SESSION: Archaeology of the future (time keeps on slipping…)

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Organizer: Karen Holmberg (NYU, Environmental Studies)

Recent interest in deep time from historical perspectives is intellectually welcome (e.g., Guldi and Armitage, 2014), though the deep past has long been the remit of archaeology so is not novel in archaeological vantages. Rather, a major shift of interest in time scale for archaeology came from historical archaeology and its relatively recent focus and adamant refusal to be the handmaiden of history. Foci on the archaeology of 'now' (e.g., Harrison, 2010) further refreshed and expanded the temporal playing field for archaeological thought, challenging and extending the preeminence of the deep past as the sole focus of archaeological practice. If there is a novel or intellectually challenging time frame to consider in the early 21st century, it is that of the deep future (Schellenberg, 2014).

Marilyn Strathern's (1992: 190) statement in *After Nature* is accurate, certainly: 'An epoch is experienced as a *now* that gathers perceptions of the past into itself. An epoch will thus always will be what I have called post-eventual, that is, on the brink of collapse.' What change of tone comes from envisioning archaeology's role and place in a very deep future? This session invites papers that imaginatively consider the movement of time, the movement of archaeological ideas, the movement of objects, the movement of data, or any other form of movement the author would like to consider in relation to a future that only a few years ago might have been seen as a realm of science and cyborgs (per Haraway, 1991) but is increasingly fraught with dystopic environmental anxiety regarding the advent of the Anthropocene (e.g., Scranton, 2013). These may entail shifts in perceptions of materiality/immateriality, artifact curation, digital data archiving, theoretical frameworks, or other considerations. Presentations are invited to creatively engage with the topic in whatever way allows the presenter to discuss their own material or theoretical interests in relation to the question, 'what can archaeology contribute to the future'? We invite presentations that utilize imagery, multimedia, or are more interactive than a traditional conference paper.

Rather than a formal discussant, a conversation amongst presenters and audience members will occur following the papers. This will be moderated by art curator and critic, Murtaza Vali.

References

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PARTICIPANTS AND ABSTRACTS

Zoe Crossland (Columbia University)

'**Telos: archaeology's end games**'
How might we rethink teleology in a way that is not tied ineluctably to notions of progress, modernity, and civilization? Is such a task achievable or even desirable? In this paper I explore the question of history's directedness, and suggest that not only is the notion of telos worth recuperating, but that a critical re-engagment with the concept is essential if we are to find new narratives to replace the exhausted yet persistent 19th century tropes of the 19th century that continue to haunt archaeology.

Paulina Dobrota (University of Toronto)

'**Cyborg Archaeology: 21th Century Humans in the Age of Cyborgs**'
21st century digital records problematize the relationship between our embodied experiences and a potential future archaeologist. On the one hand, the salvage of online data might provide a future archaeologist with information that was inconceivable for previous time periods. On the other hand, these records, resulted from the *translation* of our actions, thoughts and emotions by machines, are in effect *hybrid* assemblages that mirror both human experience and machine agency. Their interpretation is predicated on how the boundaries between humans and machines are drawn at the site of the human-computer interface.

These boundaries are likely to be redefined by (not so distant) future technological developments. If claims that we are ever so slowly and unequally becoming *cyborgs* will hold, it means that 21th century people are engaged in an evolutionary event as radical as the development of bipedalism, the first stone tools or the early expansion of hominids out of Africa. Even though this *technospeciation* event would arguably be better documented than any other past events, the radical redefinition of boundaries that it implies will determine the terms of its understanding. If the *present moment* (sensu Gadamer) of future cyborg archaeology will hold ideas incompatible

with a finite, bounded human body, how will cyborg archaeologists redraw these boundaries in their reconstructions? Will our hybrid digital records, in that moment, become complicit in obscuring our embodied experiences?

