

# Chapter 15

## Art//Archaeology//Art: Letting-Go Beyond

Doug Bailey

Professor Bailey investigates the articulations of art and archaeology. He argues that while recent influences of contemporary art have expanded archaeological interpretations of the past, more provocative and substantial work remains to be done. The most exciting current output is pushing hard against the boundaries of art as well as of archaeology. Bailey's proposal is for archaeologists to take greater risks in their work, and to cut loose the restraints of their traditional subject boundaries and institutional expectations. The potential result of such work will rest neatly within neither art nor archaeology, but will emerge as something else altogether. The new work will move the study of human nature into uncharted and exciting new territories.

### Introduction

The articulations of artists and archaeologists are many and hold fascination for scholars and practitioners across both subjects.<sup>1</sup> Many archaeologists have found inspiration in the works of painters, sculptors, performers, and poets as sources of either interpretative models for us to explain past behaviour or ancient material that we need to examine, categorise, and interpret. Just as frequently, inspiration flows the other direction; contemporary and traditional artists have found stimulation and subject matter not only in ancient objects and sites, but also in the practice and process of archaeological excavation, analysis, and curation. Chris Evans has written (e.g., 2004) about the relationship between artist and archaeological subject, for example the ways in which the archaeological landscape of the Vale of the White Horse in the

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<sup>1</sup> Recent work of note includes Renfrew (2003); Renfrew et al. (2004) and Bonaventura and Jones (2011).

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UK has inspired artists: the unusual and evocative photographs of archaeological landscapes that Paul Nash produced in the 1930s, work that is simultaneously artistic and archaeological (e.g., Nash *The White Horse, Uffington, Berkshire* 1937).<sup>2</sup> A full discussion of artists' renderings of archaeological landscapes, of ruins, and of artefacts is worthy of its own book or even set of books. In such a conversation, one would drill down through the deep layers of nostalgia that may lurk in Nash's work (or at a second level, in Evans' commentary on Nash's work). Alternatively, one could work through the archaeological contexts and imaginations of a 1761 Giovanni Battista Piranesi lithograph *Scenographia reliquiarum aedis quae Concordiae asseritur, Agrigenti in Sicilia*, or one could take flight into vast, descriptive discussions, for example, of the evolution of prehistoric figurine form from naturalist to realistic representation. In this essay, I intend something else: to explore sharp and at times raw articulations that have emerged between the artistic and the archaeological in recent work by practitioners of both subjects. The discussion that I wish to provoke will examine the work of a growing number of artists and archaeologists who have ignored the boundaries that restrict their own disciplines and, in doing so, who have started to realise the enormous potential for pan-disciplinary thinking on major themes in humanities and social sciences.

## Artists Being Archaeologists

We could begin with Mark Dion, an artist whose best-known work, most notoriously in London but also in Venice, and most recently in the USA, has found energy on a pivot of the artistic and the archaeological. One of Dion's most famous works was the *Tate Thames Dig* (1999),<sup>3</sup> in which he collected objects from the shores of the River Thames in a quasi-archaeological project. He set up finds-processing tents on the banks of the River Thames and in front of the Tate Modern Gallery, and he invited people to join in the work as assistants and analysts; many more watched the theatre of the project.

Though one of the best known, appreciated, and viewed examples in the recent past of an artist being inspired by archaeology, *Tate Thames Dig* left many archaeologists unsatisfied. Perhaps selfishly so, many were uneasy with the way in which Mark Dion came into archaeology and played with the methodologies that archaeologists employ. Fuller discussions of the *Dig* are available elsewhere and it is not necessary to repeat them here (Birnbaum 1999; Blazwick 2001; Vilches 2007; Coles and Dion 1999). Dion's own words are illuminating, and in 2001, he spoke to Denise Markonish about his role as an artist playing the archaeologist:

I never take on the mantle of mastery in these projects. It is always obvious that I am a dilettante struggling to find my way. As you know the tone set at a dig is pretty irreverent despite the serious labour involved. So there is a strong performative aspect, but there is no illusion. (Markonish 2001, p. 36)

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<sup>2</sup> See also Hauser (2007).

<sup>3</sup> More information on Mark Dion's *Tate Times Dig* can be found at: <http://www.tate.org.uk/servlet/ViewWork?workid=27353>

Dion is a successful contemporary artist and much of his work is about display (e.g., *Loo 2*, *Raiding Neptune's Vault* 1997/1998). Indeed, some of his best work is about taking archaeological material, and manipulating and displaying it in museums in provocative ways. Perhaps professional archaeologists' unease comes from a realisation that Dion's archaeological projects are not in fact archaeological (though they pretend to be). They are an illusion, a sleight of hand and, perhaps, because of this, from an archaeological perspective the work appears amateurish, with a glaze of the student-esque, almost as a prank, or in Dion's words as the work of a "dilettante."

