

Assembling “Effective Archaeologies” toward Equitable Futures

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ABSTRACT An urgency compels us to engage how archaeology relates to contemporary situations and future dilemmas as citizens anxiously contemplate their futures. We see “crowd-sourced” efforts to define pressing questions. A welter of theoretical approaches promises new insight into our relationally configured worlds. We couple awareness of the situated character of knowledge with a commitment to its empirical grounding. In light of this contemporary frame, I explore principles of an “effective archaeology” that imagines its “impacts” beyond narrow “uses.” By attending to how we make facts, archives, and narratives; by placing Western knowledge in productive dialogue with knowledge grounded in other epistemologies; and by embracing a disciplinary responsibility to expand and enlarge imaginings of futures through evidentially robust and critically engaged practice, effective archaeologies hold promise to build toward more equitable futures. [*archaeology, epistemology, ontology, knowledge production, collaboration*]

RESUMEN Una urgencia nos compele a comprometernos con cómo la arqueología se relaciona con las situaciones contemporáneas y los dilemas futuros en la medida en que ciudadanos contemplan ansiosamente sus futuros. Vemos esfuerzos “crowd-sourced” (solicitando ideas de una comunidad grande) para definir cuestiones apremiantes. Una mezcla de aproximaciones teóricas promete nuevas ideas en nuestros mundos configurados relacionamente. Combinamos concientización del carácter situado del conocimiento con un compromiso a su base empírica. A la luz de este marco contemporáneo, exploro principios de una “arqueología efectiva” que imagina sus “impactos” más allá de sus “usos” estrechos. Al atender cómo producimos hechos, archivos y narrativas; al colocar el conocimiento occidental en diálogo productivo con conocimiento basado en otras epistemologías; y al abrazar una responsabilidad disciplinaria para expandir y ampliar las imaginaciones de futuros a través de una práctica críticamente comprometida y evidencialmente robusta, arqueologías efectivas sostienen la promesa de construir hacia futuros más equitativos. [*arqueología, epistemología, ontología, producción de conocimiento, colaboración*]

These are challenging but also exciting times for anthropological archaeology. Among the challenges are utilitarian neoliberal sensibilities that provide a yardstick for disciplinary value (Stengers 2011). Today’s academic landscape is normalized as a competitive marketplace in which universities vie for students, reputation, and patentable

research. Delivery of our academic mission relies on exploitative labor practices. Government-sector practice is subject to bottom-line assessments, with heritage and its regulation viewed as impediments to prosperity and growth (Coombe 2013). Cultural resource management practitioners navigate a marketplace configured by development and its

imperatives (Cumberpatch and Roberts 2012; Hogg, Welch, and Ferris 2017; Hutchings and Dent 2017; Ndoro, Chirikure, and Deacon 2018), and public archaeology is pressured to demonstrate “value for money” (Flatman 2012, 293–94) while muting critical engagement with contemporary socio-political-economic arrangements (Matsuda 2016; Segobye 2008). Regardless of location, we are called to account within terms and metrics shaped by these sensibilities in an enlarging “audit culture” (Strathern 2000). Yet, more fundamentally and righteously—and herein lies the “exciting juncture” (Atalay 2012, 11)—we are called to account, by other principles and social groups that travel under the sign of “community,” for all that term’s gloss of the diverse composition and interests within a community. We are asked to state more clearly and forcefully than ever what archaeology brings to the table, what are our “broader impacts” (Ion and Barrett 2016; Kintigh et al. 2014; Little and Shackel 2014; Minnis et al. 2017; Pikirayi 2015; Rockman 2012; Sabloff 2008). Thus, during times when citizens anxiously contemplate futures in relation to intensifying flows of people and things—perceived by some as a headlong rush into “catastrophic times” (Stengers 2015)—we feel both compelled and persuaded to account for how archaeological studies of the past are useful in the present and for the future.

My aim here is to sketch the contours of “effective” rather than “useful” archaeology. To be “useful” trains attention narrowly on the applicability of archaeology’s outcomes or *products*. Aspiring to be “effective” widens our vision, encouraging reflection on *processes* of knowledge production that enlarge or constrain understanding, with implications for how we imagine future possibilities and our discipline’s value beyond funding-agency “impacts.” Drawing on select examples, I discuss approaches to archaeological knowledge production that, through study of past contexts, enlarge present-day and future possibilities. Doing so requires that we critically engage the genealogies of our foundational concepts and analytical objects; pay ongoing attention to our making of facts, archives, and narratives; place knowledge generated through Western ways of knowing in productive dialogue with knowledge grounded in other epistemologies; exercise strategic and ongoing awareness of how present and future possibilities are anchored in understandings of the past; and embrace a disciplinary responsibility to expand and enlarge those possibilities through evidentially robust, critically engaged practice.

