

Archaeo-Ethnography, Auto-Archaeology: Introducing Archaeologies of the Contemporary Past

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ABSTRACT

After significant research effort and publications over the course of a decade, a new generation of writings and research into archaeologies of the contemporary past is beginning to emerge, with a social and political awareness that appears more acute and more focused than before. Perhaps it is not too much of an exaggeration to say that this new generation of contemporary archaeologies can contribute in some small way to addressing specific problems and challenges that face contemporary and future society. In this introduction we begin to touch on this possibility, and introduce the papers and authors that explore it in further depth.

Résumé: Après l'effort de recherche significatif et des publications réalisées lors d'une décennie, une nouvelle génération d'écrits et de recherches dans les archéologies du passé contemporain commence à faire jour, avec une conscience sociale et politique qui apparaît plus aiguë et plus concentrée qu'auparavant. Peut-être n'est-ce pas trop exagéré de dire que cette nouvelle génération d'archéologies contemporaines peut contribuer d'une certaine façon, bien que restreinte, pour répondre aux problèmes et défis spécifiques aux problèmes auxquels feront face la société contemporaine et à venir. Dans cette introduction nous commençons à nous rendre compte de cette possibilité et de présenter les articles qui les explorent plus en profondeur.

Resumen: Tras el importante esfuerzo de investigación y publicación realizado en el transcurso de una década, está empezando a surgir una nueva generación de escritos y estudios de arqueología sobre el pasado contemporáneo, con una conciencia social y política que parece más aguda y más centrada que nunca. Tal vez no exageramos si decimos que esta

nueva generación de arqueologías contemporáneas puede contribuir en cierta —aunque escasa— medida a solucionar problemas y dificultades específicas que afronta la sociedad actual y del mañana. En esta introducción empezamos hablando de esta posibilidad y presentamos los trabajos y los autores que lo analizan con más detalle.

KEYWORDS

Archaeology, Contemporary past, Archaeo-ethnography, Auto-archaeology

Introduction

The archaeology of the recent and contemporary past—that is, the archaeology of places and events that relate to the period of recent or living memory—is a dynamic new field which engages critically with what it means to be ‘us’, with the politics of late-modernity, and with the nature, shape and relevance of archaeology as a contemporary research practice. A series of key publications and studies over the past 10 years have sought to develop the archaeology of the recent and contemporary past as a distinct stream of studies. At the same time, heritage practitioners have begun to pay attention to 20th and 21st century heritage as a logical extension of representative and landscape approaches to heritage more generally. After almost a decade since the publication of two key books central to the establishment of the archaeology of the contemporary past as a specific field of study in the English-speaking world—*Matter, Materiality and Modern Culture* edited by Graves-Brown (2000b), and *Archaeologies of the Contemporary Past* edited by Buchli and Lucas (2001d)—this special guest-edited volume of *Archaeologies* brings together papers that provide a snapshot of the current ‘state of play’ in archaeological studies of the recent and contemporary past.

As Buchli (2007a:115) points out, archaeologists have long taken an interest in contemporary material culture, dating back to the early part of the 20th century and including Pitt-Rivers’ 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 (accepting a conservative and literal definition of archaeology, as something that should concern itself only with that which is ancient, or ‘archaic’). Within the history of archaeological research it is possible to isolate two principal influences on the establishment of a field of archaeology concerned with the contemporary world: the

ethnoarchaeological interests which began as part of the 'New Archaeology' in the 1960s and 1970s (and which has continued to influence the archaeology of the recent past as it has developed over the past decade), and the inversion of the archaeological lens to concentrate on the politics of archaeology which characterised the post-processual reaction to the New Archaeology of the 1980s and 1990s. Another important influence was the emergence of the more anthropologically focused field of material culture studies during the 1980s and 1990s (see further discussion in Harrison and Schofield, forthcoming).