Heartening is the recognition that Dion's dabbling in matters archaeological is only one (though perhaps a particularly well known) example of an artist visiting the world of the archaeological. Work of different stature and consequence has been taking place, as other contemporary artists get into the trenches with archaeologists. A good example is the work of Simon Callery. Callery is a UK based contemporary artist who has worked with archaeologists from Oxford University at Bronze and Iron Age sites such as Segsbury Camp and Alfred's Castle in the UK (Bonaventura 2003). Callery's work at Alfred's Castle, *Trench 10* (2003) (Callery 2004), is enthralling for archaeologists, for contemporary artists, and for many others.<sup>4</sup> Callery took his artistic self on-site at the excavation and threw himself into the archaeological process while holding onto the artistic tools, skills, and knowledge that he knew best. The result? Callery covered the bottom of one of the archaeologist's freshly excavated trenches with wet latex, and let the latex harden in place.

When Callery pulled the latex cast away from the chalk ground of the trench bottom, the cast pulled away bits and pieces of the chalk. In doing so, Callery had created an unusual artefact/artwork that was both object and record, yet at the same time, neither artefact nor documentation, and perhaps not even art object or historical referent. Callery presented the cast in a museum as an installation (exhibited first at Great Barn, Great Coxwell, then at Dover Castle and finally at the Storey Gallery in Lancaster), and accompanied it with an installation of aerial photographs (in collaboration with Andrew Watson) of the site and the trench from which the cast was taken. Like the object created in latex at the site, the installation is neither fully art object as traditionally understood (and thus does not sit comfortably within much contemporary western art of the late twentieth century) nor is it a presentation of archaeological practice and scientific result (and thus does not fit into traditional presentations of the past via excavation). Callery teases the viewers of the cast and its installation as he pulls spectators back and forth, playing with effects that a visitor expects from museum space and display as well as from archaeological object and formal representation of site and excavation.

Simon Callery has spoken about why he does what he does and about what happens when he starts to work with archaeologists. His comments hint at the radical potential that lurks within the connection of archaeologist and artist. Partly because of this potential, Callery's work (and, as we will see, his words) may provide reasons that works like *Trench 10* hold greater potency than does Mark Dion's *Thames Bank*

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<sup>4</sup> More information on Callery's work and *Trench 10* can be found at: [http://contemporary-magazines.com/reviews52\\_1.htm](http://contemporary-magazines.com/reviews52_1.htm). See also Bonaventura (2011).

*Dig. Trench 10* shows how making work at (and within) an excavation is more substantial and has a greater range of consequences for viewers than is the staging of an amusing pseudo-project as if the latter were a side-show at a festival. From such a show, the spectator (and participant) takes little beyond a shallow thrill on impersonating a scientist for an afternoon. Callery and the archaeologists he worked with share a mutual engagement with a common set of issues. In Callery's work, both the archaeological and artistic work engage issues of absence, of what happens when one digs a trench, of the consequences of removing objects and material, and vitally of how that the phenomenon of absence is made manifest in art or in archaeology. In contrast, Dion's performance piece with objects collected from the banks of the River Thames remains unarticulated with archaeological work of consequence; it remains an act performed on a stage of pretence, where Callery's *Trench 10* is down and dirty, yet philosophically engaging at the same time.

On another level, an additional interest that Callery and his archaeological collaborators share in their investigation is representation: representation of fieldwork and its results (for the archaeologist in the field and in the museum), but also representation of surface (for the artist in the studio and the gallery). Shared interest in representation collapses into the multiple roles played by museum, equally for archaeologist and artist, as well as for visitor and spectator. Viewing *Trench 10*, the archaeologist finds intellectual and practical adhesion and, in making the work, the artist embraces shared concepts of materials and intention. Common questions emerge. Where are the boundaries between the site of fieldwork outside and the place of that work in a display in a modern building? What constitutes a museum, regardless if it is an art museum or a natural history museum or a museum of archaeological objects?

Callery's work is also important because he takes risks; here is where the archaeological articulation with art should flourish and where archaeologists have much to learn. Callery sees art and archaeology as equally valid processes that provide access to new fields of deliberation about topics that reach beyond the current disciplinary limitations of academic and professional archaeology. Much contemporary art of merit is of interest, value, and consequence because risk-taking is at its core, as contemporary work turns on their heads those expectations that the viewer holds and the specific output that the discipline's tradition defines as acceptable output. In contemporary archaeology, the opposite situation holds: most work struggles under the subconscious restrictions of derivative action and a holy quest for interpretive explanation. The past exists to be explained; the scientist's purpose is to simplify and to remove the complexity and disorder that is human existence. Archaeologists are addicts of explanation and derivative interpretation.

Artists like Callery have a healthier, less insecure perspective on knowledge. In 2004, Susan Cameron, then a Masters student at Cambridge University interviewed Callery, asked him about his work and if he could explain it. He replied, "I don't feel the need for explanation because it is possible to explain things away, to short-cut the experience. I don't want to explain it. I actively try to make things difficult. Because it is not about communicating in the quickest possible way, it is about communicating in a distinctive way" (Cameron 2004). When asked about archaeology,

Callery replied, “Archaeology is about limiting interpretations . . . about limiting connections, about proposing a truth or a fact. Art seems to be actually richer when it works through misunderstandings” (Cameron 2004). Callery’s words point the way to a more vibrant practice: a radical contemporary articulation of art and archaeology that embraces misunderstanding, seeks complexity, and creates what is difficult (perhaps impossible) to digest, explain, or interpret.