I write as an archaeologist trained in a North American anthropological tradition, decades into a career spent in academic institutions engaging in research and graduate and undergraduate teaching. My research has drawn on interdisciplinary perspectives and multiple sources to study global connections in relation to West African village life (Stahl 2015), and I have worked in and with the same small but diverse communities in Banda, Ghana, since the 1980s. The “effective archaeology” sketched here builds on my experiences as a researcher and educator at the same time as it draws inspiration from the work of diverse colleagues

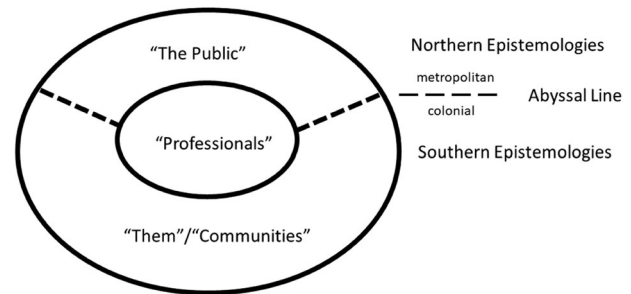


FIGURE 1. Audiences for archaeology as imagined through the “abyssal line” (Santos 2016).

in varied world regions. Rather than ground my discussion in a specific case study or region, my aim is to highlight principles gleaned from broader disciplinary and interdisciplinary debates to serve as signposts as we work to enhance anthropological archaeology’s twenty-first-century contributions. My examples are necessarily select, the principles drawn from the work of many, and the elements of effective archaeology intended to serve as the basis for nimble and reflective rather than formulaic practice.

TO WHOM ARE WE ACCOUNTABLE?

As archaeologists, we must ask to whom we speak, or *with* whom we are in conversation as we reflect on our “broader impacts” and accountability, while being aware that “we” glosses diverse professional and personal locations. Sketched in a cartoonish fashion, archaeology’s default audience has long been the professional communities to whom we are held accountable through peer review and received ways of knowing (Figure 1). Historically, these communities authorized our particular forms of expertise. In later decades of the twentieth century, there was growing concern to speak to and be heard by “broader publics,” whether as justification for government funding or motivated by a desire to contribute to the “betterment of humankind” (Spriggs 2013, 291). For the most part, this imagined public “circle of we” (di Leonardo 1998, 82) excluded colonized peoples (“them”) whose pasts many archaeologists studied (Andah 1995; Pikirayi 2015; Pwiti and Ndoro 1999). “We” was conceptually bounded by an “abyssal line” (Santos 2016, 2018) that imagined the metropolitan (“Western”) as separate from the colonial, grounding the visible (metropolitan, civilized) in what was rendered invisible (colonial, savage) and creating hierarchies of knowledge that undergirded Western scholarship.

Over recent decades, we have seen a broadening of the “circle of we” to include “community” as an audience but more fundamentally as participants in shared work. On the metropolitan side of Santos’s abyssal line, community archaeology has endeavored to involve “the public” in research and interpretation. Initial enthusiasm has been tempered by a growing recognition of the challenges in doing so (Moshenska and Dhanjal 2012), but ongoing creative efforts foster

archaeology as a tool for civic engagement in heritage work (Little and Shackel 2014).

On the colonial side of the abyssal line, we see emergent disciplinary practice that shifts from imagining community as an “audience”—a term that implies watching and listening—to collaborative, decolonizing research practices (Atalay 2012; Cipolla, Quinn, and Levy 2019; Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson 2008; Gnecco and Ayala 2011; McNiven 2016; Schmidt and Pikirayi 2016; Silliman 2008; Watkins 2000). This has proven transformative in cases where scholars have engaged in building the substantive relationships on which successful initiatives depend (e.g., Croes, Carriere, and Stapp 2018; Lyons et al. 2016). However, community archaeology is a label that can paper over power relations within communities and the complex relationships of present-day peoples to the archaeological landscapes within which they dwell (Chirikure and Pwiti 2008; Smith and Waterton 2009; Thiaw 2003). So too can it serve as a gloss for work continuous with the abyssal line—for example, when archaeology is imagined as an economic salve through tourism initiatives that reproduce metropolitan/colonial frames through “growth” and “development” metaphors (Herrera 2013b; Pyburn 2017; Santos 2018, 24), or communities are imagined only as “audiences” for our work. Thus, as scholars, we should not assume that “public” and “community” are “concepts . . . neutral enough, and universal enough, to travel” (Green 2013, 40; see also Jopela and Fredriksen 2015) as we seek to produce more symmetrical forms of knowledge that do not leave us “holding all the cards of truth” (Green 2015, 241).

While community-engaged research has provided one arena for considering archaeology’s relevance, some archaeologists have weighed in more broadly on questions of our “use” and “impacts” over recent years, and increasingly so with future-oriented responses (Dewan and Rothenberg 2016; Hegmon 2017; McGovern 2018; Mizoguchi 2015; Sassaman 2012; Wurst and Mrozowski 2014). What can we learn from the past that helps “us” navigate the future? How can lessons gleaned be applied to (optimistically) improve futures or (pessimistically) avert catastrophe (Kintigh et al. 2014; Smith 2010; cf. Cobb 2014)? Archaeology is not alone in this concern, with the future a focus of burgeoning scholarly attention (Adam 2010; Appadurai 2013; Ferry 2016; Kleist and Jansen 2016). While some archaeologists make a case for how our work can contribute positively by creating “usable” pasts for sustainable futures (Lane 2011, 2015; Logan et al. 2019; Ogundiran 2019; cf. Stump 2013), others take a more sober view of whether archaeology *should* be “useful” given the uses of archaeology in the past in which it was “harnessed for ill” (Dawdy 2009, 132).