Keith Edmier (artist, New York City)

'I don't know what it is but it's weird and pissed off'
Using John Carpenter's 1982 film *The Thing* as a focal point, this presentation offers an exploration of cinematic archaeology through the genre of the science fiction film. *The Thing's* plot centers on an Antarctic archaeological expedition that discovers a buried spacecraft (>100,000 years old) with the remains of an alien life form. The remains are still active on a cellular level and can infect and assimilate humans and animals. The film has often been discussed as a metaphor for the AIDS epidemic which came to the public's awareness at the same time. I discuss the tools of motion picture special effects used to make this film and others from my experience working in 1980's Hollywood. This is, in essence, an archaeological excavation for pre-digital artifacts. By 1993, when Steven Spielberg's *Jurassic Park* was released, computers were becoming the tools that provide the dominant way of making science fiction films. Whether rumor, lore, or truth, when Spielberg first saw a digital dinosaur test for the film he purportedly turned to the special effects supervisor who would be responsible for animating the dinosaurs with the traditional technique of stop motion, Phil Tippet, and said "You're out of a job." Tippet's reply: "Don't you mean extinct?"

Felipe Gaitan-Amman (University of Chicago)

'Mind the Crossbones: a spoilsport tale on how past pirates became the present's cool'
It is printed on your socks and on your underwear. It's all over your TV screen. It's on the rum bottle at the bar, in the technology section of your daily newspaper and in the new Lego game you may be buying for your kids. Whether in the media, the entertainment industry, the sphere of designer fashion or the gastronomy field, the once fearful Jolly Roger has permeated every corner of Western popular culture. The once infamous black flag hauled up by sea bandits in the days of yore has become a widespread icon of coolness, an easy marker of hipness and, at best, an empty token of whatever freedom means. As responsible citizens of the present, however, shouldn't we feel encouraged to dig a little deeper into the historical trajectories of the icons we consume? Beyond a mere description of the romantic fascination that the figure of the pirate stubbornly exerts upon our disenchanted minds, this paper wonders how an iconoclastic take on what an archaeology of piracy could be may contribute to challenge our convenient blindness to the social and economic tragedy piracy represented in the recent past. Further, how would an exploration of the theoretical foundations of such an archaeology prepare us to address what we may foresee as an impending process of banalization of the materiality of violence which, under the troubling tag of terrorism, is submerging us today?

Jonathan Gardner (University College London)

'Recurring dreams/nightmares: mega events and traces of uncertain futures'
Investigating 'mega events', such as World's Fairs and Olympic Games, I discuss the complex relationship they have demonstrated with regard to the idea of the future. Such events are frequently associated with demonstrating progress towards future utopias (for example, 'the World of Tomorrow' theme of the 1939 World's Fair in NYC), but they have also frequently manifested darker, more anxious ideas of that which is yet to come. Both of these visions can be

investigated archaeologically through the traces of their structures, exhibits, and from archival material.

This paper identifies three ways in which the tension between events' utopian dreams, and dystopian nightmares are exhibited. Firstly, these events tend to be built on sites considered of little value and used prior to their events as places used to mitigate anxious futures: environmental degradation (e.g. garbage dumps) or warfare (e.g. civil defense sites). Secondly, the events themselves, during their operation, often conceptually frame promised utopian futures by referencing the past and the future in anxious or negative terms, in order to justify the need for 'progress', lest disaster strike. Lastly, following closure, mega event sites are frequently left to decay and can become poignant symbols for a future that did not arrive as promised. In discussing these three types of relationship, I demonstrate how an archaeological investigation of such events can be useful in examining how societies have related to, and continue to relate to, the *idea* of the future and to identify the types of traces this process can leave behind.

Alice Gorman (Flinders University of South Australia)

'Congohelium and Computronium: the thinking materials of the far future'
In this paper I explore two materials of the far future and use them to imagine the material worlds they inhabit. In Cordwainer Smith's classic short story *Under Old Earth*, congohelium is an unstable material composed of "matter and antimatter laminated apart by a dual magnetic grid" (Smith 1966). The Douglas-Ouyang planets, an artificial cluster of planets with a dull malevolent sentience, communicate with Earth through the music of the congohelium.

Computronium is the material of a hypothetical giant super-computing Matrioshka Brain, structured as nested Dyson shells of processing elements which employ the entire energy output of the sun. In Robert Bradbury's conception, an element of computronium consists of a cooling system, a solar power array, a nanoprocessor and vernier thrusters for station-keeping –very like contemporary satellites. In the far future, today's satellites could be considered equivalent to eoliths, with some resemblance of form, yet barely recognisable as cultural artefacts.

