervention' to communicate with contemporary society. The Garbage Project is one of the longest-running projects in social science (1973–2005) and has significantly 'intervened' in US culture. I have testified before two US Senate committees about the nature of resource waste in household refuse and how US landfills could be better designed to protect nearby residents. I have also testified before 13 state legislative committees and 15 local city councils and committees.

In addition, the Garbage Project has made a point of not receiving funding from normal archaeological funding sources, so as not to usurp monies available for traditional archaeology, restoration and preservation. Given the diversity of funding sources that we worked with, we do not have the extensive list of publications in archaeological media I would like. On the

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other hand, we have reached out in a wide variety of publications which are not often read by archaeologists. We have used every medium we could to relate householders to their discards so they could decide for themselves what they wanted to perpetuate and what they wanted to change.

Our attempts to reach a wide variety of audiences in US publications included the popular *Archaeology* magazine (Rathje 1974); *American behavioral scientist* (Rathje 1984); the *Atlantic monthly* (Rathje 1989); *National geographic* (Rathje 1991); *Rubbish! The archaeology of garbage* (Rathje and Murphy 1992); and the *Encyclopaedia Britannica yearbook of science and the future – 1997* (Rathje 1996). These publications were meant to intervene directly in Anglo-American scientific and popular culture and behaviour without a single apology for using archaeological methods to reveal untold relationships between material, behavioural and mental realities. In addition, the Garbage Project published its methods and results in scientific journals and proceedings in a wide variety of disciplines.

We first concentrated on food waste (see Rathje 1974; Harrison, Rathje and Hughes 1975; Rathje and Harrison 1978; Rathje and Ho 1987), because it was so obvious in garbage – a whole head of lettuce, half a loaf of bread, half a steak. Yet the vast majority of householders interviewed by the US Department of Agriculture denied discarding or wasting food. What we found was that households threw out 15 to 20 per cent or more of what they bought (based on the weight or volume printed on original containers and not adding in any 'garbage-disposal' effect). The waste factor was so large that US food waste could feed Canada. 'Abject' food waste should be brought to the attention of everyone who prepares or eats food.

Our exposure to the public through myriad media outlets was not difficult to achieve.[3] Just about any place an archaeologist works has a PR unit or person. Ours, at the University of Arizona (UA), became aware of our modern garbage research. How, I don't know. A reporter from *Psychology today*, who was at the UA on another story, was informed and wrote a short piece for the May 1974 issue. From that publication on, neither the UA PR unit nor I ever made any 'cold' or any other kind of call to a media source; we just returned calls. Any archaeology of our contemporary society is a fascinating 'story' because archaeology is popularly perceived as a study of the past; the turnabout of studying ourselves the way archaeologists study the ancients is not only fair, but also fascinating, play. If the results have significance to the public and their legacy to the future, they take on newsworthy implications that reporters drool over.

Finally, as I mentioned, I like Harrison's arguments as the Garbage Project has tried to put them into practice for 32 years. I just want results that justify and utilize archaeological techniques to 'intervene' in a positive way in contemporary society. However, that level of activism is not only a potential future for archaeology in and of the present, it is part of its actual past.

Notes

[1] As one small example concerning intellectual genealogy, which Harrison tends to blur in his article, when I came to teach at the University of Arizona in 1971, Michael Schiffer was a graduate student focused on the archaeology of the past. I asked students to study the relation between attitudes, behaviour and material culture in contemporary Tucson,

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so they could understand how archaeology works in describing a familiar contemporary society. I involved them in the founding of the Garbage Project in 1973 for the same reason. My friend Michael started his first study of the present a few years later (Schiffer, Downing and McCarthy 1981) and has continued to make major contributions ever since (see, for example, Schiffer 1991; 1992; and Schiffer, Butts and Grimm 1994).

[2] A list of Garbage Project research and results – analyses, grants, publications, technical reports, testimony, talks and teaching and media exposures – can be viewed online as CV'06 WLR.doc at http://humanitieslab.stanford.edu/GarbologyOnline/home.

[3] In our attempts at public interventions, we have been reported on every national US television news programme, on 106 local television news programmes, on national news documentaries and in national print media.