To be clear, archaeology does yield insights that are applicable—of use—in the present. Amanda Logan (2016) argues for the importance of archaeology as an “alternative archive of food security” that illuminates how people of Banda, Ghana, avoided famine in the face of a centuries-long drought by relying on indigenous grains that are uncommon

today. Her insights can apply to policy and practice today as people confront changing climate (Logan et al. 2019), and work like hers has inspired a new “Usable Pasts Forum” as a regular feature of the *African Archaeological Review* (Ogundiran 2019). In a similar vein, Kathleen Morrison (2015) makes a case for how richly contextualized material histories can inform South Asian resource management strategies in the present and future. Jeremy Sabloff (2008) has made an impassioned case for what he argues should be an “action archaeology” based on such work. These studies underscore that archaeology can be “useful,” and many policies regarding present and future practice would benefit from archaeology’s scalar perspectives, particularly in reference to climate change and resource scarcity (Flatman 2012, 291–92; Rockman 2012). But as Mark Pluciennik (2009) argues, archaeology is probably not the best place to start if your primary motivation is to change the world. We should own, he observes, that doing archaeology is “intellectual fun” (153; see also Mizoguchi 2015, 20) and, more importantly, that our discipline can spark wonder and lifelong learning among nonprofessionals (Minnis et al. 2017, 29). We should not discount this aspect of our discipline as an avenue for leveraging what may be among our key contributions: to enlarge possibilities and provide a platform for forging presents and imagining futures that are “otherwise,” as I explore below.

HOW ARE WE ACCOUNTABLE?

Rather than wade further into the debate over whether or how archaeology is *useful*, I shift the question, building on Michel-Rolph Trouillot’s (2003, 117–39) argument that moral optimism is a strength of anthropology and a legacy we should claim. Anthropology’s moral optimism entails a sensibility of “generosity . . . toward humanity as a whole . . . a primal act of faith in humankind, however qualified by history and politics” (135). This sensibility has long drawn students to our discipline. But to build on this strength, Trouillot argued, anthropology needed to abandon finally the “savage slot” that imagined “Others” as standing apart and behind “Us.” Doing so requires that we intervene in broader conversations by: (1) recognizing the competency of native voice, making it a “full interlocutor”; (2) “publicly identif[ing] . . . [our] hidden interlocutors in the West who are the ultimate targets of our discourse”; (3) “publiciz[ing] the stakes of this exchange about humankind within the West”; and (4) explicitly claiming “the moral optimism that may be . . . [our] greatest appeal and yet most guarded secret” (136). To do this effectively requires that we attend to long-standing rhetoric in which “the Other” has played the role of “evidence in an argument between two Western interlocutors about the possible futures of humankind” (133). This rhetoric involves three moves: (1) setting up a proposition, often grounded in what is presumed to be universal; (2) countering it based on empirical evidence; and (3) taking a lesson for the future. When mapped onto the cartoon sketch of audiences above (Figure 1), a “them”/then filtered through our expertise becomes a lesson for a

future-oriented “us” through a “counter-punctual” (Trouillot 2003, 136–37) argument, examples of which I discuss below.

Trouillot argues that the key audiences for these counter-punctual arguments are in the West, or on what Santos (2016) terms the metropolitan side of the abyssal line. Despite the targeted audience, the stakes behind the arguments matter. As Trouillot (2003, 137) frames it, making these arguments creates space for “natives” to “jump into the discussion, establish themselves as interlocutors, and further challenge the slot by directly claiming their own specificity.” Archaeological evidence can similarly “jump in” to challenge the slot. Motivated by moral optimism, then, our key message for broader audiences in the West is “that we have seen alternative visions of humankind . . . and we know that [ours] may not be the most respectful of the planet . . . nor indeed the most accurate nor the most practical” (139; cf. Kleist and Jansen 2016).

Many of us would agree that alternatives—or “possibilities” (Guyer 2009)—are among the things that archaeology brings to the table, but how do we do so with effect? Rather than asking how archaeology is “useful,” I find it more productive to ask what makes our work “effective”—and in what ways? I start from the premise that we operate in a big-tent discipline enriched by multiple aims, theoretical perspectives, and approaches originally rooted in and authorized by Western epistemologies and ontologies, with due recognition that learning from material traces of the past is not unique to a Western tradition (Lane 2011). Importantly, however, anthropological archaeology has begun to grapple with the implications of alternative ontologies—particularly relational, perspectival ontologies that have and continue to configure the dwelling and being of many communities (Descola 2009; Escobar 2016; see also Alberti et al. 2011; Baltus and Baires 2018). Surveying this landscape, and anthropology more broadly, I sketch principles from which to assemble effective archaeologies that deliver on our discipline’s moral optimism in building toward equitable futures.

SKETCHING THE CONTOURS OF EFFECTIVE ARCHAEOLOGY

Foremost is to recognize that the knowledge we produce through our “intellectual fun” circulates, and with effect. Our knowledge makes a difference in the world—at times for ill, as Native Americans and other colonized peoples have argued for years (Watkins 2000, 2009). Bruce Trigger (1989) highlights archaeology’s role in providing the backstory for colonial, imperial, and national ambitions in ways that postcolonial archaeology seeks to redress (see also Gosden 2012; Habu, Fawcett, and Matsunaga 2008; Lydon and Rizvi 2010; Patterson 2008). Thus, a core premise of effective archaeology should be “do no harm” (Herrera 2013a, 288; see also Watkins 2009). But in what ways might we also “do good”? Despite our diverse topical foci and theoretical and methodological inclinations, how can we assemble strategies and possibilities for effective archaeologies that

grapple with our (varied) locations in relation to ongoing settler colonialism and intensifying inequality, are actively and continuously ethical, and work toward change today and build toward future possibilities without predictive hubris? In short, how do we make archaeology effective?