During the 1970s, the significant potential for the archaeological study of the recent and contemporary period was demonstrated as part of a general interest in ethnoarchaeological studies, largely by North American archaeologists working within the 'New Archaeology' framework. Two milestone publications, *Modern Material Culture Studies* (Rathje 1979) and *Modern Material Culture: The archaeology of us* (Gould and Schiffer 1981), grew out of 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 the authors of *Modern Material Culture Studies* and papers in *Modern Material Culture: The archaeology of us* were largely concerned with the description and analysis of contemporary material cultures in modern, industrialised societies. Nonetheless, there was a lack of agreement, particularly amongst authors represented in the edited volume *Modern Material Culture*, over whether the archaeological study of contemporary material culture should be seen to be an ends in itself, or whether the main aim of such a study was the generation of models for understanding past human behaviour. This initial North American efflorescence of research on the archaeology of modern material culture was largely not followed up by the establishment of further research projects. While research by Rathje (Rathje and Murphy 1992; Rathje 2001), Gould (2007) and Schiffer (1991, 2000) continued, most ethnoarchaeological and modern material culture studies within archaeology throughout the 1980s and early 1990s remained focussed on traditional forms of technology, and on the use of ethnoarchaeological models for the explanation of cultural change in the past.

A new interest in contemporary material culture emerged during the 1980s in Britain as post-processual archaeologists turned to contemporary material culture as case studies against which to test social archaeological models. For example, Hodder (1987) undertook a study of the social meaning of bow ties in a contemporary British pet food factory, as a model for understanding the relationship between social practices, material culture

and meaning in human societies. Shanks and Tilley (1987:172–239) undertook a detailed examination of the design of beer cans in England and Sweden, suggesting that differences existed in the degree of complexity and elaboration of designs. In addition to these particular post-processual studies of contemporary material culture, another important aspect of post-processualism in the development of the archaeology of the contemporary past was the way in which it turned the archaeological lens on the process of ‘doing’ archaeology itself, particularly in terms of its political ramifications. At the same time as these important developments in post-processual archaeology were developing in Britain and the US (as well as other countries such as Australia, South Africa and Latin America), an interest in modern material culture based on more anthropological methodologies was also emerging in Britain (e.g. Douglas and Isherwood 1979; Gell 1988, 1992, 1996, 1998; Miller 1984a, b, 1987, 1995, 1998a, b, 2001, 2005a, b; see further discussion in Buchli 2002), the US (e.g. Appadurai 1986; Kopytoff 1986) and France (e.g. Lemonnier 1986, 1992). At this time too, significant early publications on archaeologies of the recent past began to emerge in France (e.g. Schnapp 1997; Olivier 2000), and Latin America (e.g. Freitas 1999; Crossland 2000, 2002). It was from within this context that Graves-Brown’s edited volume *Matter, Materiality and Modern Culture* (2000b) was developed, followed shortly after by the publication of Buchli and Lucas’ edited volume *Archaeologies of the contemporary past* (2001d). These two volumes—with their specific focus on the analysis of modern material culture and the archaeology of the very recent past for what it can tell us about ourselves (rather than the deeper past)—have acted as key texts for the field of the archaeology of the contemporary past as it has emerged in the English-speaking world over the last decade.

Since the new Millennium, the archaeology of the contemporary past has developed into a distinct field of study. Growing out of the archaeology of the First and Second World Wars, and then the Cold War, the field has emerged as one in which archaeology is employed in the study of increasingly recent places, objects and events. A significant step in establishing the recent and contemporary past within current archaeological practices was the establishment of the Contemporary and Historical Archaeology in Theory (CHAT) group in Bristol in 2003 (see www.contemp-hist-arch.ac.uk and further discussion in Piccini and Holtorf 2009:19). This group now hosts an annual conference which considers issues relating to both historical archaeology and the archaeology of the recent and contemporary past, and has acted as a forum for the development and presentation of much of the UK—and a significant proportion of the US—based research which has subsequently come to define this field. Papers from two of these conferences have been published (McAtackney et al. 2007) while another is in preparation. A recent

collection by Holtorf and Piccini (2009) and an important critical review by González-Ruibal (2008) have also added significantly to the growing number of archaeological studies of the recent and contemporary past to emerge over the past decade from Australia (e.g. Byrne and Nugent 2004; Gorman 2005, 2009; Harrison 2004; Paterson et al. 2003), South Africa (e.g. Hall 2001, 2005, 2006; Hall and Bombardella 2005; papers in Murray et al. 2007), Latin America (e.g. Funari and Zarankin 2006; Zarankin and Funari 2008), North America (e.g. Beck et al. 2009; Pearson and Mullins 1999; Gould 2007; Rathje 2001; Schiffer 2000), Sweden (e.g. Burström 2007; Campbell and Ulin 2004; Holtorf 2005, 2007, 2008, 2009), France (e.g. Olivier 2001, 2004), Spain (e.g. Ferrándiz 2006; Gonzalez-Ruibal 2005, 2007) and the UK (e.g. Buchli 1999, 2007a, 2007b; Bradley et al 2004; Hicks 2003; Graves-Brown 2007a, b, 2009; Penrose with contributors 2007; Symonds 2004).

