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Samtidsarkæologi

udfordrer vores tids- og kulturarvsforståelse

I dette tema får vi præsenteret tre samtidsarkæologiske projekter, der er i gang netop nu. Med forskningsobjekter som modernitetens ruiner, atomaffald og havbåret materiale tager de med arkæologens viden, metoder og særlige blik fat i nogle af vor tids store udfordringer. Projekterne er samfundsrelevante. De udvider tænkningen, rykker ved vore opfattelser og kvalificerer diskussionerne. Fælles for de tre artikler er, at de udfordrer den gængse opfattelse af tid og kulturarv – og som konsekvens af dette lægges der op til, at måden, vi forvalter og kommunikerer kulturarven på, bør nytænkes. Alle arkæologer, der tør blive udfordret og inspireret, må bare læse temaets tre artikler.

Det er ikke sædvanen at tænke på kondemneringsmodne bygninger som kulturarv, men hvorfor ikke? I artiklen *I tidens fylde* behandler Tim Flohr Sørensen paradokset, som disse bygninger repræsenterer – mellem på den ene side den historie de kan fortælle om liv og samfundets udvikling og på den anden side behovet for at få disse ”øjenbæer” fjernet. Ruinerne er på samme tid både fortid og nutid, under afvikling og tilblivelse. De falder udenfor kategori: Hus eller affald? Fortid, nutid eller fremtid?

Tiden er også omdrejningspunktet i artiklen *The Contemporary Archaeology of Nuclear Waste*, hvor Cornelius Holtorf og Anders Högberg diskuterer, hvordan vi kommunikerer med fremtiden. Projektet udspringer af et samarbejde med Svensk Kärnbränslehantering Aktiebolag, om hvordan man kan advare fremtidige generationer om atomaffaldets farlighed. I artiklen vises en model af, hvordan nutiden er nåleøjet, hvorigennem fortolkninger af fortiden bliver transformeret til forestillinger om fremtiden. Holtorf og Högberg foreslår, at vi i vores forvaltning af kulturarven ikke alene skal fremme en historisk bevidsthed, men også en fremtidsbevidsthed.

Radioaktivt affald er normalt ikke noget, vi opfatter som kulturarv, men det ér det, og det vil det være i titusinder af år. Noget lignende gør sig gældende med de enorme mængder af plastaffald, der flyder rundt i verdenshavene. Det affald arbejder Bjørnar Olsen og Þóra Péturdóttir med i projektet *Unruly Heritage: Tracing legacies in the Anthropocene*. For dem handler det om at udvikle et anderledes kulturarvsbegreb – mindre menneskecentreret og mere altfavnende økologisk. I projektet vil de undersøge og måske redefinere nogle af vore centrale begreber i relation til kulturarvsforvaltningen: kulturarv, erindring, etik og beskyttelse. Selv om artiklen jonglerer med begreber, så tager projektet i allerhøjeste grad udgangspunkt i feltarbejde og materielle fund.

Vi påstår ikke, at de tre artikler er letlæste. De er hardcore teoretiske og rykker ved vore vante forestillinger. Men samtidig er de inspirerende og åbner for nye muligheder. Der er noget at hente for alle arkæologer i disse artikler. Læs, læs, læs.

Redaktionen

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Unruly Heritage:

Tracing Legacies in the Anthropocene

According to UNESCO's definition, heritage is "our legacy from the past, what we live with today, and what we pass on to future generations". While exemplary inclusive, this hardly reflects concern for the fact that our legacy is becoming increasingly mixed and messy: landfills, archipelagos of sea-borne debris, ruining metropolises, industrial wastelands, sunken nuclear submarines and toxic residues in seals and polar bears. Our legacy has become so conspicuously manifest that it has become diagnostic of a new geological epoch, the Anthropocene. While this palpable legacy has triggered debate within the heritage field, it has yet not led to any profound rethinking of heritage itself. This paper introduces a new research project, *Unruly Heritage: An Archaeology of the Anthropocene*, which aims at undertaking such rethinking. The project was recently granted funding for the period 2017-2021 through the Norwegian Research Council's FRIPRO Toppforsk programme. Based on extensive case studies of modern ruin landscapes and sea-borne coastal debris, the aim is to develop alternative, less anthropocentric and more ecologically adept heritage understandings.