In sketching the contours of effective archaeology, I riff on “effective history” (Murphy 2010) without maintaining fealty to it. Taking inspiration from Foucault (1977; see also Scott 2001), effective history is critically engaged practice that, rather than starting from foundations, takes up inquiry through examples, understanding our analytical objects as actively configured through our processes of inquiry. In other words, rather than taking concepts and analytical objects as neutral and unhooked from history, effective history concerns itself with their formulation—how they and the “traditions that inform our judgements” (Murphy 2010, 7) came to be. In short, it presumes that foundational concepts have histories, that attending to those histories helps to denaturalize the concepts, and that by illuminating the processes through which concepts and entities “came to be,” effective history interrupts fixity, opening *possibilities* of futures that depart from present arrangements. This is most pressing with respect to those foundational objects, categories, or characteristics that common sense suggests are “without history” (Foucault 1977, 139–40).¹ These include gender, race, and ethnicity (to name a few) as well as units of analysis (cultures, individuals). These also include premises that imagine social practice as driven by optimality, competitive individualism, accumulation, and growth—in short, the premises that dominate neoliberal contexts.

Effective history resists the tendency to imagine pasts in terms of outcomes and refuses the “facile normalization of the present” (Scott 2004, 2). In this regard, effective history can be a key ally in decolonizing processes but only if it “fundamentally interrupts what is received, what is ordered, what is supposed to be settled” (Simpson 2011, 209). So as a starting principle, practicing effective history or archaeology requires a critical lens on our concepts and practices, including those that reinforce a hierarchy of epistemologies (“ours” imagined as superior to others).

This is a fundamental premise of Boaventura de Sousa Santos’s (2016, 188–211) “ecology of knowledges,” which places scientific knowledge founded in Western epistemologies—his “epistemologies of the North”—“in dialogue with other knowledges,” termed “epistemologies of the South.” An ecology of knowledges eschews relativism, opting instead for a pragmatic relation between knowledge systems. It does this by recognizing the copresence of knowledges grounded in “criteria of rigor and validity” that have long been rendered “nonexistent” through epistemologies of the North (188). For Santos, achieving an ecology of knowledges requires overcoming forms of ignorance *learned through*, and *internal to*, an epistemology. A familiar example is how feminist epistemologies made visible the androcentrism that underpinned and was naturalized by earlier scientific practice. Yet, an ecology of knowledges is premised

on the notion that epistemologies have limits—“what is not and cannot be known by a given kind of knowledge”—with the implication that “alternative interventions [are] only rendered possible by other kinds of knowledge” (189). Extending the feminist example, second-wave feminist critique was transformed through interventions of so-called Third World feminists who brought into view the Western premises that underpinned earlier feminist critiques (Santos 2018, 4). Seriously engaging in an ecology of knowledges thus requires “an equality of opportunities” premised on “each kind of knowledge participating in the conversation” and in the process bringing “along its own ideal of ‘another possible world.’” To be clear, an ecology of knowledges does not declare knowledge generated through Western epistemology offside. It instead works to foster copresence and dialogue among knowledges through what Mi’kmaw Elder Albert Marshall characterizes as “Two-Eyed Seeing” (*Etuaptmumk* in Mi’kmaw; see also Blair et al. 2019).² By implication, the discussion may have “little to do with alternative means to reach the same ends and more to do with alternative ends” (Santos 2016, 190), which can include erosion of the abyssal line itself.

We can point to examples of research informed by this sort of respectful engagement among scholars working directly with Indigenous communities (e.g., Cipolla, Quinn, and Levy 2019; Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson 2010; Ferguson, Koyiyumptewa, and Hopkins 2015). But as George Nicholas (2010) argues, the point is not to create forms and practices of “Indigenous archaeology” that stand apart from mainstream archaeological practice and are ignored by those who imagine themselves as working on contexts not directly connected with extant Indigenous communities. Here, for example, we might ask how well-intended prognosticating about futures in the Anthropocene naturalize premises about individualism, growth, and accumulation that make it hard to imagine futures otherwise (Tsing 2015, 17–25). The point is to foster openness to alternatives that emerge through learning enriched by “epistemologies of the South,” which enlarge the range of starting premises (e.g., Escobar 2016), but importantly doing so in ways that respectfully acknowledge the sources of such enrichment (Todd 2016).

In a related vein, Chirikure and colleagues (2017) advocate for a process of “concept revision” that simultaneously challenges Western universalizing presumptions and configures understanding through locally emplaced knowledge (see also Manyanga and Chirikure 2017; Mungwini 2017; Pikirayi 2016). Using the southern African example of distortions introduced through the English-language gloss of “rainmaking” in reference to the Shona practice of *mukwerera*, Chirikure and colleagues make a case for drawing on vernacular languages and associated meanings in scholarly practice. Using multiple lines of evidence, they assess how representations from the colonial archive compare to, and should be revised through, local understandings. Here, however, we need to avoid imagining local understanding as a

“fly in amber” and recognize that concepts have dynamic histories (Santos 2018, 34). As such, praiseworthy efforts to ground inquiry in local knowledge can be enriched by studying the dynamism of concepts through which the world is accessed and acted upon, as in the emerging focus on “conceptual history” (Stephens and Fleisch 2016). This fundamentally cross-disciplinary arena draws on wide-ranging sources—documentary, oral historical, archaeological—to explore how “historical actors worked both to contest meanings and to ensure continuity of meaning” (Stephens and Fleisch 2016, 2), with recent research illuminating the dynamism of concepts glossed as “labor,” “wealth,” “poverty,” “work,” “marriage,” and “land” in a variety of African case studies (e.g., de Luna 2016).

