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Human, Transhuman, Posthuman Digital Archaeologies: An Introduction

MARTA DÍAZ-GUARDAMINO AND COLLEEN MORGAN

Department of Archaeology, Durham University
Department of Archaeology, University of York

Current archaeological thought evokes a sparking Catherine wheel: spinning fireworks that detonate light, colour, and sound with every movement. These theoretical turns swirl alongside the ongoing development and adoption of scientific and digital techniques that have wide-ranging implications for archaeological practices and interpretations. Two particularly combustible developments are posthumanism and the ontological turn, which emerged within the broader humanities and social sciences. Posthumanism rejects human exceptionalism and seeks to decentre humans in archaeological discourse and practice. Linked to this is the so-called 'ontological turn' (aka the 'material turn'), a shift away from framing archaeological research within a Western ontology and a movement *beyond* representationalism (i.e. focusing on things themselves rather than assuming that objects represent something else).

In archaeology these 'turns' are kindling relevant changes in focus and practice. These include first and foremost moving beyond modernist dualisms (e.g. subject-object, nature-culture, mind-matter, past-present), a return to materials, and a renewed consideration of other-than-human agential entities. This may entail a shift in focus from categories to relations and processes of becoming, a novel emphasis on how humans and non-humans have co-evolved, co-existed, and collaborated, and work from alternative ontological perspectives to consider the ontological diversity of past worlds. Archaeologists are developing a variety of approaches to address these issues from different perspectives (for recent overviews see Harris & Cipolla, 2017; Jervis, 2018). Some of the relevant methodologies are not new, but have been experiencing recent developments, such as symmetrical archaeology and Actor-Network Theory (ANT), entanglement theory, or some branches of sensorial archaeology. Others have emerged in the last few years, such as material engagement theory, process archaeology, new materialism, or assemblage thought.

This thematic issue on *Human, Transhuman, Posthuman Digital Archaeologies* is an attempt to establish digital archaeology at the forefront of these developments and set the agenda for future investigation. The growing paradigm of digital archaeology has come under critical scrutiny (e.g. Richardson & Lindgren, 2017; Perry & Taylor, 2018); yet, theoretically-informed work with digital tools has remained largely framed within Western modernist (and white male) perspectives (Huggett, 2017; Taylor et al., 2018).

The articles collected in this thematic issue address the current use and future role

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of digital technologies in shaping archaeology from a range of posthuman perspectives that intersect with feminist, Indigenous, and queer archaeologies. These articles emerged from a session at the European Association of Archaeologists annual meeting (Barcelona, 2018) titled *Human, Posthuman, Transhuman Digital Archaeologies*. The session called for papers 'to evaluate the growing paradigm of digital archaeology from an ontological point of view, showcase the ways digital technologies are being applied in archaeological practice—in the field/lab/studio/classroom—in order to dig into the range of questions about past people and worlds into which digital media give us new insights and avenues of approach' and asked participants to critically engage with theory-based digital archaeological methods (Figure 1).

The resulting articles explore the following questions: How can we work with digital technology to transcend (disrupt) perceived boundaries and develop new understandings of the self and others, agency, life, or embodiment? Can we work *with* digital media and technology to develop new perspectives on more-than-human pasts? Can other-than-human agential entities be grasped and fostered via digital media and techniques to create multisensorial experiences? How is the digital shifting relationships between archaeologists, the archaeological record, and the public?

In her manifesto for a 'cyborg archaeology', Colleen Morgan draws from feminist posthumanism, and particularly the work of feminist philosophers Donna Haraway (1991) and Rosi Braidotti (1997), to intervene into archaeological interpretation and its modernist representational frameworks. She demonstrates that, by using embodied digital technologies (e.g. virtual and augmented reality), we can creatively transgress boundaries between humans and non-humans, the past and the present, to focus on processes of becoming. She deploys the figures of the avatar (The OKAPI Island in Second Life reconstruction of Çatalhöyük), the monster (Voices Re/Cognition, a 2014 Heritage Jam project), and the machine (liminal entities, creatures inhabiting borderlands) to illustrate this.

Multisensorial emotive evocations are the focus of the articles by Ruth Tringham and Sara Perry. Ruth Tringham discusses the emotive power of storytelling and the problem posed by putting words into the mouths of the long-dead. But 'without speech, how are we archaeologists and the broader public to imagine the intangibles of the deep past (emotions, affect, gender, senses)?', she asks. Her approach is to embrace ambiguity and explore alternatives to speech (i.e. non-discursive practices with less cultural baggage) in creating fictive narratives about the past. Drawing on the work of composer György Ligeti, linguists, experimental psychologists, and ASMR (Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response) performers, she uses digital media to explore the emotive power of vocal non-verbal interjections and utterances to forge the multisensorial, emotional engagement of audiences in three experiments linked to Neolithic contexts from Britain (Orkney), Serbia, and Turkey.