Introduction: outline of a paradox

Over the last decades, critical discourses on cultural heritage have flourished. Strongly influenced by social constructivist thinking, a common motif is the idea of heritage – and the past – as staged and negotiated in response to contemporary human interests and conflicts. In many ways, the discourses make explicit a common use of heritage as a vehicle for recalling and commemorating various wished for or useful pasts. Moreover, while importantly democratizing heritage, in terms of allowing space also for the mundane and the intangible, and by welcoming local and native voices, these critical discourses have done little to challenge a deep-rooted understanding of heritage as an exclusive reserve of valued things and traditions. It may further be argued that the critics' insistency on heritage as a contemporary social construct reinforces the modern leitmotif of the past as irretrievably lost or left behind. Thus, and despite considered an important resource for contemporary struggles, enjoyment and knowledge, heritage and the past itself is, de facto, rendered an 'optional' condition rather than something inevitably and involuntarily *lived with* (cf. Harrison 2011: 158).

Yet, at the same time as increasingly more theoretically sophisticated discourses on heritage unfold, a very tangible heritage – a very present past – is relentlessly and ever more rapidly accumulating around us; archipelagos of sea-borne debris, industrial wastelands, sunken nuclear submarines, withering metropolises, and regions of ghost towns. And while the increasing emission of greenhouse gases, melting ice caps, and micro plastics in oceans indeed have given rise to justified environmental concern and debate, these matters have hardly been discussed in the context of heritage. Surely, heritage discourses and practices are not indifferent to the challenges. Calls for action in relation to e.g. air pollution, damage to architectural heritage and the effects of global warming on permafrost conserved archaeological sites, clearly show increased awareness about this haunting legacy. But mostly as a threat to heritage, not *as heritage*. Despite UNESCO's quite inclusive definition of heritage as 'our legacy from the past, what we *live with today*, and what we pass on to future generations'[1], the delineation is understandable. This is waste, unwanted pollution – not heritage. And how could these obnoxious and immature spoils of history be considered heritage at all – and at what consequences? Heritage against heritage? Pasts against pasts? Still, we argue, the urgent question remains: How can we in the proposed new geological age of the Anthropocene, with ever more unintentional monuments and involuntary memories accumulating around us, self-confidently think of the past as completed and gone? As a distant 'foreign country' – or indeed of heritage as something selected and optional?

Unruly heritage: aims and scope

The new research project *Unruly Heritage: An Archaeology of the Anthropocene* strikes right into the core of this paradox. The project was among the 46 research projects recently granted funding through the Norwegian research council's FRIPRO Toppforsk programme. It has, surely, had a long pedigree and is in many ways a continuation of work we have conducted through previous projects, both *Ruin Memories* (Olsen and Pétursdóttir 2014) and the currently running *Object Matters*. Much is new, however, and we are happy with the opportunity to air our ideas and aims at this early stage.

Based on rich and varied case studies of modern ruin landscapes and seaborne coastal debris in the north Atlantic region, our aim is to explore alternative, less anthropocentric and more ecologically adept under-standings of heritage. We argue that the current 'clash' between prevailing conceptions of heritage as something confined, wished for and thus worth saving, and an unruly past ignoring such work of purification, urges a reconsideration of strategies and rationales for how to 'deal with' heritage. Responding to this challenge, what this project undertakes to explore is possible outcomes of exposing heritage also to the masses of neglected and unwanted matters passed on and lived with. What happens if heritage is no longer a sheltered niche for the selected few but radically extended to consider such obnoxious things? How would it force us to rethink memory, what ethical questions arise, and how can a notion of care be applied to these hybrid assemblages?

These questions are crucial to the *Unruly Heritage* project and they all gather and intersect through our focus on things and the redundant or discarded materials of the world. Understood as an inclusive concept that embraces far more than man-made objects, things within the context of this project importantly allude to all material constituents of our lived legacy that endure, gather, and for good or bad have a tactile impact in the present. In what follows we shall briefly elaborate on some issues that pertain to this understanding in relation to the project's central questions on heritage, memory, ethics and care raised above.