Attention to Fact-Making

Building on this, a core principle of an effective archaeology is that we attend to our practices of knowledge production in relation to what Trouillot (1995, 26) describes as four moments of history-making: the making of facts, archives, narratives, and retrospective significance. We routinely train our students in archaeology to be mindful about fact-making processes as we interpret associations in the ground, ask questions about site-formation processes, evaluate sample size, critically engage the use of analogy, and more. The facts we make through archaeology are hard won—we know the labor that lurks behind every table and graph! But an effective archaeology broadens the scope of this mindfulness to encompass how our moments of fact-making are configured through epistemological and ontological frames that have histories. It requires us to critically engage “commonsensical” premises that we anachronistically and hubristically project on other times and places. In doing so, effective archaeology aligns with a broader range of anthropological engagements that illuminate and dislodge taken-for-granted constructs and in the process preserve and transform possibility (Guyer 2009, 360; see also Escobar 2016; Tsing 2015).

We have seen productive work along these lines on gender in recent decades. But we have less effectively probed other root taxonomies that configure understanding—for example, the idea that people come in originary “kinds” configured through race, ethnicity, and other pigeonholes inscribed in archives through our predecessors’ fact-making. Root taxonomies conceive of difference typologically and ignore questions of history, thereby naturalizing difference. Ethnographic archives are replete with examples like that of the LoDagaa of northern Ghana, a “tribal” name that took form through colonial archives and ethnographic efforts to “make sense” of a fluid landscape of social identification among so-called acephalous communities. Only late in fieldwork did Jack Goody (1962) come to understand the varied practices among people in the northwestern Gold Coast Colony through Indigenous directional terms, *Lo* (west) and *Dagaa* (east). Gleaning that these terms referentially distinguished group identities in relation to funerary, inheritance, and other practices, he used the amalgamated term in his

system of ethnographic naming. At the time, it did not operate as a “form of ethnic consciousness” (Hawkins 2002, 93). However, “LoDagaa” as appellation took hold in part through Goody’s ethnographic publications, albeit not through his archiving moment alone. LoDagaa experience was reshaped through people’s twentieth-century confrontation with “the world of writing” (in courts, boarding schools, etc.), producing new forms of ethnic consciousness and LoDagaa solidarity during the colonial era (Hawkins 2002), though, as Keese (2016) notes, colonial “takes” on ethnic composition were not invariably “taken up” by the people so designated.

Similar examples of naming and archiving practices are legion. It is one among many reminders (Southall 1970) that the “tribes” (later “ethnic” groups) who configured colonial ethnography and administrative imaginations in Africa (and elsewhere) obscured the historical processes that gave rise to them (Lentz and Nugent 2000). Yet we can point to contemporary archaeological studies that take such units for granted, tracked for example through ceramic variation. Regardless of whether our focus as archaeologists is on more proximate or distant times, we should be interested in and knowledgeable about these processes of recent centuries, given their role in configuring archives from which we take analogical inspiration and their saliency for history-making and memory work in the present (Beaudoin 2016; Beyette and LeCount 2017).

An effective archaeology pays attention to how our archives and narratives operate in socially persuasive ways to reproduce and bolster particular ways of imaging pasts and authorizing futures—for example, the ways aDNA analyses are configured through settler imaginaries (Reardon and TallBear 2012). Decontextualized “facts” of groupness underpinned by an imagined landscape of pure originary groups ignore the recent and longer-term historical processes through which interacting groups of people were defined as separate and separable (Schoenbrun 2012, 300–303). They also ignore the colonizing practices that treat Indigenous people as repositories of DNA to which science can lay moral claim on the grounds of relevance to “our human story” (Reardon and TallBear 2012; see also MacEachern 2007).

Thus, critically engaging our processes of fact-making is central to the practice of effective archaeology. Importantly, this is *not* akin to a position that facts do not matter: “the much welcome awareness that our empirical base is a construction in no way erases the need for such a base. On the contrary, this awareness calls upon us to reinforce the validity of that base by taking more seriously [its] construction” (Trouillot 2003, 128). Effective archaeology is critically realist in foundation, or what Nelson and Wylie (2007) describe as grounded in “social naturalism.” So too is it methodologically expansive (Green 2013; Ogundiran 2013; Schoenbrun 2012), as in African history, where oral sources and historical linguistic, art historical, archaeological, and comparative ethnographic insights are put in conversation to yield deeper insight into past processes than possible through archaeological sources alone. Genealogical consideration of these

sources can yield robust insight into the dynamics of material conceptual practice over *longues durées* (e.g., Kodesh 2010; Schoenbrun 2016; Stephens 2013). Ongoing dialogues about the possibilities and challenges of working with multiple lines of evidence among Africanists can inspire creative new research in other world regions (de Luna and Fleisher 2018; Fleisher, de Luna, and McIntosh 2012), as contributors to Beyette and LeCount (2017) also demonstrate for Mayan studies.

In related fashion, effective archaeology is genealogical. Genealogy illuminates the historical production of our categories and knowledge and helps us to understand how the frameworks that scaffold our knowledge were established (Fassin 2017). But it is equally a strategy through which to explore the dynamism of tradition and to counter anachronistic parsing of what is deemed “authentic” from that branded as “inauthentic.” The political dynamics and stakes vary by location. As Vine Deloria Jr. ([1969] 1988) long ago pointed out, Native American communities are held to different standards of continuity in practice and biology by settler agencies and communities. Federal recognition processes and public opinion alike continue to be underpinned by the anachronistic amalgams through which the authentic is imagined and the inauthentic—and therefore the unauthorized or inadmissible—is gauged (Silliman 2012). Here, the Western interlocutor sees “so much change; too much change.” The stakes can be different with reference to a rural African setting in which the Westerner perceives “so little change; a need for change.” Here, imaginings of a changeless past ignore the long-term dynamism of village life lived in connection with far-flung places over the course of centuries and indeed millennia. The interventions of an effective archaeology will therefore be differently motivated and configured depending on our locations at the same time as they are unified by reflecting on the consequential facts and narratives we produce and how they reinforce or disrupt anachronistic, temporalizing logics, to which I turn now.