Several of the papers in this journal volume (Barker and Lamb; Broderick et al.; Frederick; Gorman; Harrison; Schofield) were originally presented in the session 'Archaeo-ethnography: The archaeology of the recent and contemporary past', at the *New Ground: Australian archaeologies* conference held at the University of Sydney in 2007. The aim of that session was to consider ways in which archaeologists were approaching the archaeology of the late twentieth century and the early part of the twenty-first. The concept of ethnoarchaeology, or the study of contemporary material culture and behaviour to interpret the archaeological record, is a familiar one to archaeologists. Our aim with this session was to ask what happens when we invert this pursuit by taking an archaeological approach to the recent or contemporary past. We asked authors to consider what fresh perspectives on the supposedly 'familiar' past (after Graves-Brown 2000a) emerge from the study of contemporary material culture. To this original set of papers, we have added two new works (Bagwell; Badcock and Johnson) which round out the geographical coverage of the journal volume, and which broaden the range of themes and case studies which the authors address. The collection of papers stands alongside those in the recent edited volume by Holtorf and Piccini (2009) as a current cross section of the field of the archaeology of the recent and contemporary past, and its potential for engaging cross-disciplinary audiences and addressing topics of widespread public concern.

Here we provide some context for what follows by drawing the reader's attention to a number of themes which emerge from this collection, and their relationship with the broader themes which inform the field as it is currently developing. The papers contained within this collection touch on several of the themes mentioned by previous authors, while suggesting others. In particular, we would highlight the themes of reversed meanings and modern material culture studies; the subaltern; militarism, protest and

conflict; human rights, disaster or forensic archaeologies; interdisciplinary approaches to the archaeology of everyday life; and the idea of an archaeology of virtual worlds, of the late-modern 'place' and super-modern 'non-place'. This list of themes is not intended to be definitive in any sense, but merely an indication of some current areas of interest and concern. More comprehensive coverage of the themes which characterise the archaeology of the contemporary past can be found in Graves-Brown (2000a), Buchli and Lucas (2001a, b, c), González-Ruibal (2008) and Harrison and Schofield (forthcoming).

Reversed Meanings and Modern Material Culture Studies

In December 1976 in Britain, four young men swore openly on prime-time TV, shocking the nation to its core. *The Daily Telegraph* headline described how '4-Letter Words Rock TV'; *Daily Express*: 'Fury at Filthy TV Chat'. Punk had arrived on an unsuspecting but, arguably, a deserving nation. Their legacy is a fascinating one, in that it reversed meanings and levels of acceptability, in music for example and fashion. For punks there was a desire to constantly display the division they felt between 'us' and 'them', expressed largely through a form of self-presentation, often quite literally as walking rubbish sculptures. Things that most people would discard were used or worn, and items often placed out of context: safety pins as earrings for example, and zips in trousers where they served no useful purpose. In that summer in the mid 1970s, the world changed, and as archaeologists this is a point at which our reading of material culture through the analogy of contemporary usage takes a completely new and unforeseen direction (see further discussion in Schofield 2000 and Hebdige 1988).

Similar reversals have occurred since, with the transient, flimsy and tacky artefacts of Nu-Rave, and the reversed meanings of acid house dummies, for example. How then should we regard these reversals in modern material culture? Key here is the degree to which materiality reflects social diversity, and specifically alternative views and perspectives. The point of punk was that it deliberately reversed perspective, twisting it through 180° to the point almost of polar opposite. Punk material culture, encountered archaeologically if you will, could be read in a normative, conventional and literal way, but leaving open the possibility of contrary views. It is queer, in some respects, turning convention on its head and ensuring the possibility of alternative and perhaps radically opposing views and interpretations.