Heritage, memory, and the obstinacy of things

While heritage and preservation are nouns with a predominantly positive connotation in modern society, critical heritage discourses have for the last decades devaluated this status. Notions such as 'heritage boom' and 'heritagisation', have surfaced to critically address the exponential growth in the number of sites and monuments listed and displayed as heritage (e.g. Hewison 1987, Lowenthal 1998, Harvey 2001). This has even been referred to as an 'accumulation crisis' that threatens to render heritage 'ineffective and worthless' and which thus calls for active management strategies, including delisting and disposal, in order to secure a heritage – and a past – relevant to contemporary and future societies (Harrison 2013).

In a similar way, late modern society has been described as 'saturated' with memory (Huyssen 2003); an excessive memorialization closely related to, and galvanized by, heritagisation, musealisation and the abundance of mnemonic devices. Explained as a response to the 'fear of forgetting', the more general ontological condition for this urge has been linked to modernity's alleged break with tradition and, thus, loss of capacity for 'spontaneous' remembering. In other words, 'we speak so much of memory because there is so little of it left' (Nora 1989: 7). And yet, forgetting – and disposal – is at the same time claimed to be a necessary component of collective remembering; 'memories are like plants: there are those who needs to be quickly eliminated in order to help the others burgeon, transform, flower' (Augé 2004: 20). Thus, as with heritage, too much of memory will devaluate and render it worthless.

What underlines these briefly summarized positions, is the view that heritage and memory – and indeed the past itself – is something controlled and chosen by us; a kind of gardening work where good and sustainable pasts are nurtured at the expense of others. This even has some bearing in UNESCO's quoted definition of heritage, referring not only to our 'lived with' legacy but also to what *we choose to pass on*. While seemingly adequate, what is left out is the fact that things are passed on whether we manage and care for them or not. And contrary to the quite selective regime of heritage promotion, things themselves are rather egalitarian in their own 'heritage management',

allowing also for the survival and gathering of the unwanted and discarded. Strangely, this peculiar 'heritage boom', this very saturation of ruin memories, is rarely addressed. Nevertheless, what it makes evident is that the survival of the past, and thus what becomes heritage, is not solely an outcome of human care and implemented regimes of preservation, but depends on a number of agents also independent of human control and selective remembering.

As commonly understood, heritage is about a past cared for and consciously addressed, denoting sites, objects and traditions that are preserved and protected for their uniqueness, monumentality, beauty, and/or historical, cultural and ecological significance. This project tries out an alternative understanding. Taking things' material obstinacy seriously, we explore the outcomes of conceiving heritage as the 'raw', unfiltered legacy passed on; a legacy which thus also refrains from any commitment to the oppositional domains grounding its current practices (e.g. old-new, patrimony-waste, preservation-loss). Far from selected or 'optional', this is a heritage inevitably lived with as an existential and 'thrown' dimension of our being-in-the-world (*pace* Heidegger 1962).

This alternative understanding is closely associated with a radical rethinking also of memory. Contrary, to the kind of conscious memory politics at work on the heritage scene today, this understanding brings to attention how the past is also involuntarily remembered through the tenacious material deposits we live with. While memory studies have emphasized memory as also materially mediated (e.g. Connerton 1989, Assmann 2011), and increasingly challenged the historicist notion of the finality of the past as reflected in concepts such as "mnemohistory", "precentism", and "afterlife" (Lorenz and Bevernage 2013, Tamm 2015), the radical outcome of this has yet to be explored. This accentuates the need to develop more genuinely material notions of memory, which go beyond common understandings of things and places as vehicles for deliberate commemoration (lieux de mémoires), to also explore how they themselves remember. Hence, in this project we are concerned with how memory is affected and enabled by both things' endurance and processes of ruination, and also with how the involuntary commemoration involved in *living with* an unruly heritage affects understandings of past, present and future.