Expanding Possibilities beyond “Modernity”

Given the historical role that “prehistory” played in naturalizing social-evolutionary thought and its culminating modernity (Stocking 1987; Trigger 1989), I argue that it is reasonable that archaeology should participate in a “recall” of modernity (Latour 2007). This requires first that we historicize our knowledge-production practices—our making of facts, archives, narratives, and significance. But effective archaeology further challenges modernism’s “historical amnesia” (Rabinow 2011, 187), whether by illuminating the lived experience and genesis of modernity—including its asymmetries and inequalities, as highlighted in archaeologies of the contemporary past (González-Ruibal 2014; Zimmerman, Singleton, and Welch 2010)—or disrupting the notion that we “have no choice” in the face of marketplace rationalism, competitive individualism, and so on by expanding awareness of alternatives. Effective archaeology understands that often things were and could have been otherwise and

that through our disciplinary practice we can illuminate the processes through which particular futures past came to be (Criado-Boado 2016, 153–54).

Much African archaeology has been motivated by this sort of project, albeit in varying forms over the decades, but directed in a counter-punctual way at Western audiences. Early on, the framing went something like this: you imagine Africa as a continent apart, behind and dependent on others for innovation and progress, but I will show you that Africans independently invented the things your progress values (domestication, metallurgy, urbanism) so that you will respect Africa for its inventiveness. This left intact the underpinning logic of progress: that it is a technological race, and that it matters who got there first (Stahl 2005). This logic rested on the premise (echoing patent law?) that to be valued, innovation had to be originary and independent.

Somewhat later, the framing changed: you imagine agriculture or urbanism through particular regions that have been elevated to stand for the universal, but I will show you how African examples of agriculture or cities depart from these normative examples (the “surprising” combination of wild and domestic resources, forms of sedentism that emerged in the absence of domestication, the dispersed and heterarchical forms of urbanism) in order to show you that your “universals” are better understood as regionally emplaced “particulars” (McIntosh 1999; Neumann 2005). This work was important for broadening our facts and archives at the same time as it maintained continuity with the focusing power of “key developments” (agriculture, urbanism) and the overarching narrative of progressive developmentalism.

In recent work, these counter-punctual framings in African archaeology focus on the dynamism of daily practice against an imagined sameness and isolation of village life over centuries and indeed millennia (Logan and Stahl 2017; Richard 2018). Also prominent is a counter-punctual reframing of the significance of connections: you imagine Africa as a pliable source of raw materials and indiscriminate consumer of products manufactured elsewhere, but I will show how the circulation of materials and goods across interfaces (of Atlantic Africa, Saharan, or Indian Ocean connections) coproduced lifeways in regions so entangled, so that you understand the agentic role of Africans in the shaping of these broader systems.

There are always partialities and risks involved in these framings—for example, in how a counter-punctual focus on African global entanglements potentially elevates these processes over internal ones. Here, I am reminded of Isabelle Stengers’s (2015, 100) discussion of the ancient Greek “*pharmakon*,” translated as “drug,” which is something that “depending on dose and use . . . can be both a poison and a remedy.” Its use requires that we “pay attention,” that we are mindful of its scalar effects and its vulnerabilities to repercussion (103). In other words, the counter-punctual is a framing that requires periodic revisiting, with strategic attention to its operations and effects within a dynamic and broader array of ongoing claims and debates (e.g., Pyburn

2017, 197). Rather than a once-and-for-all solution, the counter-punctual is a tool that can be effective in expanding awareness of *scale* and of *alternatives* so long as we wield it in ways that do not reinscribe social-evolutionary premises and typologies (Ogundiran 2013, 795).

Cocreating through Generative Dialogue

The projects I have described are primarily directed toward Western audiences. What of those “other” audiences, and indeed collaborators? As noted, archaeologists are taking seriously the need to work collaboratively with the communities whose histories are a focus of our study. Recent years have seen a growing range of collaborative approaches (community-based, engaged, participatory) with due recognition of the variable forms that comprise the “collaborative continuum” (Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson 2008). Robust collaboration fosters critical engagement, forces reflection on whose and how facts are valued by bringing into view the epistemological hierarchies and ontological premises that configure fact-making (Cipolla, Quinn, and Levy 2019; Jopela and Fredriksen 2015).

Clearly, collaboration and cocreating (Bollwerk, Connolly, and McDavid 2015) will be key to assembling effective archaeology (e.g., Croes, Carriere, and Stapp 2018). But if we agree that archaeology holds potential to expand horizons of “the possible” by illuminating alternative understandings of present and future, key to doing so is taking seriously Indigenous ontologies and “epistemologies of the South” (Santos 2016, 2018; see also Green 2015; Menzies 2013). This requires strategies of dialogue and interpretation that encourage us to resist too quickly assimilating what we are learning to what we “know” (Weismantel 2015) and allow for the copresence of different ways of knowing (Santos’s [2016, 2018] “ecologies of knowledges”). Moreover, we need to puzzle over the fractures that can come to the fore when we put knowledge systems in conversation.