Sara Perry discusses recent efforts in creating a more affective archaeology, its potential for achieving a truly socially beneficial professional practice, and the role of digital technologies in advancing these undertakings. She makes a strong case for the capacity of archaeological and cultural heritage sites to 'enchant' (*sensu* Bennett, 2001) and presents a multi-stranded conceptual approach for generating enchantment with the archaeological record amongst both the specialist *and* the broader public. She discusses one strand of this model, facilitated dialogue, through two case studies developed within the European

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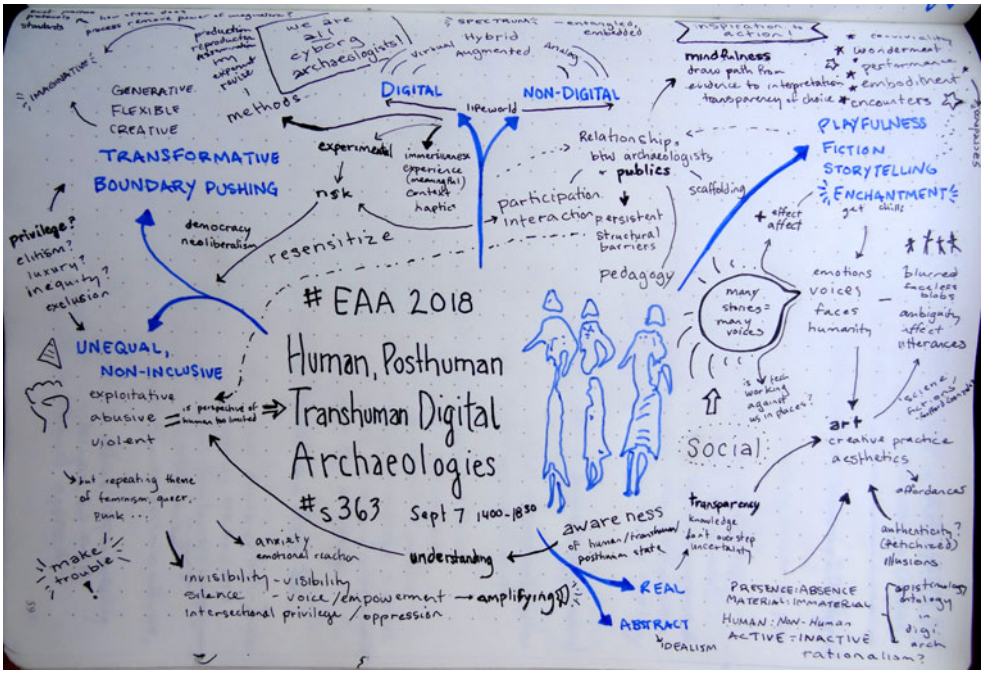


Figure 1. *Discursive notes from the 2018 EAA session 'Human, Posthuman, Transhuman'* Digital Archaeologies. Drawn and annotated by Katherine Cook, University of Montreal.

Commission-funded EMOTIVE Project. These are the experiences developed at the site of Çatalhöyük in Turkey (exploring egalitarian practices) and the English cathedral of York Minster (facilitating critical dialogue between strangers on contemporary social issues).

As Morgan argues in her manifesto, it is necessary to make machines visible to understand how we co-create our experience. Arguably, the adoption of digital technology within archaeology contributes towards a transhuman agenda (i.e. techno-utopian visions on the use of technology to achieve human progression). In his article, William Caraher provides a much needed historical perspective and critique of the transhuman condition of archaeological practices by drawing on the wide body of assemblage thought, and particularly on Ivan Illich, Jacques Ellul, and Gilles Deleuze. He argues that current trends in digital practices risk alienating and de-territorializing archaeological labour and proposes a series of strategies for resistance: unstructured creativity (Punk Archaeology), challenging the expectations of technological efficiency (Slow Archaeology), and the consideration of the human consequences of our technology (Archaeology of Care).

Annie Danis makes a key contribution to the critical assessment of transhuman practices, particularly by using the affordances of digital technologies to develop engaged research. As a case study she presents the Berkeley-Abiquiú Collaborative Archaeology (BACA) project. This is a collaborative survey project taking place in the American Southwest which deploys an open-source digital field recording system for 'paperless' recording. As Danis explains, the affordances of their digital data collection approach *affected* their relationship with time. Using the time afforded to them by the digital field

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recording they produced an hypermediated and augmented media object (a 'zine' or hand-made magazine) informed by their experiences of digital data collection, now reinterpreted through their embodied experience of place. In short, digital technologies can play a relevant mediatory role in engaged research, including the production of intergenerational knowledge and the analog representation of participants' experience in the project.

Further critical appraisal of transhumanism and digital scholarship is presented by Katherine Cook. She discusses powerful uses of digital technology to promote inclusivity via 'Do-It-Yourself' style disruption and activism that creatively challenges normative representations of people in the past and the present. But, as she clearly exposes, open, web-based heritage projects facilitate pervasive structures of privilege, inequity, inaccessibility, and abuse. Cook proposes the adoption of a series of strategic applications of digital technologies to achieve a balance between public profiles and individual-focussed translational storytelling, and the associated personal and professional risks, with efforts to promote, support, and protect marginalized archaeologists and communities.

Collectively, these papers are a provocation to rethink normative practices in analog and digital archaeology before they become comfortably ossified. The papers describe play, experimentation, transgression, hope, and care as forming the basis of a posthuman archaeology and invite future researchers to engage with this work as a form of resistance. Queer, weird, monstrous, fun archaeology will never be as lauded or rewarded as mainstream digging and lab work; but it is vital to the creative lifeblood of the discipline. The sparking Catherine wheel will keep turning, inviting a new cycle of archaeological theorists to (re)imagine the complexities of archaeological interpretation. But perhaps we can stop spinning through these endless turns and start kindling revolutions instead.

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