This problem of reversed meanings deriving from a consideration of late 20th century counter cultural movements raises issues for archaeologists of the contemporary past which are touched on by Ursula Frederick's paper

'Revolution is the New Black'. Here, Frederick considers the rise of contemporary graffiti art in Australia, and its relationship to Indigenous Australian rock art imagery. In her discussion of the stencil revolution and wandering *wandjina* she demonstrates the complexities of image-making practices and meaning construction in contemporary urban societies, and the multi-faceted relationship between past and present, and colonial and postcolonial relations which underlie them. Her reading of contemporary graffiti art as reflecting a range of meanings and functions including play, protest, defacement, commemoration and conflict suggests the need for archaeologists of the contemporary past to consider the complexity of meaning embodied by objects of modern material culture and the range of often discordant images which accompany them.

Subaltern Archaeologies

Buchli and Lucas (2001a, b, c) mapped out a series of themes which they saw as characterising the archaeology of the contemporary past and which have been very influential on the development of the field. They pointed to the linked themes of production/consumption, remembering/forgetting, disappearance/disclosure, and presence/absence, in which they emphasised the role of the archaeology of the contemporary past in "bringing forward or indeed materialising that which is excessive, forgotten or concealed" (2001b:171). They suggest that as a result of this role, "this body of archaeological work begins to appear qualitatively different from more conventional archaeological projects and other disciplines working on the recent past" (2001b:171). A theme which was 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 which are constantly being overwritten by dominant narratives.

These issues of the archaeology of the subaltern are raised in the papers by Bryce Barker and Lara Lamb and by Rodney Harrison. Barker and Lamb describe the archaeology of a Great Depression camp for unemployed men, established at Toowoomba in Queensland, Australia during the 1930s. Its ephemeral archaeological signature is read as reflecting the influence of mainstream middle class values and ideals regarding the difference between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor; nonetheless, they conclude that it is also a potent material symbol of a work ethic which was central to notions of dignity, respect and the moral development of individuals. Harrison's paper also focuses on working class housing, considering the potential contribution which archaeology might make to understanding the British welfare state through a study of its material

worlds. The paper suggests that a narrow focus on the built environment of the welfare state cannot explain the circumstances under which the welfare state fails, suggesting that public housing needs to be considered as part of a broader landscape which also includes the spaces of homelessness. His paper represents part of a wider project to consider the ways in which archaeology might engage with social justice issues and to explore the nature of exclusion and the subaltern in contemporary societies.

The Archaeology of Militarism, Protest and Conflict

An important area of research for archaeologists working on the recent past has been the archaeology of ‘super-modern’ 20th-century conflict (after González-Ruibal 2008; e.g. Schofield 2005; Schofield et al. 2002; Schofield et al. 2006; González-Ruibal 2005, 2006, 2007). The First World War has formed a major focus for this work (e.g. Saunders 2003, 2004, 2007; Robertson and Kenyon 2008). Most of this archaeological work has focussed on the Western Front, with only limited investigations elsewhere, in Britain, northern Italy and Gallipoli in Turkey (Saunders 2007:201). For example, Saunders (2001, 2002) discusses the excavation of Pilckem Ridge on the Ypres Salient battlefield, undertaken by the Institute for the Archaeological Heritage of the Flemish Community (IAP). This ultimately led to the establishment of the first dedicated Department of First World War Archaeology as part of the IAP in Belgium in 2003 (DeWilde et al 2004). Saunders (2007) summarises the various phases of Great War archaeology, beginning with the work of the Imperial War Graves Commission and various amateur groups which led to the beginning of professional archaeological research by French, Belgian and later British archaeologists in the 1990s and early 2000s.

Another significant area of recent attention has been the impact of the Second World War in Britain, with a concentration of effort initially in documenting site distributions, typologies and chronological frameworks through research undertaken in the National Archives (e.g. Dobinson et al. 1997). This major and long-lasting study has laid the foundation for subsequent projects, many of which are developer funded archaeological interventions on sites earmarked for future development. Other national surveys have included English Heritage’s National Mapping Programme, which is reviewing aerial photographic cover of the entire country, and many of the newly recorded sites are from this period, some surviving above-ground and others as buried archaeological signatures. English Heritage has also provided guidance for enthusiasts on such things as military aircraft crash sites and recording military wall art. Enthusiasts have also been the mainstay of a national study of anti-invasion defences—the

Defence of Britain Project. Work has continued apace in other countries too. In Australasia the War in the Pacific has been the subject of ongoing research, as it has in North America, and many northern European countries. It is interesting to note that much of this research was influenced by two situations that arose in France, where little such work has thus far been undertaken (but see Legendre 2001). One was the 50th anniversary of the D-Day Landings and associated events and celebrations, prompting a wider awareness of the iconic value of surviving bunkers; and another was an archaeological study of those bunkers published in the 1990s by a non-archaeologist, the urban theorist and philosopher Virilio (1994).