Ethics and care

Ethics and care have long been central topics in heritage discourses. Ethics is the common denominator in most discourses on dispossession, repatriation and the *right* to an acknowledged and protected past. Likewise, as underlined in heritage acts and legislation, caring for our legacy is seen as a crucial part of programs for sustainable development. On closer inspection, however, it may be questioned to what extent the objects of concern actually are the concrete things, monuments and sites in question. Or whether their importance, and hence ethical significance, rather is grounded in their use-value as *things-for-us* – as tools employed to reach contemporary social or moral ends (Heidegger 1993)? The widely employed heritage phrase of cultural *resource* management is perhaps indicative of the latter.

Ethics, for sure, traditionally denotes concern for fellow humans and though animals may be included, ethics is normally not extended to inanimate things. In fact, much ethical concern has been preoccupied precisely with saving the subject from being reduced to 'a thing'. Nevertheless, the current fading of ontological polarities and the growing recognition of non-human agency, has arguably rendered an ethics of things a conceivable and anticipated step (e.g. Benso 2000, Verbeek 2009, Introna 2014). This not least in response to the very critical Anthropocene challenges we are facing today. Importantly, though, our aim is not to subject things to an anthropocentric discourse on rights, or to any absolutism or normative ethics. Given that things have always been part of our world, it is rather to explore how new understandings may emerge from attentiveness to the very diverse ways in which they participate, act and impact (Benso 2000: 131). In other words, an ethics grounded in curiosity and openness to things' being, how they affect us upon encounter, and which, importantly, takes seriously how they persist, gather and outlive us. Moreover, considering their recently enhanced status as beings endowed with agency and social capacities, one may polemically ask why moral implications and shared responsibility should *not* follow suit?

Extending ethics beyond human fraternity also impels a rethinking of *care* as an exclusively human virtue, and to explore more distributed understandings (cf. Puig de la Bellacasa 2011, Domínguez Rubio 2016). For example, would it be possible to redefine care not as

the 'property' of any human or non-human but as a 'capacity' that becomes realized within actual material ecologies; in other words, 'when species meet', join forces and form alliances? Rather than to look for divides and disjuncture, such care is ontologically impartial and concerns the connections among objects, environments, people and animals inhabiting a shared world. And from that point of departure it seems possible to discuss and analyse also how things care, both for us, 'their own' and for other non-human entities; for example, how bogs and wetlands offer conditions of preservation superior to any humanly implemented conservation, or how abandoned and ruining buildings provide home and shelter for animals, birds and plants, enabling new ruin ecologies to emerge. Furthermore, releasing care from its conventional association with presumably *humane* acts of salvation and healing, also opens for explorations of how care may sometimes be implied through acts of 'releasement' or 'letting go' (Introna 2009, cf. Heidegger 1966). Such releasement is manifest in many indigenous discourses on heritage, and while its consequences for the legacy dealt with through *Unruly Heritage* may be radically different, exploring its challenge to the traditional tropes of protection and rescue may still be very productive. This further counts for how things' indiscriminate 'care', extending also to harmful and unwanted materials, accentuates ethical questions of shared responsibility.

Case studies: Sticky heritage and surplus diasporas

Our engagement with the Anthropocene legacy will be executed through two extensive case studies, "Sticky heritage" and "Surplus diasporas", both set in sub-arctic areas of the North Atlantic region. While rich in resources, recent processes of economic depression and political change have left much of its landscape conspicuously dotted with the residues of redundant or failed political and industrial enterprises. Palpable effects of climate change and pollution, including excessive amounts of sea-borne waste, have, moreover, made this region subject to current environmental discourse and anxieties.

Our first case study focuses on abandonment and ruination in remote towns and settlements on the Russian Kola Peninsula, with comparative cases from

Fig 1: The village of Teriberka, Murmansk Oblast, Russia. Photo: Bjørnar Olsen.

NE Iceland and Norwegian Finnmark. Unlike their more ancient peers, the ruins lived with here, have a very different, more imbuing and pestering presence. Traditional, ancient heritage ruins are often made present to us in sheltered settings; neatly displayed for our occasional visits, they give ample support to the modern idea that heritage – and the past – is an optional and voluntary engagement. The ruins of the recent past, however, are less cautious and speak in a more pestering tone to a past that is far from optional, but rather an inescapable and immediate reality. Thus, to many people in peripheral areas of the North Atlantic region, ruins and the production of ruins, is a constant and ubiquitous presence. Abandoned military sites, vacant homes, ruining factories, closed shops and derelict council buildings, rest in sharp contrast to the prosperous story of northern modernization they once played a prominent role in.