Our sociocultural colleagues offer a variety of metaphorical frames that encourage pause before too quickly papering over moments of incommensurability. Informed by Stengers’s philosophy, Helen Verran (2013; see also Verran 2001) illuminates how allegory can elide moments of “epistemic disconcertment” over which we should instead pause and probe (Alberti 2016, 143–44; Law and Lin 2011). Verran’s ethnographic example explores the “disconcertment” that arose through interaction of an Australian Aboriginal elder and a botanist over the naming of a plant. But the issue is equally pertinent to archaeological inquiry. Verran draws on philosophical literature in terming these times of disconcertment “idiot moments” when “the basic tenets of agreement no longer provide the certainty of truth or what to do next” (Green 2015, 240). Rather than imagining ourselves as “holding all the cards of truth” (241), we see archaeologists developing strategies that respectfully illuminate and take seriously multiple ways of knowing and world-making (Cipolla, Quinn and Levy 2019; Jopela and Fredriksen 2015). Lesley Green (2013, 2015) pursues this strategy

in her ethnographic analysis of how a public archaeology project working with Palikur people of the Brazilian Amazon transformed from a study of “things left in the ground” to “reading the tracks of the ancestors.” Santos (2016, 219) describes this work “in the contact zone” as requiring “mediation and negotiation” as necessary steps in “intercultural translation” (223). The process does not discard

Western conceptions, even as [it] questions the latter’s universality, thereby making room for other conceptions existing in non-Western cultures. It rather brings them into a contact zone where mediation, confrontation, and negotiation become possible and are carried out. The aim is to develop richer constellations of meaning. . . . Together they seek to create copresence across the abyssal lines. (Santos 2016, 226–27)

Taking seriously other ways of being and knowing enriches archaeological insight through unexpected or “surprising” insights. We see this in literature that draws on relational ontologies to reconfigure knowledge around human and nonhuman animal interactions previously understood through the lens of “domestication” or “exploitation.” Robert Losey (2010) explores the apparently “fragmentary” character of ancient fish weirs in the Pacific Northwest in relation to the animistic understanding of fish as sentient beings existing in relationship with humans. Tacking between archaeological, oral historical, and ethnographic evidence, he comes to understand the repeated building and dismantling of the weirs as linked to the human–fish relationship. It was anathema to capture fish—to invite them into the house—if people were not there to receive the gift. Peter Whitridge (2018, 24) uses multiple lines of evidence to “unfold the exceptionally dense dog-human networks of the past” that facilitated Inuit colonization of the Eastern Arctic. Using relational ontology as a starting point, dogs are understood as co-inhabitants and “dedicated collaborators in human projects” (23), at the same time as Whitridge is attuned to the contextual dynamism of these relations. In a related vein, Peter Stahl (2014) probes the “paradox” of “non-domestication” in the Amazon Basin, which was long attributed to environmental circumstance (whether paucity of suitable candidates or a superabundance of animal resources). The “paradox” is otherwise illuminated through perspectival ontologies: animal domestication, he argues, was simply not compatible with a lifeworld in which humans and nonhuman sentient animals exist in a social relation.

Inspired by Nigerian writer Ben Okri’s (1997) reflections on how poetics extend the bounds of the possible, Jane Guyer (2013, 288) employs “quickenings” as a metaphor for interpretive practice attuned to the possibilities of surprise. Quickenings refers to the mild fluttering of a fetus first felt by the mother at sixteen weeks, which Guyer encourages us to leverage through “epistemologies of surprise.” An epistemology of surprise builds on those moments when “the intuition and analogy of ordinary thought are suspended so that the phenomenon can be its own *form of life*, continuing to make its own impression, and not yet taken into our own frames of reference as an *object of study* or interpretation”

(286; emphasis in original). Such an epistemology entails “receptive attentiveness to phenomena that declare *their own* existence” and that we come to know “through ongoing interaction” (289). The strategy encourages pause between “impression” and “interpretation” (or what we might equally term “assimilation”), a holding off of the too rapid “settling” of the matter; here is where scholars like Strathern “insert indigenous epistemologies” in ways that enlarge the range of possibilities and give “pause for thought” (Guyer 2013, 295; Santos 2016, 44). This strategy of inquiry may rule out some possibilities but without settling on a singular conclusion in which requirements of systematicity and proof obscure those aspects or elements of the situation that elude us (Guyer 2013, 296). From practical experience, we know that archaeological evidence holds considerable potential to foster moments of surprise—unexpected juxtapositions and odd associations—that can open new understandings (Alberti 2016). There is value in puzzling deeply rather than papering over those moments.

This sort of “generative dialogue” (Green 2013, 262; see also Cipolla, Quinn, and Levy 2019) can produce new insights and possibilities, not simply through anachronistically projecting ethnographic analogy but through rigorous comparative use of analogical insight (Wylie 2002). Africanist archaeologists are producing rich insights into the dynamism of practice through a process of dialogic puzzling that puts archaeological evidence in conversation with embedded ways of being and valuation. Studies of Atlantic West Africa provide rich examples, including Akin Ogundiran’s (2014, 77) analyses of how cowries imported as the shell currency of the Atlantic slave trade came to be incorporated into Yoruba ritual practice and bound up in a “new contemplation of individuality in social life.” Neil Norman’s (2014) work on incorporative aesthetics of Vodun provides another example as he tracks practices centered on shrines, feasting, and the dynamics of sacred spaces in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Hueda (Benin), insights that he enriches with reflection on how this dynamism carries forward in the use of plastic action figures in twenty-first-century Beninese practice (Norman, in press).