Callery and other artists like him work at the interface of art and archaeology and wrestle with themes that are common to both fields. Here are artists who are inspired by archaeological landscapes and projects. Critical comments noted above aside, Mark Dion’s work sits at this interface as well. Like archaeologists, Dion and Callery work on the Big Subjects—time, the body, place, landscape, materials display, knowledge, and representation. Most of the work is very good, though some of it, like Dion’s, may be less satisfying. In the most provocative work, artists manipulate the surfaces of sites, not only by casting (as Callery did with *Trench 10*) but in other provocative ways through the use of photographs and film. Thus, they dissemble the traditional gallery vitrine in order to provoke new thoughts in the minds of those who experience the work: minds of artists, of archaeologists, of the public, of other scientists and cultural producers, and of an undefined community of viewers who have never held a trowel or dabbed a canvas, and who will never desire to dig or paint.

Simon Callery and his colleagues’ willingness to take risks and to continue to put themselves in situations where they have to reject traditional objects, setting, intentions, and established expectations for practice and for output sits comfortably within the institutional boundaries of standard disciplines and livelihoods. When Callery was on the archaeological site, he did not talk about making art in the ways that he usually did—he did not bring his expertise and experiences to the site as if they were some resource which the archaeologists could feed from in derivative extractions, as if the artist was an ethnographer of some community, offering analogies and tools for better interpretation and clearer understanding of that ancient site and of its inhabitants. On the contrary, Callery talked about exploring new territory and about taking advantage of unique places and times and intersections of material and being. He did not seek explanatory validation. He created something new.

## Archaeologists Reading Artists

Dion and Callery and many others share a common relationship to archaeology and archaeologists. Trained as artists, they have found inspiration on excavation or in archives. Over the past decade or so, it has become common practice for archaeologists, especially in the UK, but also across Europe and in the USA, to look to the better known (mostly western) contemporary art as a source of inspiration in their interpretive work.<sup>5</sup> A particularly popular source is the work of artists like Richard

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<sup>5</sup> I include some of my own earlier work here: Bailey (2005a, b); Bailey and McFadyen (2010).

Long. Long makes work in the landscape, most famously by walking back and forth between two points for a period of time until, having worn away grass beneath his feet or flattened the sand or pebbles, he has created a line on the ground; this is the case with one of his most famous works, *A Line Made by Walking* (1967).<sup>6</sup> As is the case for many of my archaeological colleagues (see Renfrew 2004, p. 14; Fleming 2006), Richard Long's work provokes thought and reaction. It makes me think about time, about human behaviour and the traces of it left in place, and about the temporal scales of being in the landscape. Time, traces of behaviour, temporal scales, and landscape are central concerns for archaeology. As western interpretive archaeologists devoted great energies to the study of the landscape in the last decades of the twentieth century, they found inspiration in the work of Long, in the same way that archaeologists in the 1970s and 1980s found analogies in ethnoarchaeological investigation of non-western communities of hunter-gatherers and simple agriculturalists. Long's work is complex and it is good to think with, whether those thoughts are about landscape or about traces and actions; archaeological practice and interpretation is much the better for his impact. However, its inspiration is of different substance and effect than that derived from the ethnoarchaeological: Long's work does not propose explanation or provide analogy; it advocates action and results that need have no other impact than in the reaction that the viewer has when experiencing the work.

Long is but one of a cohort of western contemporary artists to whom archaeologists have looked for inspiration. Another is Andy Goldsworthy who works with stone but also with ice and other, at times unexpected, materials. With *Ice Star* or *Ice Ball* (both 1985), he constructed geometric three-dimensional objects out of ice. With his *Cairn* works he creates massive and solid egg-shaped wholes which he constructs out of many, closely fit slabs of smaller stones. Goldsworthy's work provokes archaeologists to think in new ways about materials, temporality, and the ephemeral. He does not offer any set explanation for past behaviour or artefact patterns; he creates and in doing so he makes people think. Another popular source of inspiration has been the work of Anthony Gormley, who has made work that stimulates thought and debate about the human body, another rich topic of archaeological thinking in recent decades. In a recent contribution (*Another Place* 1997), Gormley cast his body-form in iron and placed hundreds of copies made from these casts around the landscape, first at Cuxhaven in Germany and more recently and famously at Crosby Beach, Merseyside in the UK.

Gormley's work pulls at the archaeological thinker in eclectic and disruptive ways; the result is a raft of new questions. What is an appropriate representation of the body? In what form, in what material? Whose body is represented? How accurate is the representation? How accurate does it need to be? In my own interpretive work, Gormley made me think about the body in new and unexpected ways; his *Field* series (first in 1991), in which he constructed tens of thousands of terracotta bodies in miniature and filled rooms in wall-to-wall carpeting of miniature human representations. When I was starting to think about how I can represent the body of

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<sup>6</sup> For more information on Richard Long's *A Line made by Walking*, see: <http://www.richardlong.org/sculptures/1.html>

someone who lived 6,000 years ago, I stood in front of *Field* and had to think in new and unanticipated ways. While there was no suggestion of an explanation or of an interpretive analogy through which I could shove onto my material, there was an energy of thought that had been absent before.