Sticky heritage explores the consequences of living with this persistent material legacy; how it challenges notions of memory and time, and how the viscosity of this material past complicates traditional notions related to historical succession and even chronology. It also, however, investigates how things in ruination affect our understanding of them, their material otherness, and the potential dimension of care embedded in this otherness. That is, how non-human companionships, alliances and hidden thingly affordances are invited as things become released from human usefulness and censorship, thus revealing other and unforeseen 'caring' potentials. For example, while ruined and abandoned buildings are marginalized in terms of the humanly useful (though they may offer spaces also for othered human

conducts and being), their increasingly more accessible facilities provide home and shelter for new non-human inhabitants: animals, birds, plants and funguses. Moreover, due to this care, and the new ruin ecology that emerges, these spaces also challenge heritage's commitment to an orderly and divided world, in which nature and culture, past and present, preservation and loss, are neatly kept apart. This is further explored in our second case study.

Our second case study, *Surplus diasporas*, focuses on the growing problem of marine debris in waters and along shorelines of the North Atlantic and Arctic. The abundance of drift matter and the significance of *drift beaches* in coastal communities in the region are well attested in local toponyms and historical and ethnographic sources. Driftwood, mostly of Siberian origin, has for example long been a valuable resource in sparsely forested coastal areas, as documented already in the earliest written law codes (e.g. the Icelandic Grágás and Jónsbók from 12th-13th C). This significance is further attested through assessment of land value, as evident, for example, in an early 18th Century Icelandic Land Registry (Jarðabók), where drift beaches are listed as natural resources alongside meadows, peat bogs, salmon rivers, lakes and bird colonies. This positive historical assessment, however, has little impact on current conceptions of drift matter. Since the discovery of several floating Garbage Patches in the 90s, marine debris and the build-up of micro-plastics in marine environments are postulated among the most urgent environmental problems. Thus, 'resource' is hardly a likely concept used today to describe the varied materials washing ashore or circulating in oceans. Heritage is even less likely, while

Fig 2: Pole photograph of beach assemblage in Eidsbukta on Sværholt peninsula, Finnmark, Norway. Photo: Þóra Pétursdóttir.

Fig 3: View of marine debris in Molvik in Båtsford kommune, Finnmark, Norway. Photo: Þóra Pétursdóttir.

garbage, *visual disturbance* and *ecological threat* are more probable, and reasonable, characteristics.

This case study looks into sea-borne debris from a different angle. Based on extensive field studies of drift beaches in northern Norway, Iceland and NW Russia, the aim is neither to trivialize the serious environmental problems caused by sea-borne debris nor to suggest specific programs of action. Rather, focus will be on exploring how these accumulating assemblages of stranded things throw light on things' unruly afterlife, and how this may impel alternative understandings of "our" heritage. We find that the long-lasting northern tradition (or indeed heritage) of drift material utilization brings an important corrective to current discourses and serves as an exercise in thinking differently and more critically about sea-borne debris. For example, how does this still living tradition blur distinctions between resource, heritage, and waste? How does use of, or engagement with, drift material alter under-standings of things' being and agency, also beyond human relations? Moreover, how can concern for their voyages, gathering and entanglement underpin alternative and less anthropocentric understandings of 'care'?

Turning to messy things: Theoretical and methodological challenges

In our attempt to rethink heritage, we build on a number of approaches associated with the so-called 'material turn' in the humanities and social sciences. These include actor-network theory as developed by Latour (2005) and others, DeLanda's 'assemblage'

theory (DeLanda 2006, 2016), Morton's 'new ecology' (Morton 2010, 2013, 2016), and object-oriented ontologies as proposed by for example Bogost (2012), Bryant (2011, 2014) and Harman (2010, 2016). Though indeed a varied congregation of ideas, a shared concern is to assign matter, things, or 'the real', a new stance of significance. Hence, much effort has been put into replacing modern negative dualities between inert things and creative, thoughtful humans, with an alternative 'flat' ontology, where the relations of interest are no longer confined to only those involving humans but radically extended to include interaction also between non-human entities.

