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Archaeoclash: Manifesting Art and Archaeology*

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*Based on a manifesto issued in the Cambridge Archaeological Journal (see Cochrane and Russell 2007)

Biographies

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www.iarchitectures.com/irac.html
www.iarchitectures.com/visualizingarchaeologies.html.

Abstract

Is archaeology a science? Is archaeology a humanity? What are the politics of spectatorship and archaeological representation? These initial thoughts form the basis for our archaeological explorations. Within current archaeological discourse, there are a growing number of requests for expressions, which illuminate and expose the interpretive and artistic qualities of presentation and narration. Yet few scholars actively utilise expressive practice to explore these philosophical issues. As such, we feel that this is an opportune time to intervene in the visual and textual discourse by issuing a manifesto for our project, building upon our previous works (e.g. Cochrane and Russell 2007). We call for the development of a critically reflexive practice of visual archaeological expressionism, which seeks to contest traditional modes of thought and action[i].

A declaration

We declare the importance and the need to express theoretical concepts in a format which is not constrained by linguistic context. We will express theory which is often written in English and turn to the visual as a means of promoting a visuality of archaeological theories, methodologies and narratives. This simultaneously acts as an invitation for practitioners who feel constrained themselves by this discourse in archaeological theory to seek to transcend linguistic cultural barriers by embracing the visual.

Such endeavours have far-reaching ramifications for the tension between non-academic (public) and academic (expert) discourses (if indeed it is possible or appropriate to make these separations). Actions will pose further questions; for instance, can we ask what the implications for value and meaning are in archaeological presentations?; will archaeological science be deemed less 'hard' by its inclusion in abstract and unquantifiable visual expressions?; how will this affect the linguistic authorities of archaeological discourse? We feel that the consequences of not undertaking such critical ventures are greater than undertaking them. If archaeologists fail to reflexively intervene in discourses of visual literacy, then this threatens value in archaeological research and risks the loss of the social and visual relevance of archaeological expression. These concerns and contemplations are the stimuli for this manifesto.

Reflexive acknowledgement

We accept that this manifesto is by no means an assertion of a universal 'state of affairs'. The views and ideas expressed in this text are the contextualised expressions of our own individual and shared experiences as Western academics and artistic practitioners. In particular we choose to acknowledge our childhood experiences in Richmond, Virginia in the United States and Cornwall, England in the United Kingdom. We studied and currently work in Dublin, Ireland and Cardiff, Wales and understand our thought as a product of Western European and Anglo-American intellectual and social discourses.

Influences

In the spirit of our previous manifesto (Cochrane and Russell 2007), here we adopt modes of free thought and expression. Therefore at times we choose to abandon traditional standards of citation and referencing, and instead acknowledge here the list of thinkers and artists, who have greatly shaped our thought and practice:

Theodor Adorno
Douglass Bailey
Banksy
Jean Baudrillard
Ulrich Beck
Walter Benjamin
Joseph Beuys
Maurice Bloch
Elizabeth DeMarrais
Marcel Duchamp
Alfred Gell
Andy Goldsworthy
Chris Gosden
Raoul Hausmann
Cornelius Holtorf
Stephanie Koerner
Bruno Latour
Richard Long
René Magritte
Eduardo Paolozzi
Man Ray
Colin Renfrew
Michael Shanks
Julian Thomas
Andy Warhol
Peter Weibel

Structure

Following Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) and William Burroughs (1914-1997), in this manifesto we also distinguish ourselves from more traditional scholarly writings by articulating ideas as a collection of excerpts and free-standing paragraphs[ii]. The formatting of argument as fragments in their own context not only allows the reader the freedom to absorb discussion in which ever order they please, but also moves us as authors nearer to an experimentation with surrealist textual montage, that disrupts particular linear and systemic flows of explanation.

To alleviate representational pressure

Throughout the modern Western world, there has been a growth in the assertion of scientific process as a method of constructing representational archaeologies. The modern scientific expression of a true, and accessible past evident in visible and tangible material, occurred in tandem with the development of modern faith in rational science as a means for explicating contemporary existence. In response, Jean Baudrillard pronounced of modernity that: 'we, the modern cultures, no longer believe in this illusion of the world, but in its reality (which of course is the last and the worst of illusions)'[iii]. In archaeology, the belief in a 'real' past as an observable phenomenon obscures the many layers of modern confusion and misrepresentation that are experienced in everyday life. That 'modern cultures' believe in the 'real' or a 'real' past is not so much a declaration of the 'current state of affairs' but more an affirmative declaration of the desire of one of the projects of modernity, the archaeological endeavour. But as Bruno Latour has asked 'have we ever been modern?'[iv]. If modernity is a process which is in search of the scientifically explicable 'real', will the project ever come to completion? Is it possible to attain a utopia of the 'real', or is this merely a modern purgatory of struggle for authoritative meaning through representation?