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Archaeologies 'now'. Creative interventions in the present for the future *Rodney Harrison*

> *Then I reflected that everything happens to a man precisely, precisely now. Centuries of centuries and only in the present do things happen; countless men in the air, on the face of the earth and the sea, and all that really is happening is happening to me . . . in an infinite series of times, in a growing, dizzying network of divergent, convergent and parallel times. This network of times which approached one another, forked, broke off, or were unaware of each other for centuries, embraces* all *possibilities of time.*
>
> Jorge Luis Borges, *The garden of forking paths*
>
> *Force yourself to see more flatly.*
>
> Georges Perec, *The street*

I thank the commentators for their thoughtful and articulate responses, in which they have quite rightly exposed several inconsistencies and queried or expanded on a number of points that I did not have the time or space to develop in the original piece. In doing so, they raise the important issue of regional variations in the ways in which archaeology is conceived, practised and perceived by its practitioners and publics, which also significantly extends and complicates the original discussion. Rather than comment on specific points, almost all of which are relevant and well made, I want to focus on four linked themes which I think are reflected in different ways across all five comments. These are the relationship of archaeology to modernism and modernity, the value of the archaeological production of a sense of the 'uncanny' as an active intervention in the quotidian present, the surface/depth dichotomy, and the question of archaeological methodology in relation to an archaeology in and of the present. In doing so, I hope to provide some important clarification regarding what I mean when I use the terms

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'archaeology in and of the present', 'surfaces' and 'assemblages', as well as to take up Ian Russell's challenge to approach more critically the use of artistic metaphors to emphasize the affective qualities and creative possibilities of archaeological practice. Before I move on to do this, I think it is helpful to discuss briefly the circumstances under which this paper was written and its place within a broader emergent programme of research and writing to give some context to what follows.

Designs for an archaeology in and of the present for the future

This paper began to take form in the immediate aftermath of the completion of *After modernity* (Harrison and Schofield 2010). At that time I began to look back at the work which John Schofield and I had undertaken in the book in summarizing the publications dealing with the archaeology of the present and recent past over the decade since the publication of Buchli and Lucas's *Archaeologies of the contemporary past* (2001b) and exploring the ways in which conventional archaeological methods (broadly speaking) might be applied to the study of late modern societies. It seemed to me in retrospect that in trying to outline the ways in which traditional archaeological methodologies might be used to study the present and very recent past we had implicitly exposed the ways in which those same techniques might be considered to be deficient for this purpose. This is a point which is echoed by Paul Graves-Brown, who notes that in 'applying an archaeological sensibility to the contemporary world, it becomes increasingly clear that the habitual tropes of archaeological practice either do not work, or need to be rethought and reconfigured' (p. 168). This paper was partially written as a way of thinking through some of the implications of this situation, as a starting point for developing what I have come to think of as a new set of techniques and ways of thinking, a new 'toolkit of concepts', as Paul Rabinow (2003, 2, drawing on Foucault) might express it, with which archaeology might begin to reorient its interests towards the emergent present and its possible futures. I mention Rabinow's work here as he has, for many years, been involved in a parallel project with respect to the *anthropology* of the present (e.g. 1996; 1999; 2003; 2008; Rabinow *et al.* 2008), and a number of his more thoroughly developed concepts parallel some of those I have discussed, and those which the commentators have noted in responding to the discussion article (see further discussion below). Audrey Horning rightly points out that despite my bold assertion that we need to focus on 'how' to do the archaeology of the present, the bulk of my article and its conclusion were still oriented towards the question of 'why'. I think this is partially because archaeology has so consistently defined itself as 'that which archaeologists do which others do not', or *excavation*. Alfredo González-Ruibal and Ian Russell quite rightly draw attention not only to the importance of excavation as a creative *practice*, but also to its epistemological and political value to archaeology. This is a point which is made clear by various papers in the previous issue of this journal on the role of excavation in the 21st century, which were unfortunately not yet available when I was writing my own discussion article, but which form an important counterpoint to this discussion. But as Graves-Brown

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and González-Ruibal note, excavation is not necessarily the most useful methodology for querying the present archaeologically (although clearly in some cases it is – and William Rathje's account of 32 years of the Garbage Project elegantly demonstrates this point). This forced me to begin to think about the usefulness of excavation as a trope for archaeology more generally, while implicitly beginning to think through some of the ways in which we might need to revise its 'toolkit' to deal with an unfinished, emergent present (a point to which I will return at the end of my reply).