The Cold War period has also been the subject of significant academic attention, within the higher education and heritage sectors. Major overview studies have been published on the archaeology and architecture of this period (Cocroft and Thomas 2003; Beck 2002; Johnson 2002). As with earlier overviews, these led to further more detailed studies, of particular places or thematic and topic-based research, such as wall art for example (Cocroft et al. 2006). The archaeology of space, of space exploration and the Star Wars Programme of the Reagan Administration also has relevance here (Gorman and O'Leary 2007).

There is then the evidence of those that opposed militarism, and in fact the archaeology of protest and opposition is clearly centred on military sites and those of the Cold War specifically. For example, work has been undertaken on the archaeology of the Greenham Common protest camps near Newbury, England (Schofield 2009) and on the peace camps in Nevada, US (Beck et al. 2009; Schofield 2009). Both the Greenham and Nevada studies involved an attempt to ensure symmetry and balance in the way they construct and analyse the archaeological record. Despite some considerable difficulties in striking this balance it was essential that this was achieved. How could the military occupation of Greenham, especially in the 1980s, be understood without an appreciation of the archaeological traces that existed beyond the fence, and of the materiality of protest? Equally in Nevada, the significance of archaeology of the nuclear testing programmes, described in Beck (2002), can only be fully appreciated alongside the remains of the peace camps, the settlements of those that opposed these tests.

The new generation of studies in this area of research is represented here in papers by Anna Badcock and Robert Johnson, Alice Gorman, and Mick Broderick, Mark Cypher and Jim Macbeth. Badcock and Johnson's contribution documents the archaeology of the Lees Cross and Endcliffe environmental protest camp in Derbyshire, England. Established in 1999 and still occupied at the time of recording, this paper not only suggests ways of approaching the archaeology of contemporary protest and activism, but explores some of the issues raised by recording contemporary

'living' places. Where much archaeological research deals with places long abandoned, a central issue for the archaeology of the contemporary past is the documentation of places which often remain part of a dynamic contemporary landscape. The paper shows how activism and protest have become integrated into a contemporary landscape, and the ways in which such protest might be understood as a form of contemporary place-making.

Broderick, Cypher and Macbeth cover different ground in their focus on the tangible and intangible remains of Australia's Cold War and nuclear heritage. Their multidisciplinary project aims to provide opportunities to uncover, mediate and reflect on the histories, spaces and narratives surrounding former nuclear installations in central Australia. Their focus on contemporary material remains and their engagement with virtual imaging techniques reflects a growing trend within the heritage industry to employ digital technologies, whilst reflecting sensitively on the role of these new technologies in producing new engagements with, and perceptions of, these hidden and previously peripheral spaces in world history. Continuing this Cold War theme, Gorman resumes her work on the archaeology of space exploration, considering the methodological issues raised by 'doing' archaeology in space for a discipline dominated by a Cartesian model. Her case study of the archaeology of the Mir space station shows how celestial archaeology forces us to reconsider traditional archaeological notions such as 'site' and 'artefact', arguing that we need to develop new ways of thinking about the relationship between the earth and objects in orbital space to properly understand the archaeology of outer space.

Forensic, Human Rights and Disaster Archaeology

Gould (2007) defines a field of 'disaster' archaeology which deals with the urgent requirements of victim identification and scene investigation in the aftermath of mass fatality events. He distinguishes between disaster archaeology, human rights archaeology which is concerned with the definition and investigation of mass graves and the sites of mass executions which result from genocide and political 'disappearances', and forensic archaeology more generally, which is concerned with the investigation of crime scenes. We use the term 'forensic archaeology' in its most general sense to describe the application of archaeology to investigate questions of interest to the legal system, in particular criminal or civil law. In this sense, forensic archaeology might be linked in some ways to the work which is carried out by archaeologists on land rights claims with indigenous peoples

(e.g. papers in Lilley (ed.) 2000; papers in Harrison, McDonald and Veth (eds) 2005).

