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Archaeologies of Art:
Papers from the
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Ian Russell

Art, archaeology and the contemporary

Our world is a palimpsest of temporalities, of traces and residues both of things from the past and phenomena of today but also possibilities for the future.[1] Through the layers of our palimpsest percolate a constellation of things – a cobblestone from a 19th century Dublin street, a rural medieval settlement landscape, flints from a Mesolithic archaeological site or a ticket-stub from a recent GAA match at Croke park (see Witmore 2006; González-Ruibal 2008). As part of our methods of coping with daily life, we ascribe order to these occurrences – a temporal structure which allows us to rationalize the contemporary appearance of these things today (see Thomas 2004).

This archaeological sensibility has a specific history and modern context of development, and whether or not these things are evidence, traces or residues of pasts, the engagement, negotiation and mediation of relationships with these things is decidedly contemporary (see Shanks 1992; Latour 1993). Archaeology is not simply about the past. It is more about a hope for a past – a dream of a past. The performance of archaeology is an attempt to realize these dreams, these pasts, but to control and structure their appearances through rationally manifested knowledge and information. To focus only on the scientific aspects of archaeology is, however, to only tell half of the story. The narrative of archaeology is as much, if not more so, about the fascination of encountering and mediating things today whose stories one is compelled to construct or reconstruct from traces and residues, absences and presences. It is a curiosity about things and a drive to mediate the experiences of things to render the world intelligible today which underpins the archaeological sensibility.

Institutionally, archaeology owes its genesis to art historical traditions. It shares with them a common history in the modern development of strategies of seeing, viewing and visualizing (see Molyneaux 1997; Moser & Smiles 2004; Thomas 2004; Russell 2006). Augmented by the scientific revolutions of the 18th and 19th centuries, a disparate collection of professionals began to articulate, in their leisure time, a sensibility towards those traces and residues of bygone eras witnessed in the world around them. Broadly described as 'antiquarians', these passionate individuals amassed extensive collections of curious objects and artifacts and produced a large body of publications which in time would become the foundation of a new discipline of archaeology – founded on modern scientific principles of depth, linear time and comparative analysis (see Thomas 2004). It was during the late 19th century and early 20th century that disciplinary specialization led to the development of archaeological methods and practices of discovery, documentation and interpretation distinct and separate from those of art history (see Russell 2006; Jorge & Thomas Forthcoming). Due to this separation between art historical and archaeological scholarship, the development of archaeology was not directly subject to the criticisms of and commentaries by other disciplines relating to visual and material culture. While the archaeologies of the early 20th century served to articulate and embed ethno-nationalistic narratives in the physical objects and landscapes of European nation-states, movements in the arts were deconstructing the authoritative potential of art objects as sources for knowledge or essentialised truth.

At the same time that archaeology's role in articulating truth-claims to ethnic identities in Europe was being developed, art movements such as Futurism issued manifestos violently calling for the end of past-oriented societies.[2] Artworks from later movements, such as Marcel Duchamp's 'Fountain' (1917) (Dadaism) and René Magritte's 'The Treason of Images' (1928-9) (Surrealism) questioned and undermined the ability of the object, the image or text to represent or convey authentic meaning or 'truth'. Early 20th century European political movements' use of archaeological information was, however, unaffected by these movements, and the burgeoning discipline of archaeology lacked intensive external or internal critical debate on the issues raised in the arts. Instead, politicians aided by prehistorians utilised archaeological artefacts through 'cultural historical'[3] models of the past to represent and bolster ethno-national identities and claims to territorial regions such as in the Irish Free State (Cooney 1996; Crooke 2000), Falangist Spain (Díaz-Andreu 1993; 1995; Díaz-Andreu & Ramírez Sánchez 2004), the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (Klejn 1993; Shnirelman 1995; 1996) and National Socialist Germany (Arnold 1990; Arnold & Hassmann 1995). It is especially problematic that archaeological artefacts and monuments are still understood as manifestations of national and ethnic identity and are used to market national heritage and tourism industries while the works of Duchamp, Magritte and others (e.g. Joseph Beuys & Andy Warhol) are popularly appreciated as comments on the inability for cultural objects to embody authoritative truth, knowledge, meanings or values (see Russell 2006).