'Now-time': archaeology, modernity and modernism

I think one of the issues which we failed to adequately come to grips with in *After modernity* was our treatment of modernity (and indeed 'late modernity'), albeit with some reservation, as a historical time period which might be studied in a broadly similar way to other archaeological periods (but see Harrison and Schofield 2010, 5). In doing so, we were (at least implicitly) drawing on the treatment of modernity popularized by Marshall Berman (1982) and channelled through the writing on late modernity and postmodernity by Jameson (2005), Auge (2004), Virilio (1986) and others. All of this work is more or less haunted by the spectre of Walter Benjamin, for whom modernity comes to stand in for a particular form of lived experience; modernity becomes a distinct and totalizing temporal periodization from which flows a particular treatment of time and the concepts 'past', 'present' and 'future'. Graves-Brown makes an important point about distinguishing between 'modernity' and 'modernism' in their divergent treatment of the concept of tradition. Modernity appears in the present discussion article in three linked guises – as historical time period, as condition or quality of experience and as (an incomplete) project (see also Osborne 1995). Putting aside the problems of treating modernity as a single unified project (instead of the form taken by a heterogeneous set of interests which draw on a similar underlying philosophical justification for the exercising of certain modes of power/knowledge), as Osborne (1995, 13–14) notes, the 'time' of modernity is not straightforward, as it involves a complex doubling in which it defines itself simultaneously as both 'contemporary' and 'new'. In doing so, it constantly creates the present as 'contemporary past' whilst it anticipates the future as embodied within its present. This simultaneous intimacy and distance of the past in the (modern) present is what makes working on the archaeology (as *τα αρχαια* or *ta archaia*, 'the ancient'; see Witmore, in press; Harrison and Schofield 2010, 6) of the present so conceptually difficult, even oxymoronic. I am certainly not the first archaeologist to discuss the ways in which the past is actively created in the present (e.g. Shanks and Tilley 1992) or the ways in which simultaneous, overlapping pasts are contained within it (e.g. González-Ruibal 2006b; Lucas 2005; 2010; Olivier 2003; Schlanger 2004; Witmore 2006b; Witmore, in press). But the commentators were right to push the concept of modernism and its conceptual differences from that of modernity, as well as some of the ways in which modernist tropes such as an emphasis on empiricism and experience might be potentially useful to archaeology.

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I think one way of avoiding this bind is to work with Benjamin's distinction between the present as a historical period and the experience of *Jetztzeit* or 'now-time' (Olivier 2008; Funari and Vieira de Carvalho 2009) which is generated as a result of a revelatory intervention in the present (see also Dawdy 2010 on the use of Benjaminian perspectives on ruin and the relationship between modernity and antiquity in relation to archaeology). I use this term 'intervention' explicitly to connect with Rathje's point about the role of archaeology as an intervention in contemporary society, and my own discussion of archaeology's role in translating (or, perhaps more accurately, *creatively assembling*) the intervening traces of the past in the present. For Benjamin, 'now' represents the point at which a constellation of images, objects, agencies, ideas and trajectories coalesce to form a unique image or assemblage (Rosen 2003, 2) which in turn generates a dialectical realization of the past being gathered up in the present (Osborne 1995, 143). The assignation of a particular event to a specific moment in time becomes irrelevant as past, present and future are experienced as a single moment in an alternative historico-metaphysical experience which generates an explosive revelation and sense of redemption. Leaving aside the metaphysical elements of this notion, the idea of a 'now-time' as a creative coalescence of multiple overlapping pasts experienced simultaneously at a particular, unique time and place is helpful in overcoming the simultaneous intimacy and distance which is implicit in a modern notion of the 'present', and provides us with the grounds on which to begin to build an archaeology in and of the present for the future. Adopting the sense of the present as *Jetztzeit* means that we are no longer dealing with a historical present, but a series of localized and hence spatialized presents and the pasts that are generated by the relationships between the particular people and things contained within them. These collectives of human and non-human actors which coalesce as assemblages experience a sense of synchronicity of pasts in the present generated by their creative coming (or gathering) together at a particular moment in which the ordinary chronological boundaries which divide them one from another are severed. I say 'gathering' here as I see within this a creative role for archaeology in actively bringing things and people together ('assembling' and 'reassembling') and helping to generate this experience of *Jetztzeit*. Hence what was perhaps my most radical suggestion (which strangely generated no discussion from the commentators): abandoning the focus on particular temporal periods for an emphasis on the present and the pasts that intervene within it at a particular moment of archaeological involvement; that is, archaeology, 'now'. This seems consistent with various discussions of alternative historical ontologies in which the past is perceived as palimpsest and the 'trace' (another thoroughly Benjaminian concept; see e.g. Lucas 2010) plays a fundamentally creative, even revelatory, role. I think this also sits comfortably with the notion of a four-dimensional percolation of time and material in relation to contemporary critical art practice to which Russell refers, citing Witmore (2006b). This brings me to my next point about the everyday and the role of producing a sense of revelation, of bringing to consciousness that which is normally unacknowledged, through making the familiar uncanny or unfamiliar.