Reframing Narratives

Effective archaeology engages broader audiences in ways that Paul Rabinow (2011, 89) characterized as making “conditions available for rethinking and, eventually, intervention.” Doing so requires textbooks effective in sharing our insights into the past through frames other than a pursuit of “origins” and “firsts” aligned in an inexorable march of progress that leaves vast regions confined to temporal sidelines—examples of “secondary” developments. These narratives have been amply critiqued over recent decades, and yet the familiar social-evolutionary narrative continues to be reproduced in the introductory textbooks that pick our students’ pockets. Colleagues at a recent African archaeology conference asked a successful writer of introductory texts why Africa continues to be marginalized in such texts. “Africa

doesn’t sell,” we were told, and “until we figured out stories that would, nothing will change.” If textbook mills refuse to expand possibilities by building on the rich insights that effective archaeologies have to offer, there is clearly work to do in pursuing alternatives. As an example, the OpenEd initiative mounted by the Province of British Columbia, Canada,³ is encouraging development of open-source textbooks, free to students, and those among us with job security should seize such opportunities to craft educational resources framed by different narratives. So too should we be engaging rather than ignoring the role of platforms like Wikipedia in the global dissemination of archaeological knowledge and narratives (Grillo and Contreras 2019).

Here, we might take inspiration from books for young readers, an audience for which publishers are more willing to engage nonstandard narratives. *Turtle Island: The Story of North America’s First People* provides a useful example: “This isn’t the kind of history where one event leads to another along a straight line. . . . Instead of telling Turtle Island’s story through dates, we look at what life was like in different places across North America to celebrate the wisdom and ingenuity of the people” (Yellowhorn and Lowinger 2017, 4). The authors also avoid using names of people and places. “We aren’t always sure what people called themselves . . . or their land. Names are very powerful, so instead of misusing them, we have steered away when we could. However, you will see the names of several archaeologists because we do know who they are” (4). Similar initiatives directed at undergraduate audiences may be in the works, but clearly there is creative work to be done in developing resources aligned with effective archaeology: ones that foreground genealogies and practices of knowledge production, resist enclosure in the “commonsense” of abyssal thinking (Santos 2018) while recognizing the partial and ongoing character of how we understand past processes, and are explicit about exploring the alternatives and possibilities that keep past, present, and future in productive dialogue.

Professional Development


Finally, an effective archaeology aligns its routine disciplinary practices with its aims. Doing so requires ongoing reinvention of key practices: of graduate training, professional mentoring, publishing, and peer reviewing. We need to offer courses that develop the skills for an effective archaeology. If, as we claim, collaboration and expanding our audiences are important, we need to ask: How are we building that into our expectations for proposal development, peer review, tenure, and promotion? The Society for American Archaeology’s (2019) *Guidelines for Promotion and Tenure* encourages us to broaden our conceptualization of what “counts” in these processes that configure professional life chances. But work remains to align these aspirations with institutional practice, a task that again falls to the job secure among us. At the same time, we must recognize that assembling effective archaeologies is an ongoing process rather than a formulaic method that will everywhere look the same.

BROADER IMPACTS IN CONTEMPORARY CONTEXTS

The broader impacts we are asked to identify as justification for resource allocations rest on an implicit framing of the future conceived as an open realm of planning and in need of shaping and making (Adam 2010, 366). These framings can be taken to imply a future that opens to a horizon of progress, innovation, and growth, albeit one clouded by the potential for disaster in the Anthropocene. How do we “improve the future” through our work? We feel compelled to frame studies of past contexts as providing augers and lessons for future ones, and increasingly with reference to how past societies dealt with catastrophes analogous to those that cloud our horizons. But very often these prognostications project forward rather than challenge the premises of Western modernity’s abyssal line. Assembling an effective archaeology instead presses us to reflect on how these futures take shape through continuities with abyssal thinking. Let us instead use those moments when we are called to articulate our “broader impacts” as opportunities to reflect on our research practices: on how we engage “ecologies of knowledge” that reconfigure the present; on our disciplinary foundation in a moral optimism; and on the power of our facts, archives, and narratives to lay the foundation for futures built upon multiple and intertwined paths, ones configured but not determined by alternatives that involve both choice and consequence. This does not equate with “rigging our stories,” but it does involve recognizing that the questions we pose and the ways we pose them configure the facts we generate and the stories we tell. As Stengers observed,

a situation can become interesting, worthy of making people think, able to stimulate a taste for thinking, if it has been produced by a concrete learning process, in which the difficulties, the hesitations, the choices and errors are as much a part of the narrative as the successes and the conclusions arrived at. (2015, 134)

Effective archaeologies understand this by making visible our learning processes. They enlarge possibilities through knowledge practices that challenge the abyssal line while endeavoring to build “a new and empowering intercultural present” (Santos 2016, 233, 234; see also Watkins 2012). In doing so, effective archaeologies build toward more equitable futures.

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NOTES

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1. Santos (2018, 3–4) critiques Foucault's "archaeology of knowledge" for being configured through European modernity without regard to "the experience of those that were on the other side of the abyssal line—the colonial people." At the same time, however, he acknowledges the value of the "internal critique" derived from epistemologies of the North in opening space for critiques emanating from epistemologies of the South (Santos 2018, 4).
2. See: <http://integrativescience.ca/Principles/TwoEyedSeeing/>.
3. See: <https://open.bccampus.ca/open-textbook-101/>.

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