Instead of engaging these criticisms, archaeological institutions chose to garner power, clout and influence through the explication of romantic narratives of embedded national identities and ethnic claims to lands as ancestral territory – as heritage (Kohl & Fawcett 1995; Díaz-Andreu & Champion 1996). In the wake of the tragedies of the mid-20th century in Europe, rather than review the epistemological underpinnings of the discipline, archaeology would still advance some 'cultural historical' strategies (e.g. Childe 1947), develop 'processual'[4] methodologies based on the rigorous application of the scientific method (e.g. Willey & Phillips 1958) and rely on positivism and scientific objectivity (e.g. Binford 1965) as a means to control and structure the narratives of the past.[5] This turn towards object-oriented interrogation and argumentation did help build archaeology as a respected discipline or 'soft' science with some 'hard' methodologies. It did, however, also allow for the creation of essentialised truth claims for the construction of modern national identities made evident in material culture and heritage – critical components for the justification of contemporary heritage and roots tourism (see Kaplan 1994). This process of reifying contemporary identities through objects and artefacts reinforced divisions between archaeology and contemporary artistic engagements with the things of our shared world. Over the last fifteen years, movements within archaeology and the arts have, however, begun to undercut the divisions between specializations (see Shanks 1992; Pearson & Shanks 2001; Renfrew 2003; Renfrew *et al.* 2004; Pearson 2006; Witmore 2006; Ingold 2007; Russell 2006; Cochrane & Russell 2007; Russell forthcoming). It is in the spirit of these possibilities of collaborative exchanges between the arts and archaeology that the Archaeologies of Art theme of the Sixth World Arcaeological Congress and the *Ábhar agus Meon* exhibition series were positioned.

This series of UCD Scholarcasts will feature highlights from the many presentations in the Archaeologies of Art theme of the Sixth World Archaeological Congress. Prof. Douglass Bailey from San Francisco State University will reflect on the current relationships between contemporary art and contemporary archaeology and suggest some radical new directions that this disciplinary collaboration can take. Dr Blaze O'Connor of the UCD Humanities Institute of Ireland will discuss the unique synergy that was the archaeological excavation and reconstruction of the studio of modern painter Francis Bacon, meditating on archaeology's relationship to detritus, dust and debitage. There will be a special presentation from the Sixth World Archaeological Congress artist-in-residence Kevin O'Dwyer, who will speak about his own artistic practice in relationship to archaeology and his curation and direction of Sculpture in the Parklands, a unique project engaging art, archaeology, ecology and the industrial heritages of Lough Boora, Co. Offaly. Finally, a manifesto will be issued by Dr Andrew Cochrane of Cardiff University and myself, challenging the theoretical foundations of archaeological thought and practice through an engagement with artistic and anthropological theory.

These talks are a selection of the presentations from the Archaeologies of Art theme of the Sixth World Archaeological Congress, illustrating the rich collaboration that is continually developing between archaeology and art. I hope they will inspire you to imagine new futures for the practice of archaeology as a discipline not confined by the past but radically practiced in the present.

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[1] The use of the term 'thing' in this mode of argumentation is a reference to the more philosophically rich, German word 'ding' and its association to the potentially radical phenomenological theories in the early works of Martin Heidegger. For a more in depth discussion of these theories and their application to contemporary mobilizations of phenomenological approaches to experience, see Latour & Weibel 2005.

[2] *The Futurist Manifesto*, written by F.T.E. Marinetti, appeared in *Le Figaro* (Paris) under the heading 'Le Futurisme' 20 February 1909. This was a violent declaration of fear of the stagnating affect of a overly past-oriented society: 'It is in Italy that we are issuing this manifesto of ruinous and incendiary violence, by which we today are founding Futurism, because we want to deliver Italy from its gangrene of professors, archaeologists, tourist guides and antiquaries. Italy has been too long the great second-hand market. We want to get rid of the innumerable museums which cover it with innumerable cemeteries.' This sentiment is also articulated in the thought of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831) and echoed by Walter Benjamin (1892–1940) and Theodor Adorno (1903–1969). Marinetti saw it as the charge of the Futurists to deliver Italy from this past-oriented society by using poetry as a means of moving society forward. For Marinetti, 'poetry must be a violent assault on the unknown'. In subsequent years following Marinetti's manifesto, other Futurists manifestos were articulated relating to specific fields of human endeavour (e.g. painting, music, sculpture, architecture, feminism and lust). For further details see Cochrane & Russell 2007, 15.

[3] Cultural historical models of the past were originally developed in the 19th century and were based on the premise that it was possible to identify the locations, territories and movements of groups of people based on the material remains of the past. This methodology led to the de facto assumption that certain types of material remains represented cohesive group identities and that the depositional patterns of these material remains could, if identified through archaeological practice, document the territories and movements of these peoples. For further discussion see Trigger 1989, 148 and Gamble 2004.

[4] Cultural historical approaches to the past generally assumed that artefacts could only be documented, recorded and catalogued, producing timelines and the 'archaeological record, but had no further use in the study of past peoples. Processual archaeology asserted that through the rigorous application of scientific method to the study of artefacts in all the qualities, constructive statements could be made about the lives of past peoples. As such, processualism is built upon to the anthropological theory of cultural evolutions and the assumption that culture is outside and separate to the body and is a means for humans to adapt to environments (e.g. White 1959). Thus the study of the material culture remains of past peoples (which survived these peoples) could provide factual information about the lifeworlds of people who had once lived. For a discussion of this movement in archaeological theory, see Trigger 1989 and Gamble 2004.

[5] For an introduction to these and other movements in archaeological theory, see Gamble 2004. For an in-depth history of these movements, see Trigger 1989.

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