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Infra-*ordinaire*: the uncanny as the product of an archaeological intervention in the present

'Make an inventory of your pockets, of your bag. Ask yourself about the provenance, the use, what will become of each of the objects you take out. Question your tea-spoons' (Perec 1999, 210–11). Thus wrote Georges Perec in Paris in the essay 'Approaches to what?' in 1973, the same year in which William Rathje founded the Garbage Project in Tucson. Although neither, as far as I am aware, made reference to the other, both (as Rathje writes of his own work) shared a concern with exposing the nature of contemporary everyday life by drawing attention to the gap between what people think they do and what people *actually* do. Rathje's project has acted as an important touchstone in demonstrating not only the potential value of archaeology to the development of policies which can have a very real impact on issues of contemporary social, political and environmental concern, but also the value of a focus on the present to the development of innovative archaeological theory and methodology. In saying his intellectual project shares concerns with Perec, I do not want to detract from how unique and important Rathje's contribution to archaeology has been, but to suggest that the idea of drawing attention to the most overlooked aspects of everyday life – the banal, the obvious, the quotidian – is linked to concerns which are wider than those which arise directly from archaeology (a linking of archaeology with broader social issues of which I am sure he would strongly approve). Perec noted (1999, 210),

> To question the habitual. But that's just it, were habituated to it. We don't question it, it doesn't question us, it doesn't seem to pose a problem, we live with it without thinking, as if it carried within it neither questions nor answers, as if it weren't the bearer of any information. This is no longer even conditioning, it's anaesthesia. We live through our lives in a dreamless sleep. But where is our life? Where is our body? Where is our space? How are we to speak of these 'common things', how to track them down rather, flush them out, wrest them from the dross in which they remain mired, how to give them meaning, a tongue, to let them, finally, speak of what is, of what we are. What's needed perhaps is finally to found our own anthropology,[1] one that will speak about us, look in ourselves, for what for so long we've been pillaging from others. Not the exotic anymore, but the endotic.

Indeed, it has been a broadly Perecquian orientation towards the infra-ordinary which has sat, at least implicitly (but see Olivier 2000), behind the work of many archaeologists of the contemporary and recent past. In a series of novels and shorter non-fictional essays (many of which were translated and published in English in the collection *Species of spaces and other pieces*) written during the 1960s and 1970s, Perec began to develop new experimental forms of writing which were intended to uncover the overlooked aspects of everyday life. From his *An attempt at exhausting a place in Paris* (in which he sat in the same spot in Place Saint-Sulpice for three days, making a record of everything that he observed) and *Attempt at an inventory of the liquid and solid foodstuffs ingurgitated by me in the course of the year nineteen hundred*

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and seventy four, to *Life. A user's manual* (a 600-page novel which describes the events within a single Parisian apartment block at a single 'moment', precisely 8 a.m. on 23 June 1975), he consistently sought to defamiliarize the familiar to draw attention to the overlooked, quotidian aspects of human existence.