In answering these questions, we acknowledge that archaeology occupies a perplexing position in the discourse of human expression. On the one hand, archaeology is a natural science, the logical expression of a process-driven approach to explaining a linear temporal evolutionary understanding of the world. On the other, it is a humanity, a poetic expression of humans grappling with modern philosophies, paradigms and epistemologies in a world which is rapidly changing but simultaneously constant. We can appreciate the positivistic assertions of Lewis Binford in his attempts to have archaeology recognised as a legitimate social science. Such assertions, we feel have, however, actively ignored the critical comments made in discourses such as visual arts throughout the twentieth century, which called into question the violent nature of image construction and representation in a world rampant with conflict. This has given way to a dynamic state of perpetual struggles for epistemic authority in this shared world we all inhabit.

Digestible rhetoric and text

We intend to move away from the reliance on textual symbolism within Western academia as an analeptic means of intellectual debate. Taking our lead from Maurice Bloch and Alfred Gell (1945-1997) this paper will abandon interpretations, linguistic fallacies or 'thought-traps', founded on unambiguous visual meanings, definable symbolism and decipherable textual codification. In rejecting these decompositions of imagery, we remove ourselves from succumbing to the 'treachery' or 'conspiracy' of language, and call for a move toward non-representational archaeologies.

We consider how archaeology, as an enterprise in understanding past human endeavour, operates via the modern production of texts in propositional form. We also acknowledge that the creation of texts and terminologies within the discipline facilitates discourse and communication amongst practitioners, we are inspired by the art of René Magritte (1898-1967). His most notable work 'The Treason of Images' (1928-1929) is an image of a pipe with text - *Ceci n'est pas une pipe*. We feel the visual critique inherent in Magritte's work is integral to an acceptance within archaeology that text can not prove the true identification of an artefact, and an artefact can not prove a text to be true. The contemporary adoption of terminologies within public spaces such as museums encourages the belief that the textual concepts linked to the artefact are in fact materialized truth and not interpretation. This creates a paradox in which we as archaeologists utilise text to understand worlds in which text often may not have existed (e.g. in prehistoric studies). It is therefore suggested that a better comprehension of the cognition of thought processes, or how past people perceived their world, will derive from focusing not only on what we write about these people, but first on what they may have been able to see, and second from what they made of what they had seen (Bloch 1998). Building upon this notion, we suggest that broader understandings of an interpretation of a past in the present will also derive from focus on visual rather than just textual stimuli.

We are moving beyond printed text to seek out alternative metaphors and modes of attention and expression, to further elucidate the past. By exploring archaeological expressionism (such as poetry, sculpture and art), we begin to move more towards what Michael Shanks terms a 'poetic' approach to archaeology, and beyond discourses of 'counter-modern', 'non-modern', 'a-modern' or 'pre-modern'. By further appreciating our modern relationships with images, we may generate broader investigations of the complex negotiations that may have existed in the past, while celebrating the potential for archaeological expressions in contemporary society.

Archaeology and art: diverging traditions?

In the visual arts there has been a healthy reaction to and discourse over technological developments enabling methods of increasingly realistic representation. The photographers Emmanuel Radnitzky (also as known as Man Ray) (1890-1976) and Raoul Hausmann (1886-1971) used their technological craft in order to subvert 'known' or 'seen' reality, highlighting the illusion of the visually 'real' – an illusion masked by the belief in technological progress. The Futurists, Fillipo Tomasso Emilio Marinetti (1876-1944), Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968), René Magritte (1898-1967), Joseph Beuys (1921-1986) and Andy Warhol (1928-1987), all attempted to subvert the authenticity of visual representation in the twentieth century. Archaeology during the twentieth century has, however, been generally more concerned with documenting artefacts, compiling archaeological records and producing narratives of 'fact' about the past. We suggest an end to this inconsistency between disciplines and agencies, which seek to explore human expression with objects, images and environments.

A stagnation of discourse

Post-processual theory developed as a response to disillusionment with the ability of a processual archaeology to present a veristic, ascertainable, factual past. Interpretative scholars embraced the application of modern, post-modern and contemporary philosophy in the exploration of possibilities of the creation of archaeological knowledge. Despite post-processual critiques of scientific processual archaeological practice, archaeological studies as modern science are still utilised today in the formation of modern national and ethnic identities, being presented to society as evidence of an identity's 'existence'[v]. Indeed, recently John Bintliff and Mark Pearce, in their session 'The Death of Archaeological Theory?' at the 2006 meeting of the European Association of Archaeologists, begged the question of whether archaeological theory and post-processualism in particular have been unsuccessful in facilitating discourses of understanding and solving archaeological epistemic problems.