Taken together, this body of work by Gormley, Goldsworthy, Long has stimulated many archaeologists to think in coarse and raw ways about what we do as readers, discoverers, and manipulators of the past. There are many other, perhaps less well-known artists whose work have similar effects. One example is Adam Burthom, whose creations formed part of the *Ábhar agus Meon* exhibitions at the World Archaeological Congress at University College Dublin in 2008.<sup>7</sup> In one of the works that he showed in Dublin, *Bogland Book* (2007), Burthom took an everyday object (a book), placed it in the ground, and encouraged the organic processes to do what they do best, to break down the book's substance. *Bogland Book* is about entropy, about things perishing and falling away. Burthom makes us think about the processes at work upon an object, but he does so not with a reference to processual laws of formation processes or N-transforms; he does so by creating those process and their consequences. At play in all of this work (Burthom's, Gormley's, and that of many other contemporary artists), are many of the central debates and topics of archaeological thinking, though none of the works propose meaning for our archaeological datasets or subjects, and in that omission lies their strength.

## Archaeology/Not Art

What is the benefit of the inspiration created by Callery or derived from Long, Gormley, Goldsworthy, or Burthom? In many ways, the answer could be "not much." We gain some intellectual pleasure from seeing these works, thinking about them, reacting to them, and talking about them (or writing a book chapter like the one you are reading). The works trigger deep connections. We visit a gallery or an installation. We leaf through an exhibition catalogue. We search Google Images. My argument is that we do not do enough. When I think about us visiting, leafing through, and Google-searching, I feel as if we are sitting in our academic offices, looking out a window onto another discipline's landscapes of ideas, inspirations, and outputs. Contemporary artists and their work inhabit that landscape. When we seek inspiration for our archaeological work, it is as if we climb through that window, out of our offices and stride about the terrain sharing the space with the Gormley's or Long's. As we do so, we are stirred by those artists' creative efforts and we recognise in them an affinity; they are directed at topics in which we also have interest. We look at the work of Long or Callery, learn about it, and it inspires us.

The problem is what we do next. We put the work down, step away from the installations, retreat from that landscape, and climb back through the window into our

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<sup>7</sup> More information on Burthom's work can be found at: <http://www.amexhibition.com/adamburthom.html>

offices. We sit down at our desks, and we write our archaeological interpretations of the past. We keep in mind some of the essence of what we have seen, of that landscape and of the works that we found within it. In many ways, there is nothing different here from what archaeologists have been doing for 50 or more years: looking for analogies to aid in the task of interpretation, explanation, clarification, and simplification. The most common way to do this has been to look at ethnographic accounts of peoples living beyond our familiar environment or context and from whom we can draw analogies. Then we place those actions, thoughts, and lives on top of our plans, elevations, spreadsheets, stratigraphic matrices, and pottery series from the remains of the long-absent community that we are excavating. We do the same with contemporary art: we look at Gormley's body casts, for example, and then turn back to our studies of Imperial Roman portrait sculpture. There is nothing wrong with this approach, and it will remain one of the foundations of rigorous and valued archaeological interpretative practice. My suggestion is that something much more exciting is available to us. If we can take the risk (and a willingness to take risks is the key), then the potential exists in the articulation of art and archaeology for movement into a new intellectual space altogether.

## Art/Archaeology

Already, this potential is being realised in the work of a growing number of individuals who have trained as archaeologists but who have sought a more robust atmosphere in which to work. We could begin in many places, though the work of Aaron Watson is a good starter.<sup>8</sup> Watson trained as an archaeologist (he has a PhD from Reading University) and as a professional illustrator. He is an artist, and he has created some of the most stimulating understandings of the prehistoric past of Britain (see Fig. 15.1). He works with photographs. He works with paint. He works with video. He works with sound. He works with artefacts and archaeological landscapes. The results are unusual and unexpected, and they take me to places well beyond the other worlds of the prehistoric past. The work moves outside of our expectations of time or of archaeological conception of site and of the past. In *Stone Circle Vision* (2006), Watson creates a photo-collage with images of the Neolithic stone circle in Cumbria at Castlerigg. *Stone Circle Vision* is a creation that works within and beyond archaeology; it offers no explanation, but it alters the way that we see the past, and that we see the residue of the past in the present.

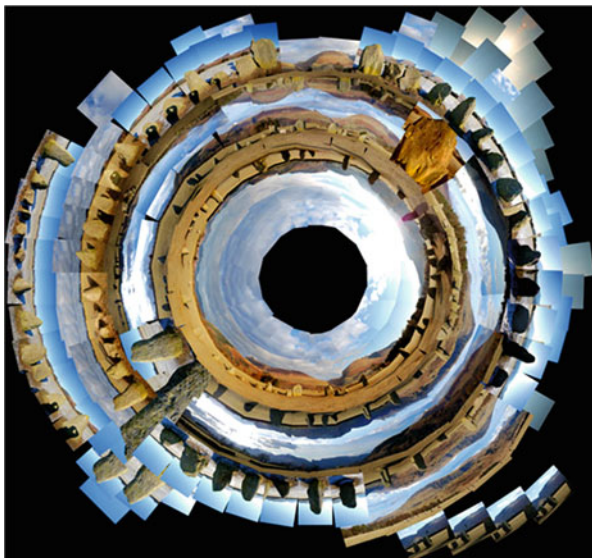
Another example is the work of Christopher Tilley, Barbara Bender, Sue Hamilton, and a field team working on a Bronze Age landscape in at Leskernick Hill in southern Britain (Bender et al. 2007; Tilley et al. 2000). These archaeologists took risks in their study of a landscape that included the stone remains of prehistoric houses. Much of the archaeological work was devoted to trying to understand the stones, their layout, and how one might reconstruct the Bronze Age houses and understand what they