In both cases we have materials which act as the intermediary between an unimaginable entity and the humans who desire to communicate with it. They are the new elements in a periodic table of thinking materials. How would we classify these materials as archaeologists, or use them to infer the behaviour of mega-engineered structures? This is the most extreme anthropocene, where the balance of materials between 'natural' and 'manufactured' is altered at the nano- and solar-system scale; where prosaic science meets a new poetics of space.

Paul Graves-Brown (University College London)

'The Future is Already Over'
According to the architectural critic Reyner Banham, the future was already a subject for nostalgia in 1976, "crushed under Neil Armstrong's boot". Others, such as Sci-Fi novelist William Gibson, take the view that we are living in the future, but are stuck in an era of atemporality. Whilst there might seem to be an antinomy in both these positions; the future being always...in the future; I believe they may be right, if we accept that "the Future" is a trope or Foucauldian episteme. As, perhaps, the past is also.

"Yesterday's tomorrow is not today." The future has its origins in the late 19th century. But here I want to argue against Foucault's stratigraphic rejection of Braudel and the long durée – the episteme of the future has deep roots and, as Gibson says of atemporality, there will certainly be something that succeeds it. A post-future age. This paper will attempt to explore these ideas without getting lost.

Ömür Harmanşah (University of Illinois at Chicago)

'New Babylon: Symmetry in the utopian spaces of the archaeological past and deep future'
In *Archaeologies of the Future*, Frederic Jameson characterizes utopian form as "a representational meditation on radical difference, radical otherness, and on the systemic nature of the social totality". As intricately constructed and politically imagined social realities, as "non-places" *dis*placed into the deep future, utopias also play a vital role in the imagination of archaeological pasts, which often take the form of exotic totalities that radically differ from what is considered contemporary. The "Fertile Crescent" for example had to be imagined as a distant exotic geography, whose history ends strictly on November 5th, 333 BCE and its civilization, its societies simply "vanish". Arthur Evans's imagination of Minoans as peaceful, technologically advanced and isolated island civilization is intimately linked with Plato's utopic island Atlantis. Archaeology informs and builds utopias as carefully embroidered palaces of memory practices and desire, (dis)placed into the deep past, where archaeological objects become jeweled relics of a long-lost paradise. Likewise and symmetrically, I also argue that the critical utopian visions for the deep future often derives their inspiration from such archaeological imagination. Notable is the Situationist International's founding member Constant Nieuwenhuys's "New Babylon", his long-term project of a utopian city designed as a polemical provocation that critiqued the corruption and alienation in cities of industrial modernity. This paper will discuss performative effects and politics of such temporal shifts and entanglements between the deep past and the deep future.

Karen Holmberg (New York University)

'Future tense, past imperfect: Ode to the tenacity of plastic gyres and radioactivity'
'I'm waking up to ash and dust,
I wipe my brow and I sweat my rust,
I'm breathing in, the chemicals….
This is it, the apocalypse….
Welcome to the new age, to the new age...
I'm radioactive, radioactive'.

- Imagine Dragons (2012), 'Radioactive' from *Night Visions*

'And now for a quick look at our time! We are frightened and run back. Where has all the clarity gone, all the naturalness and purity of that connection between life and history? How confusedly, excessively, and anxiously this problem now streams before our eyes! Does the fault lie with us, the observers'?

- Friedrich Nietzche (1874), 'On the use and abuse of history for life' from *Untimely Meditations*

This presentation takes the form of a meditation on flows of mud from a volcano formed by hydrofracking, the movement of nuclear fallout in the wind, motorcycle rides in nuclear wastelands, tides of plastic flotsam washed onto the shore of a cataclysmic natural disaster site, and the Dark Mountain movement. Using the composite work 'Meltdown' (2013) by Japanese artist Manabu Ikeda I explore the idea that archaeological ideas of the past are imaginary worlds born from experiences and contemporary events. As observers, what pasts should we imagine to better inform the future? The increasingly adversarial perception of how human culture intersects with nature prompts us, I suggest, to study that which spurs us to creative action.