This illustrates the urgency of the contemporary situation. Given the perception of a failure of a reliance on textual understandings of epistemological and ontological problems with archaeological methodologies, it is imperative that we not retreat to a process-driven scientific methodology, but accept the humanistic aspects and expressionistic potential of research and narrative. We feel that archaeological research must be reincorporated into the discourse of visual theory and expression. It should no longer be approached as a singular, unique narrative of 'truths' but as fluid expressions of modern beliefs in temporalities and human agencies. We do not wish to go as far as Marinetti to rid ourselves of the 'gangrene of professors, archaeologists, tourist guides and antiquaries', but we wish to bring visual criticisms and strategies to bear on archaeological explorations of materiality.

Visualising archaeological 'art'

In many archaeological publications, the term 'art' is often thought of as being ill-defined and consequently confined to inverted commas. The term 'art' from an archaeological and anthropological perspective is difficult to define, due in part to the imprecise boundary between 'art' and 'non-art', whose location shifts with fashion and ideology (Layton 1991, 4). Ventures within the twentieth century at expounding the term 'art' have been fashioned to encompass not just recognisable paintings and abstract paintings, but also anything that an artist defines as 'art' (Dickie 1997, 80-81). The doctrine being that 'art' is very much the free creation of the individual artist. Art is therefore characterised to be an 'ultra-abstract' concept of an 'institutional' kind (Gell 1998, 188; Tillinghast 2003, 133). Studies in anthropology have, however, elucidated that this is a most unique perspective (Layton 1991; Gell 1998). It is proposed that one should instead consider issues of social expression, knowledge and understanding. Moreover, it is noted that the term 'art' does not always exist in non-Western societies. As an illustration, the languages of Aboriginal northern Australia, such as the Kunwinjku language of a region with 'rock art', have no word for the notion of 'art' (Taçon and Garde 1995). It might therefore be as Sparshott suggests that art is '…so specifically framed within "our" civilisation that it is perhaps something native only to "us"…' (1997, 239).

Deriving the term 'art' from the Old French '*ars*', meaning 'skill', some contemporary scholars suggest that 'art' is still only the product of talented people who are often inspired by genius, madness or taste. 'Art' from such a perspective is often described in terms of its semantic or aesthetic properties, which are used for presentational or representational purposes. Previous megalithic and rock art studies have, for instance, revolved around formal description. Reducing 'art' to descriptive, aesthetic, representational and formal properties, however, limits the roles of the producers and consumers. 'Art' has more recently been defined as '…any painting or sculpture or material object that is produced to be the focus of our visual contemplation or enjoyment…' (Renfrew 2003, 66). Such a definition does unfortunately focus more on 'art' as being solely 'good to look at' rather than 'good to think with'. Therefore, we wish to free art from quotation and celebrate its practice, suggesting for the purposes of our project to explore art as imageries, societies, objects, events, articulations and fictions as a means of stimulating further debate on the nature of images and strategies of presentation. Or in Aristotelian traditions, as poetry and *tekhne*, that is the responsible exercise of practice, to render accessible expressions of understandings of being in the world[vi].

Outside the discipline of archaeology, there is a large body of knowledge encompassing art history. Most of this discourse, however, addresses 'art' in a specific context of literate societies, and is therefore of limited use within some

archaeological milieu (e.g. prehistoric studies). Frustratingly, the areas of archaeology that have demonstrated a specific interest in visual aesthetics, such as studies of the Greek Classical world, present a tendency to project back contemporary aesthetics, values and judgements ont past societies (Gill and Chippindale 1993). The trend is to create a framework for artistic study that demonstrates relationships between the image and its social meanings (Layton 1991). This orthodox art historical application, informs little of indigenous and pre-Renaissance European contexts, and more of Western notions of universal human 'culture specific' and 'period specific' aesthetics (Gell 1998, 3). If one is to adopt such an approach, 'art' might be better thought of as much a product of work, being a tool or a process, as in any other craft (Wolff 1981; Gell 1998; Conkey 2001), rather than being based upon '…Graeco-Renaissance traditions of taste…' (Renfrew 2003, 65; see Fig 2.10).

By considering moves towards archaeological expressionism, we are seeking alternative ways of understanding the 'why' and 'how' of images and physical objects. We take our lead from Alfred Gell (1945-1997) who argued that objects and images display '…a certain cognitive indecipherability…', that they enchant and confuse the viewer who is unable to recognise at once '…wholes and parts, continuity and discontinuity, synchrony and succession…' (1998, x). Archaeological expressionism is concerned with *any* form of apparatus designed either to be looked at or to enhance vision, from oil paintings, line drawings or digital photomosaics. Some modern scholars currently advocate that we are increasingly a visual society, as we are no longer informed solely by text, and they suggest a 'visual' or 'pictorial turn', with sensationalists suggesting the extreme of an 'iconic boom' of visual literacy. Daily we are informed and saturated with images ranging from advertisements, television and the internet. This is not to suggest that human experience is now more visual and visualised than ever before. Human visual experience and intelligence, both past and present, is founded on practices of spectatorship: the look, the gaze, the glance, observation and surveillance. But as we are presented, through technologies, with the opportunity to utilise different visual regimes from those in the past, we seek to explore the archaeological, by embracing visual motions which cannot be fully explicable in models of textuality. We therefore strive for other forms of expression and analogy.