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<sup>8</sup> For more information on Aaron Watson's work see: <http://www.monumental.uk.com>



**Fig. 15.1** Aaron Watson, *Stone Circle Vision*, 2006, digital photo collage



meant (i.e., traditional tasks of interpretation and explanation). In addition, and of greater interest, these archaeologists made innovative strides towards a less traditional engagement with how the people of the Bronze Age felt about, saw, and experienced their stone landscapes. In what turned out to be a radical piece of fieldwork, the Leskernick team wrapped the stones first in pink polka dot fabric, and then in plastic food wrap that they then painted in different colours (see Fig. 15.2). The intention was to transform visually the stones so that the team could experience them in a different way, perhaps so that the perception of the stones acquired a significance that was dislocated from what the archaeologists had come to expect. The result might trigger different, more sensual reactions to the stones and the buildings that they once formed part of. Regardless of the intention, wrapping the stones was a strange thing to do in terms of archaeological practice. In doing so, the team created something that was not wholly archaeological; they drifted into practices more at home among land artists and away from the standard archaeological pursuit.

This is all very exciting (some may say disturbing), but is it really archaeological? Did the Leskernick team go too far? On the contrary, I am concerned that they did not push hard enough and thus that they lost the opportunity to go even farther in their work, and to break free from the constraints of standard archaeological practice. Having completed their exciting interventions in the landscape with their wrapped stones, having gone through the inter-disciplinary window and moved beyond the limits of their disciplinary offices (as it were), and taken the big risks, the Leskernick team then crawled back through their window-frames, settled back into their offices in their academic departments, and carried on with their regular work of explaining the Bronze Age past. While it is vital to note that the project publication (Bender et al. 2007) made great strides to offer a radical alternative to a site report, it still claims to offer interpretation of the Bronze Age landscape. Having taken the risk, the team returned to the familiarity and safety of their own discipline.

**Fig. 15.2** The wrapped Leskernick backstone of House 23. (Photograph by Christopher Tilley)



In any event, the work by Watson as well as by the team of Bender et al. are exciting and move us in new, highly innovative and controversial directions. How do these works succeed in doing this? How do they get us into new intellectual territory? A part of the answer is that these archaeologists brought their own particular experience sets and their very specific skill sets to bear on common archaeological problems. For Watson, it is the case of an artist who is also an archaeologist. For Bender et al. it is their experience as field workers and archaeological theoreticians. Each of them brought the best parts of their personal work to a new activity, into a new place, and into a new context. However (and this I think is the core of the problem and the source of dissatisfaction), all of these efforts remain firmly anchored to a desire and a requirement to explain the past. In the end, each of these archaeologists feels that he or she has to justify their (unquestionably radical) work as being academic and archaeological. It is as if they are saying, “Oh, that other business over there, those ancient rocks wrapped in modern plastic, that is just some alternative work that we

are doing. It is just a sideshow, an experimental method, which gives us a new angle on the past.” My concern is that they are still locked to the project of interpreting the past, and that at the very moment when they make their most creative work, they turn away, and the potential for transformation is lost.

What disappoints me about the radical projects being carried out by people like Tilley, Hamilton, Bender, and Watson, is that their work is restrained by the need to generate a clear representation of the past. Their goals remain the creation of a scientific interpretation and explanation of the past. This goal traps many of the archaeologists who are working at the interface of archaeology and art; it handicaps development of scientists and it keeps them from breaking away. Let us look at one final set of people who are working at the interface of art and archaeology. This group consists of archaeologists who are pushing the farthest and the hardest and who are willing to let go, who are cutting the rope, who are taking the risks, and who, once they have gone through that interdisciplinary window have decided not to come back.

## **Beyond Archaeology/Art**

In 2003, Mike Pearson and Dr Heike Roms, from the University of Aberystwyth in Wales and Dr Angela Piccini from the University of Bristol organised work in Bristol in the UK. Funded by the UK’s Arts and Humanities Research Council, the project brought together a group of scholars from different disciplines (archaeologists, performance researchers, and artists) to investigate the complex issues of absence and emptiness. The questions that the project asked were fundamentally archaeological. After archaeologists excavate a site, once they have removed everything (artefacts, soil, walls) how do they react to, work with, and represent the absence that they have created? How do archaeologists respond to the constant current that runs under their work: regardless of the permanent durability of the archaeological remains (the mud-bricks, the amphorae, and the statuary), the great majority of what people did (the words, movements, emotions, intentions, and thoughts) in the past is lost forever. Archaeology is the study of absence more than it is the recovery of material remains. Part of the work run by Pearson, Roms, and Piccini was two over-night residencies camped out in the out-of-hours (empty of people, activity, and sound), closed Bristol Temple Meads train station (see Fig. 15.3).