This concern with the creative potential of the uncanny in turning the (archaeological) lens on contemporary everyday life links all five comments in different ways. Graves-Brown is perhaps clearest when he speaks of his desire to 'make the "familiar unfamiliar"' so as to reveal 'the invisible' (p. 171), but this is also obviously an interest of Rathje's in using archaeology to confront people with the gap between what it is they think they consume and throw away and what the empirical record of their food waste demonstrates they actually expend and discard. Similarly, González-Ruibal discusses the ways in which excavations of both former Nazi spaces and sites associated with the Spanish Civil War force an engagement with the uncanny liminal space between the familiar and the alien which obliges a confrontation with the 'open wounds' of the past in the present. A similar point is made by Horning in relation to the ways in which colonial pasts and presents are intimately intertwined in the context both of the work she does and of the 'histories' she produces from it, in Northern Ireland. This also emerges as an interest in Russell's comments about affect and the ways in which contemporary artists can help generate 'framing devices' for 'the negotiation of the objective/affective schism within modern archaeology practice' (p. 175).

Heidegger notes (1962, 69) that 'that which is ontically closest and most well known is ontologically farthest and not known at all; and its ontological signification is constantly overlooked'. Indeed, for Heidegger, everyday life provided the key to the universal phenomenological ontology necessary to realize the experience of *Jetztzeit* described by Benjamin (see Osborne 1995, 160 ff., 186–87). I want to suggest that the creative potential of the uncanny which the commentators mention is a direct manifestation of the revelatory experience of 'now-time' in which the individual becomes suddenly (perhaps shockingly) aware of the simultaneous existence of previously unknown or overlooked pasts, their traces in the present and their implications for the future. González-Ruibal describes succinctly the potential for revelation which exists in this uncanny liminal space between the familiar and the unfamiliar. Clearly there is an important role for archaeology in drawing attention to that which exists outside the realm of current popular knowledge, either through active erasure, neglect or its submergence into everyday practice, and I agree strongly with my commentators on this point. My intention was not to undermine that project in discussing the semantic slipperiness of this phrase 'making the familiar unfamiliar' and its relationship with a broader archaeological sensibility of creating distance, both between past and present and between ourselves and our 'others' (as part of a broader anthropological project, cf. Fabian 1983). The critical thing to explore is how we might utilize this creative, revelatory potential of the uncanny, drawing on an experience of 'now-time' generated by our archaeological intervention in the present. I believe the notion of the present as a surface is very helpful in this regard. This connects with my next point about surfaces and depths.

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Excavating surfaces: depth, proximity and creative action

All of the commentators raise the issue of the surface/depth dichotomy in different ways. In suggesting the surface as an alternative trope for archaeology arising from its reorientation to engage with an emergent present and its possible futures, I did not mean to suggest that the surface should be directly opposed to the notion of depth. Indeed, as González-Ruibal notes, surfaces can be deep and multilayered. I also did not intend to develop a notion of the surface as 'superficial' or opposed to that which is 'inside' something. Indeed, thinking of the present as a surface, as an interface with the 'now-time', is intended to significantly *deepen* the definition of the surface. In the same way that it is not useful to speak of the 'surface' in opposition to 'depth', I do not think it necessary to speak of the 'inside' in opposition to the 'surface'. In the discussion of the importance of the quotidian above I hope I have broadened out and clarified the concept of the surface and its assemblages in just this way. In speaking of the surface I wanted to draw attention to that which is actively assembled and exposed. To return to Graves-Brown's metaphor, when a rock is broken into two, new surfaces are exposed to inspection. It seems to me that it is the creative action of producing the surfaces which is important here, rather than the fact that what was previously 'inside' is now 'outside'. I agree with González-Ruibal that it is helpful to think of the past as simultaneously *imminent* (in the sense in which all pasts exist as a product of the present) and *hidden* (in the sense in which we have to do work to generate these pasts) in the present; indeed, that surface and depth as well as present and past are on the same ontological level. But I think there is an important semantic difference between this simultaneous presence and distance of the past and its traces in the present, and the idea of 'hidden' depths. There is a sense in which that which is deep and hidden comes to stand in for the unattainable. In contrast, the idea of 'surfaces with depth' which Russell discusses and which I had perhaps less eloquently tried to develop in my original discussion article is important in emphasizing the accessibility of the past, present and future. One can only 'see' what is on the surface, or, perhaps, in this case, what is on the surface one creates. I simply meant to speak of the surface as something which was attainable, in contrast to the idea of hidden depths which always remain just beyond our grasp (as in the example Graves-Brown discusses of 'going deeper' to find out more about Shakespeare, which assumes there will always be depths which remain at least partially mysterious to us).