Cornelius Holtorf and Anders Högberg (Linnaeus University)

'**Future consciousness: when archaeology meets nuclear waste management'**
Historical consciousness refers to the meaningful relations between past, present and future that govern, and are established and reproduced, in uses of the past. Just as it is possible to analyze historical consciousness from the way it manifests itself in uses of the past, future consciousness can be analyzed from the way it manifests itself in uses of the future. Both the heritage and the nuclear waste sectors preserve in the present potentially dangerous material culture for the future. Future generations will, in one way or another, find, make sense and possibly make use of this material. It is therefore interesting to ask whether or not professionals in both realms perceive of the future in the same way and what may account for any apparent differences. By the same token, how do any different perceptions of the future influence the respective working strategies in each sector in the present?

Rosemary Joyce (University of California, Berkeley)

'**Traces that endure'**
"What can archaeology contribute to the future?": our session abstract urges us to respond. And I think: "the future"? And "archaeology"?

Now "contribute": that is a word I can get behind; there is something about our activity right now that is a contribution, in the sense of something we leave for or give to others. And insofar as "the future" is the temporality that will last after we are gone, then yes, "contribute to the future". But I am left with that other question: "archaeology?"

And so we come to my presentation, which will not be a paper as such, but a collage that explores archaeology understood as a practice that makes traces appear. What traces will archaeology help to endure? what futures will the archaeological sensibility frame so that others may see as we do, long after we individually are gone?

I think this question through and in dialogue with two bodies of evidence: the opinions assembled to guide a decidedly futurist notion of how we might successfully mark nuclear waste disposal sites for 10,000 years (or not); and the opinions assembled to turn piles of earth assembled around 2800 years ago in Central America into mountains. The first set of opinions emerges largely (although not completely) from individuals who do not identify as archaeologists; the second emerges entirely (although not without dissent) from people recognized as archaeologists. In both cases, I argue, we are dealing with projections into a future that collapse time, making traces endure as archaeologies.

Cheyenne Laue (University of Montana, Missoula)

'Excavating the artificial: archaeology, temporality, and digital space'

Data moves. Field notes carefully record location and describe context. Digital storage curates objects and archives assemblages in binary form. Computer simulations revive the histories of artifacts, retracing their complex paths across ancient landscapes; forgotten lives are thus resurrected *in silica.* Dynamic, explanatory, and descriptive - data reconstitutes physical characteristics and restores momentum to the long-inert, while time, per Fabian (1985), constructs the archaeological other.

But all is not as it seems. Systems once used for organizing information, for animating and peeking into the past, now provide prescient vantage points as well. Notions of artificial culture (Gessler 1995) and artificial life seep into previously intact boundaries dividing digital and real, while ideas of nascent sociality, of artifacts crafted from bits and bytes, imply the possibility of emerging proto-histories (Epstein 1996) and complex temporal entanglements that challenge the archaeological backward gaze. This presentation makes visual use of computer simulation footage in order to interrogate these categories – artificial and real, past and future – and to question the nature of the transitions between them. In this way, we must revisit our most basic assumptions, and reexamine the role of archaeology as a discipline of the past. Landscapes, we will see, may mirage to digital grids, while artifacts litter the output of computer code in surprising worlds, devoid of dirt and stone. These worlds suggest paths for archaeological futures, and hint at the potentially generative nature of research in that time. Methods and theory collide in such futures. Some movements, it seems, collapse time.

Colleen Morgan (University of York)

'Future ghosts: Avatars, bioarchaeology, and interstitial anxieties'
Advances in archaeological simulation, including virtual reality and augmented reality have led to extensive reconstructions of past landscapes and architecture. These include creative interventions in mixed reality, with photo overlays from modern street scenes, whispered conversations from gravestones, and immersive gaming events. Simultaneous bioarchaeological advances in ancient DNA, istotopic and proteomic analyses lend an incredible fidelity to reconstructions of past individuals and their lifeways. When combined, virtual simulation, augmented reality and bioarchaeological data can be used to push back on archaeological interpretation. Distributed personhood through the mobilization of past physical affordances contributes to reframing future archaeology as a form of telepresence, ''where you are when you're talking on the phone'' (Rucker et al. 1992), that is, not quite in the room where you are now and not with the person to whom you are speaking, but somewhere in-between (Mirzoeff 1999). Inhabiting avatars of past peoples brings on interstitial anxieties, highlighting the co-permeation of past, present, and future. In this talk I discuss the ethics and affordances of the virtual simulation of past people, and the near-future potential and implications of avatar embodiment and identity.