Although linked with the archaeology of conflict, forensic archaeologies have developed along far more specialised lines and exist as part of a slightly divergent intellectual trajectory to other forms of the archaeology of the contemporary past (see further discussion in Harrison and Schofield, forthcoming). It is an area which has seen major growth since the 1990s and particularly in the wake of the World Trade Centre disaster in 2001. We have seen an expansion of research in this field associated with the use of forensic archaeology in war crime and homicide trials (e.g. Doretti and Fondebrider 2001; Cox 2001; Sterenberg 2008; Cox et al 2008; Hunter and Cox 2005; Ferllini 2007; Steele 2008), and the establishment of the Forensic Archaeology Recovery Group (FAR) and its role in the 9/11 World Trade Centre disaster, the Station nightclub fire and Hurricane Katrina (Gould 2007). In Latin America, we have seen the emergence of a whole field of archaeology concerned with revealing the repressive military dictatorships and the material remains of state sponsored terror campaigns which occurred between 1960 and the early 1980s (e.g. Funari and Zarankin 2006; Zarankin and Funari 2008) which is connected closely with work in the field of forensic archaeology through its focus on the recovery of that which has been concealed and made forgotten, alongside the contemporary politics of memory. Similarly, Ballbé and Steadman (2008) describe the growth of forensic archaeology in Spain alongside human rights investigations associated with the Spanish Civil War.

Margaret Bagwell's paper 'After the Storm, destruction and reconstruction: the potential for an archaeology of Hurricane Katrina' reflects a similar concern with the role of archaeology in disaster recovery. She reflects on the gap between archaeological salvage undertaken in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, which caused severe destruction along the US Gulf coast from central Florida to Texas (and particularly in New Orleans) in 2005, and the potential for archaeology to perform a reparatory function through a focus on the everyday spaces of pre-cyclone life, as well as to document the material engagements of individuals with their transformed landscapes as part of the process of recovery. Her discussion of the newly formed significance of objects removed as part of the process of the cyclone clean up suggests that such items can become potent symbols of loss and powerful material negotiators in a process of community grief and recovery. The paper suggests the potential for archaeologies of the contemporary past to form an engaged and socially active force in the contemporary creation of collective memory.

Interdisciplinary Approaches to the Archaeology of Everyday Life

Papers in *Matter, Materiality and Modern Culture* (Graves-Brown 2000a, b) mapped out a different series of themes to those covered by the authors of *Archaeologies of the Contemporary Past* (Buchli and Lucas 2001d). In part, this was due to the fact that, although an archaeologist himself, Graves-Brown's volume was explicitly interdisciplinary, and focussed on the materiality of modern material culture (as a response to what he viewed as an emphasis on material objects as texts within conventional anthropological modern material culture studies), rather than its archaeology per se. Nonetheless, the volume contained a number of studies which were directly relevant to the archaeology of the contemporary past, and many of the ideas in the volume have influenced subsequent research on the archaeology of the contemporary past. Its authors stressed particularly the way in which the study of modern material culture can make the familiar unfamiliar, a theme which has subsequently been repeated by a number of contemporary archaeologists. This idea had previously been discussed by George Perec in *Species of Spaces* in terms of an 'anthropology of the endotic' (Perec 1997) which might rescue an understanding of the cultural and social workings of everyday life from the dustbin of history (see also Olivier 2000). The book also stressed the theme of mutuality—the idea that culture is an “emergent property of the relationship between persons and things” (Graves-Brown 2000a:4)—and the relationship between functionality and power (e.g. see Graves-Brown 2007a, b). The focus on the material qualities of contemporary artefacts and the influence of material objects on contemporary culture was influential on later studies in the archaeology of the contemporary past, which have tended to foreground the human experience of technology and material things.

The importance of the interdisciplinary nature of the archaeology of the contemporary past is demonstrated by the paper by Broderick, Cypher and Macbeth, whose work demonstrates the range of different disciplines which are engaged by a study of modern material culture. By contrast, John Schofield's paper provides a consideration of the archaeology of the sort of 'everyday' space with which we might all be familiar, in this case, his former office in London. We might consider this to be a sort of 'auto-archaeology' in its particular focus on the space in which the author had worked. This important trend in the archaeology of the contemporary past to consider the archaeology of 'us' was present as early as the 1970s in the work of Rathje (1979; see also 2001 and Rathje and Murphy 1992) and Gould and Schiffer (1981), but has subsequently become an area of increasing concern, featuring in the work of many archaeologists but perhaps exemplified by the work of Holtorf (2004), Finn (2001) and Ulin (2009).