The Temple Meads project desired to experience, and to try to record what a busy space such as a train station is, when it is empty of people: what is left of a normally vibrant and full place when it is emptied of its occupants and activities. Is it a different place? Is it the same place? How should archaeologists, photographers, illustrators, performers, and film makers represent the emptiness, and the lack of sound or lack of light that takes over after the gates are shut and the out-of-hours arrives? The project discovered, of course, that it could not represent the emptiness, because the emptiness never materialised (as it were). Emptiness and absence were elusive states: there were always things present. There was light; the lights were never turned off.

**Fig. 15.3** Silence at Bristol Temple Meads train station. (Photography by Douglass Bailey)



There was always sound. There were always people, whether it was homeless people who were trying to find a place to sleep, whether it was the all night guard. Regardless of (or better because of) this failure to find the absent emptiness, the Temple Meads' team wrestled to represent absence, to grapple with ideas central to archaeological practice and debate. In doing so, the team pushed beyond its original grant-winning proposal to represent, interpret, or understand absence and emptiness. In the space beyond, the team created work that stood beyond what might be expected as output from standard academic practice: output which would be called art in other contexts (via photography, video, or poetry).

Other groups of archaeologists are doing similarly interesting work. One is based at the University of Tromsø in northern Norway and is led by Bjørnar Olsen. In one of their projects, the Tromsø group investigated an unusual site on the Svalbard Archipelago in arctic northern Norway: the town of Pyramiden, an abandoned Soviet mining town, emptied after the fall of the Soviet Union (Andreassen et al. 2010). The team investigated Pyramiden from the perspectives of archaeologists, anthropologists, and photographers, in order to work through debates common to archaeological discussion: understandings of ruin, of abandonment, of material culture, of geo-politics at a world level, as well as of individual moments of people's lives. The representations that they produced are photographic; they are not explained, there are no captions or titles (see Fig. 15.4). The images are striking and evoke a sense of place and time (as well as of entropy, material culture, curation, and decay): a child's shoe sits where it was left in a courtyard in the early 1990s; wallpaper curls away from the walls of a bedroom.

There is another body of work being carried out in another part of Europe, in Spain, by Alfredo González-Ruibal, who, like the Pyramiden team exploits photography as representational practice. González-Ruibal is an archaeologist and the themes of his photographic work are densely archaeological: works perforated with the emotions of materiality and migration, about people moving, about their lives and modernity, about what happens when cultures break down, either naturally or in

**Fig. 15.4** Pyramiden.  
(Photograph by Bjørnar  
Olsen)



this case under force (see González-Ruibal 2008). In Galicia in northwestern Spain, González-Ruibal has looked at the ways in which traditional houses and villages were forcibly replaced by villages of steel and concrete (see Fig. 15.5). As with the Temple Meads and the Pyramiden images, so also with Ruiz's images, there are no explanations, no captions; they work by evoking senses of abandonment and of the forced depopulation, and they do so with the strongest sensual impact. They succeed because they create well-crafted stimuli for the viewers, not because they offer a new interpretation or explanation.<sup>9</sup>

Equally powerful is the work of a team led by John Schofield, Greg Bailey, and Adrian Myers, who have applied archaeological methodology to a non-traditional site and created one of the most provocative archaeological excavations recently attempted. Using all of the archaeological tools, techniques, and skills traditionally deployed and focusing on archtypic archaeological processes (measuring, recording, removing, photographing, drawing, publishing, and analysing), the team excavated the 1991 Ford Transit Van that had been used by the archaeological site crew of the Ironbridge Historical Museum (Bailey et al. 2009; Myers 2010). Having recovered the broken down van in a breaker's yard, the team brought it back to Bristol, and pulled it apart piece by piece as if it were an archaeological site (see Fig. 15.6). Team members recorded the find spots of objects (metal screws, cigarette butts, rubbish, and beer tops) discovered in the back of the van. They plotted those objects as if the van was an archaeological project. They studied raw materials that had gone into making the van, the steel, the plastic, the leather, and then they sourced these materials, just as an archaeologist excavating a prehistoric site would source the obsidian that was used to make a found projectile point. The result was a unique project positioned well beyond the edges of archaeology. The success of the van project rested its application of the craft, skill, and experience of mainstream archaeological processes

<sup>9</sup> For more information on this work by González-Ruibal see: [http://archaeography.com/photoblog/archives/2005/06/dream\\_of\\_reason\\_1\\_1.shtml](http://archaeography.com/photoblog/archives/2005/06/dream_of_reason_1_1.shtml)

**Fig. 15.5** *Dream of reason*  
#1—Córcores, Galicia, Spain,  
July 2004. (Photograph by  
Alfredo Gonzáles-Ruibal)



**Fig. 15.6** Recording the 1991  
Ford Transit Van. (Photograph  
by John Schofield)



to an unusual site, and through its creation of a set of specialist reports that will never quite fit into a standard archaeology. Though readable as a site report (i.e., there is an entomological report on insects and microclimate reconstruction), the team's creation moved well beyond the expectations of archaeological practice and came to rest in a zone that had seldom been explored before.