Rucker, R.v.B., Sirius, R.U., and Mu Q. (1992). *Mondo 2000: A User's Guide to the New Edge.* New York: Harper Perennial.

Mirzoeff, N. (1999). *An Introduction to Visual Culture*. London: Routledge.

Elise Nuding (contemporary dancer, Berlin)

'Practicing a deep(er) present (or how time keeps shifting, slipping, and sliding)'
That our experience of time shifts, slips, and slides depending on our activities and environments is not a new idea. But it is an idea, or rather a daily reality, that is fundamental to my work as a contemporary dance artist—a performer and performance-maker. Drawing on my experiences working in this "time-based art", this lecture-performance offers some thoughts on the ways in which we are able to alter our experiences of time, and therefore, potentially, the ways in which we are able to imagine it.

Performance practices revolve around presence. It is both a concept with a semi-mystical aura (that "something else" quality some performers have) and a prerequisite for live performance—presence, both of performer and audience, is required. It is also something of a buzzword right now; excitingly, several academic disciplines beyond performance studies have shown interest in the concept of presence (and also, more generally, performance). However, with this in mind, I am less interested in approaching presence as a cultural or disciplinary phenomenon, or from a philosophical standpoint; I am more interested in practicing it, and in probing what that practice offers to the questions about temporal thinking that this session proposes.
This lecture-performance explores how practicing presence can change the way we experience and imagine time by consciously altering our mind-body state *through movement.* Here, we enter a "deep(er) present"— a present extending beyond split-second, fleeting moments, where heightened awareness facilitates different experiences and understandings of "being present", and as such, of "the present."

Uzma Rizvi (Pratt Institute)

'Theorizing deposition: Transitional stratigraphy, disruptive layers, and the future'
Disruption causes time to slip out of archaeology's control. It forces a different set a skills to cope with the archaeologists' desire and intimacy with and within walls, burnt layers, and transitional stratigraphy. There are assemblage relationships with all of the evocative, ambient, bundled, things. While excavating these in between spaces, in particular the spaces in between walls, there are multiple time periods that are simultaneously indexed and extractable – it is almost never the case that an archaeological event represents a static and singular experience. It is almost always a slipping in and out of mixed context. This paper interrogates archaeology's relationship with depositional categories through conversations between political philosophy, history, speculative fiction, critical human geography, and music. The tension in the relationships between science, political philosophy and the improvisional nature of both come into high relief in projections of the future.

Lee Vinsel (Stevens Institute of Technology)

'Cars that drive themselves versus the human self: Today's archaeology of the future and tomorrow's history of the future'

This paper explores the intersection between two topics of current interest, each of which resides in different academic disciplines and subdisciplines, namely the archaeology of the future and the history of the future. The former focuses on the movement of time, objects, and ideas in relationship to a projected future; the latter, on how people in the past imagined the future and how individuals and groups put those imagined futures to use politically. The paper uses the case of autonomous, or self-driving, vehicles to examine this junction. Prophets of self-driving cars assert that these technologies will soon be available for purchase. Drawing on the history of automotive regulation, we can guess that these technologies will become available and even mandatory through—what will be seen in hindsight as—the most mundane and boring of processes. For example, one possible path to mandatory self-driving car use is through auto insurance policies, e.g., if you want your teenager to drive the family car, he or she can "use" it but never touch the wheel, aka what we now refer to as "driving." And *yet*, today, the self-driving car is caught up in anything but ordinary discourses but is the dream thing of AI proponents, Less Wrongers, transhumanists, Silicon Valley-headed cyberlibertarians, and proponents of "disruption" and "innovation," all of whom are extremely skeptical of the human. How then can today's archaeologists of the future conserve tomorrow's history of the future so that today's extraordinary anti-humanism isn't lost to tomorrow's sense of ordinary, humdrum pedestrianism?