I think there is a crucial connection here between Graves-Brown's discussion of the importance of an understanding of the experiential qualities of things to archaeologists, Russell's emphasis on 'gesture' and the affective qualities of 'archaeology as art' as a practical/experiential engagement with the present, and Rathje's discussion of archaeology as an intervention in contemporary society. Indeed, it was this very practical involvement with the surface and creative engagement with the processes of assembling and reassembling which I hoped to highlight in the discussion article through my emphasis on archaeology as 'the making and remaking of material palimpsests which mediate the production of the past, present and future'. I certainly did not envisage a detached contemplation but a direct involvement *in* and *with*

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the surface. This concern with practical engagement also resonates clearly with Horning's and González-Ruibal's interests in the relationship between archaeology and knowledge/power effects in the past and present.

I disagree that the surface should be seen as that which is closest to us and hence most familiar. As in the discussion of Heidegger's work above, that which is most 'obvious' is also often that which is furthest from consciousness. Here I see a direct connection between the notion of a 'surface with depth' and the sort of revelatory processes which are emphasized in different ways by Graves-Brown and González-Ruibal in relation to an archaeology of the present and recent past. Engagement with the surface and the 'now-time' provides a way of bringing into consciousness both that which has been actively 'forgotten' or 'covered up', as in the cases discussed by González-Ruibal, and those actors and things which are the most quotidian and hence the most easily overlooked, as discussed by Graves-Brown. Indeed, although these appear to be opposites, they are at once both distant and proximal. The uncanny and the everyday, the proximal and the distant, the past and the present (and the future) all occupy the same ontological fields and all occur simultaneously in the now. It is in the creative engagement with the surface and its assemblages, with the active process of assembling and reassembling, that archaeologists are able to intervene in the present to produce a confrontation with the past (however 'deep') in the present for the future in the experience of the 'now'.

A 'toolkit of concepts': rethinking archaeology's methods and tropes

This brings me to my final comment about the ways in which reorienting archaeology to engage with and intervene in the emergent present and its possible futures requires a radical rethinking of both its methods and its tropes. I should say from the outset that I see this as an open and ongoing project, one best pursued through the kind of conversation entered into here in conjunction with the creative insights generated by work in the 'field' (indeed, if I had more space I would want to trouble this term too, to suggest, as others have done, that it is unhelpful to dichotomize the field and the laboratory, because 'doing' is also a process of 'thinking'). I also see the process of rethinking archaeological concepts and tropes as integrally bound up with the recasting of its methods. I have already discussed Rabinow's work in developing a 'toolkit of concepts' for an anthropology of the contemporary (especially 2003; 2008; Rabinow *et al.* 2008). There is a clear parallel between various concepts he develops and those discussed here. For example, he develops the term 'actuality' in an analogous way to Benjaminian 'now-time', distinguishing between it and the concept of the contemporary 'present' in a similar way to my discussion above. Similarly, his discussion of various processes which occupy different spatio-temporal modes as problematizations, apparatuses and assemblages would appear to map onto my concern with assemblages and the processes involved in assembling and reassembling. However, I think it is worth noting that Rabinow's particular research interests as an anthropologist are in some ways quite distinct from those of an *archaeology* of now, and for this reason it is important that we collaboratively develop our own 'toolkit' of concepts and methods which

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are specific to our interests as archaeologists. Similar experiments with the concepts of archaeology can be found in Michael Shanks's work on the 'archaeological imagination', including his online glossary (Shanks 2011). Another set of experiments is present in the critical trajectories stimulated by a consideration of 'archaeology as art' as discussed by Russell both here and elsewhere (e.g. 2008; Cochrane and Russell 2007).

My commentators have all demonstrated ways in which archaeologies in and of the present for the future are currently being pursued, and I am excited by the possibilities of this and future work. We must feel able to explore and experiment with minds open to the possibilities of the future in order to engage with the emergent present and its pasts. I hope this discussion of the surface and its assemblages makes a contribution towards this ongoing project.

Note

[1] Here there are interesting parallels with the connection between anthropology/sociology and surrealism which can be seen to have much earlier roots not only in an early 20th-century French anthropological tradition but also in the connection between surrealism and anthropology in Mass Observation in Britain in the 1930s.

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