We can look at yet another group of people breaking out and ignoring the call to tie their work to the limitations of conventional archaeology, of conventional art practice, or of the any traditional cross-over of the two: the work of Professor Mike Pearson at the University of Aberystwyth. Trained as an archaeologist at Cardiff University in Wales in the late 1960s, Pearson has worked as a performance artist and researcher, and was at the core of the alternative theatre company, Brith Gof based in Cardiff. Along with the late Cliff McLucas, Mike carried out a series of radical and important works that have had significant impact in performance, in performance research,

**Fig. 15.7** *Tri Bywyd/three lives* (1995) (Photograph by Michael Shanks)

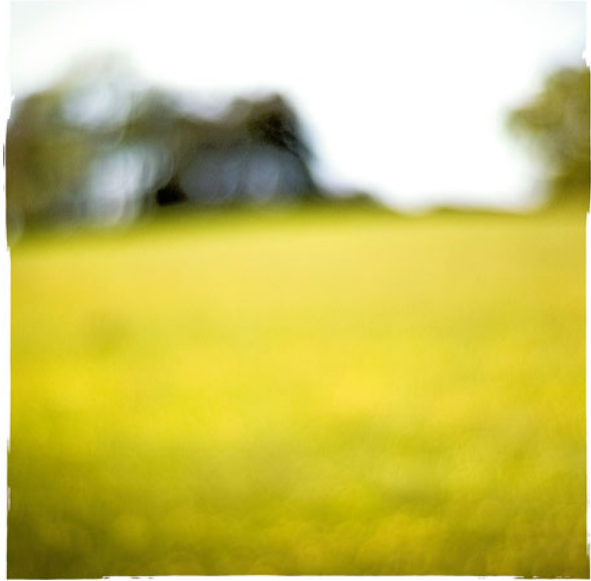


and more recently in the propulsion of archaeology out of its disciplinary cocoon (McLucas 2000). *Tri Bywyd/Three Lives* (1995) took place in an abandoned farm in a conifer plantation in West Wales, and resonates with many archaeologists (see Fig. 15.7). The work concerns three lives in a historical sense but it handles those lives in a non-narrative way. It is not a simple story, and *Tri Bywyd* does not provide any easy answers; there is no simple moral tale to the three lives it engages: the life of Sarah Jacob the Welsh fasting girl, the life (and murder) of a prostitute called Lynette White, and of Esgair Fraith, a rural suicide. The performance of the work took place in the forest, involved the erection of scaffolding around an abandoned building, as well as the performance itself, and among the actions of many different actors doing many different things. The result was a richness of work that will never be found in any newspaper story or in any academic representation of those lives. The work and the audience's participation in it take the spectator to another place, a place that is simultaneously archaeological and historical and artistic.

We could look at one final example of work that moves beyond traditional articulations of archaeology and art. Michael Shanks has probably done the most of any archaeologist to transform the art–archaeology relationship (see Shanks 1991; Pearson and Shanks 2001; Shanks and Pearson this volume). Shanks' work emerges in a variety of locations and through a variety of media, of different outputs, of different forms. Much of Shanks' output over the last decade has emerged on the web, through blogs, wikis, and visual work,<sup>10</sup> and much of this work has experimented with departures from traditional understandings of how archaeologists should represent the past, especially in efforts to push away from simple narrative and historical reconstruction.

<sup>10</sup> Shanks' online outputs can be found at: <http://humanitieslab.stanford.edu/Metamedia/Home> and <http://documents.stanford.edu/michaelshanks/Home>

**Fig. 15.8** Michael Shanks, *Deniseburna nr Hefenfelth*, 2008, digital photograph



One of Shanks' recent works will serve as an example: an out of focus photograph (see Fig. 15.8). When one looks at the image and tries to make out what is represented in the image, it is possible to identify something green down at the bottom and something else that is grey over on the left. But that is all. It is impossible to make out what is the subject of the picture. The representational failure is caused by Shanks' intentional lack of focus. The image's essence comes from the location in which it was taken: the place of the battle (in AD 633 or 634) at Deniseburna near Hefenfelth on Hadrian's Wall in northern Britain, where Oswald of Bernicia met and defeated Cadwallan Abcaddfoth Gwyneth. Shanks' work is about a battle and a battle is a very archaeological thing, as is Hadrian's Wall. But the way in which Shanks represents this place and this event intentionally leaves open our understandings of that place, that time, that battle, and those people who were there. It is a photograph of the place of that ancient battle, but it is not a historical or archaeological representation as we would expect it. Shanks has created a work that is anti-archaeological, but which stimulates the viewer to enter into an archaeological world; in making this work, in looking at this work, Shanks and the spectator have to do the work that the authoritative author normally provides in standard archaeological rendering of past place and past event.