Virtual Worlds, Place and Non-place

Anthropologist Marc Augé 1995; see also 2002 and 2004 and Merriman's 2004 critique) uses the term 'non-place' to describe a whole series of spaces in contemporary society—airport lounges, shopping malls, motorways—which he suggests are to be distinguished from 'places' in the sense in which these spaces are not relational, historical or concerned with the establishment of a sense of identity (all those things which characterise the traditional social anthropological interest in 'place'). These 'non-places' are primarily associated with the experience of travel or transit, and reflect the simultaneous time/space expansion and compression which he associates with late-modernity. Many authors have pointed to the changes in modern western societies which have come about during the mid to late twentieth century as heralding a new, and distinct period of history. In the same way that we are used to thinking of the modern age, or 'modernity', as relating to the outcomes of the Enlightenment and the Industrial revolution, some authors (e.g. Lyotard [1979] 1984; Harvey 1990; Jameson 1991) have suggested we use the terms 'postmodernity' and/or 'supermodernity' to define distinct historical periods which can be seen as separate to modernity. They point to a series of phenomenon which seem to mark the late twentieth century as separate to that which came before it (see also Appadurai 1996), including

- the growth of new communicative technologies and electronic media;
- the globalisation of technology, and its association with altered patterns of production and consumption;
- the widespread experience of mass migration and the associated rise of transnationalism (in terms of capital, technology, labour and corporations);
- new modes of capitalism involving more flexible forms of capital accumulation and distribution (see further discussion in Harrison and Schofield, forthcoming).

One of the key aspects of late-modernity revolves around the proliferation of new communicative technologies and their associated impacts on the experience of time and space, what Jean Baudrillard refers to as the development of a 'hyper-reality' (1994, 1995). Central to these changes has been the rise of Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) and virtual experience, part of the work of the imagination as a social force discussed by Appadurai in *Modernity at Large* (1996; see further discussion in Harrison and Schofield, forthcoming). While anthropologists have begun to explore the ways in which CMC is giving rise to new forms of virtual

communities and the sociocultural implications of new communication technologies (e.g. Hine 2000; Miller and Slater 2000; Fabian 2002; Wilson and Peterson 2002; Eisenlohr 2004; Zongming 2005; Boellstorff 2008), there has been little discussion of an archaeology of virtual communities. However, recently archaeologists have begun to explore the role which archaeology might play in the exploration of the internet, new communicative technologies and virtual worlds (e.g. Harrison 2009; Graves-Brown 2009, forthcoming), suggesting that 'intangible artefacts' such as web pages (Graves-Brown, forthcoming) and virtual reality avatars (Harrison 2009) are as important for archaeologists to study as tangible ones. These issues of the relationship between the virtual and the 'real' and space and non-place are touched upon by Gorman's contribution which completes this collection. Her discussion of the archaeology of space exploration not only suggests new ways of approaching archaeology on earth, but also raises the complex relationship between the spaces of the 'virtual' and the 'real' which exist in contemporary post-industrial societies.

Conclusions

This collection of papers serves as a current cross-section of archaeological studies of the contemporary past. We hope it presents ideas that provoke thought and reaction and will encourage others to explore the new frontiers of archaeo-ethnography and auto-archaeology. This field has itself largely been a product of the 21st century, a time for reflection and a reassessment of what we as archaeologists actually do. But there is more to it than simple reflection. The collection presented here stands also as a statement of a new generation of research, a field that is increasingly interdisciplinary, extending into the further reaches of human experience (space, ultimately but also the interstitial places such as those waymarked by graffiti tags and the abandoned spaces of contemporary office blocks) and representative also of a new generation of researchers, those for whom the earlier works of Buchli and Lucas (2001d) and Graves-Brown (2000b) are established and foundational texts. In the new Millennium we are seeing the emergence of a new generation of researchers, whose findings and thoughts are appropriately exploratory, seeking out the potential for applications beyond the traditional realms of archaeology. There is also a feeling here that archaeology of the contemporary past can touch people's lives, and has social relevance and meaning, in ways that may not exist for archaeologies of earlier time periods. In short, archaeologies of the contemporary past matter in ways that we may not even have begun to imagine. That is what makes the subject so exciting, and so important.

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