We do not mean, however, to ignore the tradition of visual representation inherent to the discipline of archaeology. Rather we intend to confront this tradition to expose its failed attempt at 'realistic' representation of the past and re-engage it with the equally significant tradition of visual cultural criticism. For example there are recent criticisms of studies that incorporate traditional archaeological two-dimensional black and white images such as line-drawings. Some have questioned a perspective that seems to privilege the static form of the representation, over more fluid social processes. For example, when studying the images engraved on Irish passage tombs[vii] or the 'corpus' of Irish early-Christian or 'Celtic' design, such conventions create a situation where the

spectator in studying motifs as a corpus is encouraged to participate in the illusion that the image is a 'realistic' representation of the original design. The viewer is also given an 'observer-imposed' selection of 'acceptable' visual images, presenting the motifs as spatially and temporally static. We argue that all traditional, schematic, representational line-drawing produce similar effects, whilst also creating a particular scientific realism. Furthermore, we consider current appropriations of representational systems from the fields of physics and network theory. Although these are dynamic progressions from the two-dimensional representations of archaeological knowledge, they are still firmly imbedded in the modern archaeological meta-endeavour of constructing and presenting knowledge as a visual 'reality'. This we feel pushes archaeological realism to the point of abstraction.

Thus we call archaeologists to participate in active and dynamic methods of visual expression. We are not asserting the need for a Dadaist archaeology or a Futurist archaeology or a surrealist archaeology. What we call for is a re-engagement of archaeology with the history and contemporary practice of the visual arts. This re-engagement, we feel will enable archaeology to:

- Move toward reflexive visual expressions of archaeological practice.
- Move beyond traditional realistic abstraction, which was created via scientific methodologies, and representations.
- Transcend the limitations of the two dimensional plane of archaeological representations (e.g. plans, schematic drawings, section drawings) and embrace dynamic visual articulations of multiple essences.
- Confront the visual appropriation of archaeological material as icons of modern temporalities, ethnicities, ideologies and so on.
- Alleviate representational pressure put on archaeological research and material.
- Support a move beyond representational archaeologies.
- Explore potentials for multi-vocal, multi-temporal and multi-presentational archaeologies.
- Investigate the tensions put on archaeology by its relationships with other disciplines in the humanities and the social and natural sciences.
- Counter the modern 'crisis' and 'state of emergency' through responsible acts of participatory archaeological expression.
- Highlight the human need for movement and spatial interaction by intervening in traditional representational and discursive environments, thus engaging modern dichotomies through reflexive practice.
- Communicate theoretical concepts and expressions which are not limited to language-specific contexts.

These tasks may be done in theory but more importantly we feel they must be done in practice, in participatory ways. In doing so, it is possible to broaden the resonance of the archaeological sensibility beyond the task of studying or

constructing the past and empower archaeologists with new and active ways of engaging the assemblages of things and social assemblages of people in the world. These assemblages are fluid, viscous and dynamic. The assemblage (both beyond object and self) is a constant metamorphosis of instability, messiness, contradiction and being. Thus the perception of archaeology and the archaeological object as stagnant entities or representations runs against the fundamental nature of the phenomenon of social being. Therefore archaeologists are perhaps in need of transcending their modern objectives in order to participate in the metaphorical metamorphosis of being and meaning while equally being aware of its intrinsic modern rationale as science. Therein lies the risk – to transcend modernity would be to transcend many of archaeological thought's basic philosophical assumptions that are present ion archaeology (Thomas 2004). This necessitates a great humbling of archaeology within the discourse over epistemic sovereignty and over conceptions of the past. There is a great risk in intelligence and in making art (Sontag 1973). Let us move forward and embrace this risk to partake in the metaphorical expressions of society through poetic expressions of understandings of the human condition through art and archaeology.

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[i] An earlier form of this Manifesto, where we present a fuller and more detailed list of authors we have been inspired by, can be found in Cochrane and Russell (2007).

[ii] See Benjamin (1992). Also see Burroughs (1959).

[iii] See Baudrillard (1997,18).

[iv] See Latour (1993) and Russell (2006a; 2006b).

[v] For some discussions of the role of archaeology in modern national and ethnic discourse see Kohl and Fawcett (1995), Díaz-Andreu and Champion (1996), Graves-Brown *et al*. (1996), and Meskell (1998; 2001).

[vi] See Koerner (2006) and Russell (2006b).

[vii] See Cochrane (2005; 2006).

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