## Conclusion

Each of the examples presented in this final section (from Watson to Shanks) is a radical work that moves us well beyond the common intersections of art and archaeology. Many people do not like this work. Many archaeologists refuse to accept it



as archaeological. Many artists do not think it is artistic. In some ways, all of these critics are correct: these works are neither art nor archaeology. They are something very much more important. My argument is that the best work at the interface of archaeology and art is being carried out by archaeologists (and artists) who are jumping through those extra-disciplinary windows with no intention of ever coming back, and I imagine that they would want to close the window behind them when they are on the other side. In fact, I imagine that their archaeological colleagues would be more than eager to do it for them and to make sure that the window is double locked.

The element that runs through the most inspiring works of those archaeologists who are cutting loose is a desire to go beyond what is expected and, indeed, to go beyond what is accepted. These works are non-representational. They do not attempt to reconstruct with exactitude a precise place, person, or event that has been lost to the past. They agree to leave that act of construction to others, to those archaeologists who see reconstruction as the core of their work. The works that are of greatest value are those that are not interested in representation as a goal, and those that reject the reduction of the complexity of life to a simplified narrative or representational picture.

A second strength that each of these more radical works share is that none is so insecure that it feels the need to rely on the traditional rhetorical crutches of standard interpretive archaeological work. None of it spends (derivative) energy to justify itself, its form, its intention, or the reactions it raises, through dense chapters of theoretical positioning and regurgitation of continental philosophers. None offers justification for its output, nor does it care to make the case for its acceptance. None makes excuses for what it is doing. This type of work is open. It gives the authority to the spectator, to the person looking, or to the person listening, or to the person smelling, or to the person tasting. It makes the spectator work at the experience of engagement of the work.<sup>11</sup> All of this work is in the spirit with which Simon Callery voiced about his latex mouldings of the archaeological trench. Callery talked about not needing to explain, about not needing to smooth out the difficult bits; he talked of the damage that can be done when one explains away the reality of life. The best of the more radical work at the transaction of art/archaeology follows Callery's advice.

To pull this discussion together, let us go back to the beginning and ask once again the question, "What are the relationships between art and archaeology?" A first answer (a qualification) must be that we are examining relationships in the plural; there is no one relationship. Is there a distinction between art and archaeology as separate disciplines and as separate parts of our lives? Some people have argued that there is. Steve Mithen, a successful archaeologist whose career started as an art student, has argued strongly that art and archaeology are two radically different things, and that people who are doing art should not try to be archaeologists and vice versa (Mithen 2004). I disagree. I am convinced that the relationships of art to archaeology are not of one discipline visiting another in order to find new ways of thinking about the past or to provide analogies to ease understandings of the deep

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<sup>11</sup> See Bailey (2013) and Bailey et al. (2010) for recent attempts to do this

past or to formulate increasingly accurate reconstructions of an ancient world. The relationships of art to archaeology are to move away from both disciplines into new spaces.

If there is a difference between art and archaeology, then it is that individual practitioners bring different skill- and experience-sets to the table. One could go even farther and argue that there is no distinction between art and archaeology. Both work at the same issues. Both work at the issues of what it means to be human (see Renfrew 2004). Archaeologists and artists both try to understand the essence of being human in this world. It is this common object of study and of work that draws artists to archaeology and more recently that has drawn archaeologists to the context and practice of art. The best of the work that I have discussed in this essay challenges archaeologists, and archaeologists can meet that challenge in several ways. First, archaeologists need to exploit their own particular skill- and experience-sets. Archaeologists should not try to be artists, but should apply their own particular knowledge to the common work. Second, archaeologists should seek (and not be afraid to enjoy) the challenge of the non-explanatory and the non-representational. To embrace the non-explanatory is to recognise that proclamations of authoritative explanation and reconstruction are nothing greater than archaeological arrogances dropped into the heritage profession. The challenge is to make non-representational work and thus to avoid the restrictions that accompany the past-as-reconstruction's inherent smoothing out of reality's rough and often unpleasant ruptured surfaces.

To argue for a non-representational archaeology is to argue for release; it allows archaeologists to cut free and to let loose. These are the types of processes that produce the best work across disciplines and across media. A similar, though more controversial, challenge is the call for an archaeology that is non-temporal. There is a rich, current archaeological debate over the relationship of the past to the present, and of the relationships between different phases of the past. These issues are part of what some are calling the archaeology of the contemporary past, an understanding that things which are usually separated by periods of time actually are connected in the present (Buchli and Lucas 2001; González-Ruibal 2008; Harrison and Schofield 2009; Olivier 2011). The time periods are connected because we are here today looking at these objects together and those objects only ever exist today, with use, in the here and now. If we follow this call for the non-temporal, then we are faced with the potential benefits of juxtapositioning objects, places, people, and events that are usually (perhaps always?) kept apart by modern disciplinary restrictions. By bringing together those things that are normally separated, archaeology recognises that there is much original thinking to be done; most importantly there is much new to create, where creation severs ties to academic derivation and direct reference. A final challenge for archaeologists and artists together is to meet a call for enrichment, for the enriching of our wider contributions to the larger questions that no single modern discipline is diverse enough to attack. These wider questions and contributions will be neither archaeological nor artistic; they will be something else altogether different, and that future set of investigations will be well beyond the current limits of either discipline, and that is all for the better.

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