However, as with the proclamation of most new and allegedly more democratic constitutions, also the material turn risks to promise more than it delivers. The things turned to tend, generally, to be well-fitted and *successful* objects, rather than the surplus masses of stranded things constituting our unruly heritage. Another curious feature is the repertoire of *positive* and largely wished-for *human* qualities consistently ascribed to those things that do become matters of concern. While this may have helped their much bespoken social repatriation, there is less talk about how this 'humanizing' attitude may have deprived things of their *difference* and thereby also glossed over their sometimes unpleasant affordances. Thus, we contend that a real material turn necessitates a far more profound exploration of things' otherness, including their various less desirable features. Another aim of *Unruly Heritage* is therefore to explore the confines of these theoretical frameworks, and add nuance and *flesh* to their understanding through attentive engagements with unruly things and legacies.

In order to undertake this task and to provide original and more empirically grounded understandings, this project renews a trust in archaeology – the archaeological project and perspective. Archaeology has a great – and in an academic context largely unrivalled – legacy in caring for things, in particular things discarded and broken. During the last four decades, the field of contemporary archaeology has rapidly developed, extending disciplinary concerns also to modern materials, waste and ruins. Thus, more than most scholars, archaeologists know that the border between heritage and waste is fragile. Working directly with the spoils of history, archaeologists are trained to engage in meaningful and original ways with ruined and stranded things, and possess skills and methods to document and analyse them. Moreover, at the heart of the discipline is a set of practices and understandings that also address things' non-human nature and significance.

Fieldwork is imperative to these practices and understandings, involving lengthy and intimate encounters with places and things. This tactile dimension of the archaeological project, we argue, also adds an important phenomenological dimension to the currently fashionable material turn where things themselves, in their concrete and messy manifestations, often seem preferred kept at arms' length. An underrated field method, but indispensable to our approach, is actually the bodily experience of *being present* at a site or place and being exposed to its rich portfolio of ineffable material impacts (Andreassen et al. 2010, Harrison and Schofield 2010: 69). This requires extended and frequent stays in our case areas also when seasonal conditions are rough, including winter, which at these latitudes is actually the normal condition for the largest part of the year. A ruin, a site, a littered beach, both look and feel very differently when covered in snow in temperatures below freezing. Sensitivity for these manifold faces of sites and things also refers to our conception of fieldwork as an aesthetic and phenomenological engagement, which cannot be confined to any one mode of observation but involves and affects the broad sensory register of sight, smell, sound, and bodily sensations.

A challenge for the project's methodological innovation is to explore ways to translate or "prolong" these affective moments of presence into an archive for subsequently extending them to analysis and dissemination. In order to meet this challenge a wide repertoire of documentary techniques will be employed and developed in order to attend to the richness and complexity of the sites studied. These include test excavations, soil chemical analysis, photography, video recording, mapping, drawing, and descriptive accounts – selected and adapted in dialogue with the characteristics of the sites investigated (cf. Pétursdóttir and Olsen 2014, Olsen and Pétursdóttir 2014). In addition to archaeological methods, "on-site" semi-structured interviews, based on convenience- and/or snowball sampling, will also be undertaken in order to grasp people's experiences of living with drift beaches and under conditions with

on-going ruination and abandonment, or where their life worlds to a large extent seem conditioned by the derelict manifestations of their own supposedly abandoned past. Through our fieldwork we wish to reach a common ground where theory is not simply applied onto empirical material but rather practiced or worked out, and thus allowed to interact with and be infused by data.

Notes:

1. http://whc.unesco.org/en/about/
2. For discussion of archaeology and Anthropocene see e.g. Solli *et al*. 2011, Hudson *et al*. 2012, Edgeworth 2013, Edgeworth *et al*. 2014, Lane 2015, Barje *et al*. 2016. For discussion of the concept and notion of Anthropocene see e.g. Zalasiewicz *et al*. 2011, LeCain 2015, Dalby 2016.

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