



THE UNIVERSITY OF
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Center in Paris



ARCHAEOLOGICAL SENSIBILITY

A conference organized by
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6 Rue Thomas Mann
Paris 75013

Over the last two decades, archaeology has been reconfigured by two important trends, both within the discipline and without: First, a general turn to materiality in the social sciences and humanities, and the development of interdisciplinary concerns with the workings of materialness, as well as the philosophical frameworks legislating over what demarcates things from people, animate from inanimate, material from non-material. Second, a conversation internal to archaeology about its relationship to time, which has seen a loosening of the discipline's modernist predilections and its anchoring in 'the deep past,' and a concurrent explosion of archaeological interest in the very recent past, the present, the contemporary, modernity, and even the future (Buchli and Lucas 2001; Dawdy 2012; Fowles 2015; González-Ruibal 2008; 2013; Harrison 2016; Harrison & Schofield 2010; Lucas 2005, 2015; Reilly 2019).

As archaeology's bread and butter – material worlds – has been elevated to a domain of general and critical relevance, and as archaeology has sought to partake more actively in a critical 'history of the present,' the discipline also seems in the throes of redefining what it is. No longer confined to being the 'science of the past' or ancient artifacts, no longer just defined by its esoteric techniques (excavation, typology), and no longer the privileged conduit to 'lost' pre-literate worlds, archaeology has reclaimed its existence in the here-and-now, and advocated the strength of its material archives, methodologies, and interpretive imagination to make substantive contributions to our understanding of critical questions of our time: the violent legacies of colonial warfare, capitalism, and modernization; the hauntings of civil war, mass-killing, and political disappearing; the necropolitics of border zones; the long-term consequences of global warming; life in the Anthropocene; the refashioning of collective practices of memory, feeling, mourning, and heritage; or the disposal and management of nuclear waste, among many (Boric 2010; Crossland & Joyce 2015; González-Ruibal 2018; De León 2015; Edgeworth 2014; Holtorf & Högberg 2015; Joyce 2019; Richard 2019).

If such archaeological scholarship has not always mobilized the interest of other fields – at least, by the look of citation patterns (González-Ruibal 2013) – it is interesting to note that 'archaeological' thinking and modes of inquiry *have* traveled quite successfully beyond the discipline. In effect, never has 'archaeological thinking' seemed so widespread in

the work of people who are not part of the archaeological guild: Katie Stewart's *A Space by the Side of the Road* (1996) and Gastón Gordillo's *Rubble* (2014) are 'archaeological ethnographies' in the true sense of the term. Among many others, anthropologists Anna Tsing's *The Mushroom at the End of the World* (2015; also Tsing et al. 2017), Hugh Raffles' *On Amazonia* (2002) and *The Book of Unconformities* (2020), and Yael Navaro-Yashin's *The Make-Believe Space* (2015), or geographers Caitlin Desilvey's *Curated Decay* (2017), Jake Kosek's *Understories* (2006) and Kathryn Yusoff's *A Billion Black Anthropocenes* (2018), which track material and affective entanglements between humans and non-humans at multiple spatial and temporal scales, offer textbook examples of 'archaeological imagination' (Shanks 2012) by non-archaeologists (see also Nemser 2014; Weizman 2014, 2017). Conversely, the work of trained archaeologists, like Jason de León (2015), Shannon Dawdy (2016), and Yannis Hamilakis (2011), who are pushing archaeological thinking into the realm of social anthropology, produces research attuned to the interplay of time, place and materiality that defies the conventions of disciplinary craft and redefines the bounds of ethnography. Further afield, artists and archaeologists have interleaved minds and methods to explore aesthetically and materially pivotal questions of loss and decay, ruination, sustainability, and political possibility in late modernity (González-Ruibal 2013; Harrison 2010; Lopez 2020; Olsen & Pétursdóttir 2014; Russell & Cochrane 2014; Vilches 2007). Recent work by artists like Morehshin Allahyari (*Material Speculations: ISIS*, 2016), Rossella Biscotti (*The City*, 2018), Mariana Castillo Deball (*Stelae Storage*, 2013; *Amarantus*, 2021), or Fazleen Karlan (*Stratum*, 2016) is particularly arresting in this regard.

Of course, these synergies are not completely new. Archaeology, in effect, as a metaphor, has long been 'good to think with' for philosophers and social scientists, from Sigmund Freud, Walter Benjamin, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze/Félix Guattari (Benjamin 1999; Boehlhower 2005; Deleuze & Guattari 1987; Foucault 1972; Lévi-Strauss 1961; Olivier 2011; Thomas 2004, 2009). Idem for more contemporary thinkers, like Bruno Latour, who has drawn inspiration from archaeology as a thought-object, Frederick Jameson's excavations into past futures, and maybe even Derrida (by way of Freud's reading of *Gradiva*) in his feverish account of archival desire (Derrida 1996; Jameson; Latour 1996, 2000, 2013).

In accounting for these convergences, and perhaps in an effort to activate synergies between archaeology and other fields, archaeologists have suggested recrafting archaeology beyond its well-trodden tradition of techniques, methodologies, antiquity, and objects: Shanks (2012) talks of an 'archaeological imagination' connecting materially minded scholars, a world where 'we are all archaeologists now!' (cf. Holtorf 2015). Olivier (2011) muses that archaeology is better apprehended as a kind of 'material memory.' Olsen (2012) redefines archaeology as the 'discipline of things.' Buchli and Lucas (2001) view archaeology as a kind of collective therapy, while González-Ruibal (2013) speaks of reclaiming archaeology from the tropes of modernity and redeploying its techniques to document the disturbing, dark side of the contemporary era.

Inspired by these perspectives and conversations, we propose: What if we reframed archaeology as a *sensibility*? A particular way of looking and thinking about the world? A form of attentiveness to the long-term interplay of material stabilities and transfers at multiples time-scales, and the various sets of forces driving these interconnections and mixings? In other words, as scholarship of all kinds are becoming ever more invested in material articulations, archaeology offers a particular sensitivity to the material world, a way to constituting and reading archives, an attunement to the play of presence and absence bolstered by certain techniques of recording and documenting, a way of knitting together different times and places into narratives about the relationship between past, present and future. What might archaeology, so reframed, look like and entail? What possibilities does it raise? What does it foreclose?

Through the combined lenses of anthropology, archaeology, art history, geography, cultural and media studies, and museum/heritage studies, conference participants will critically examine of the idea of archaeology as a sensibility, and the kinds of (epistemological, conceptual, empirical) vantage and limitation such sensibility brings to how we address salient problems and questions in today's world. Starting from the premise of archaeology as sensibility, a mode of engaging the world (inclusive of, but not necessarily reducible to methodology and technique), we will reflect on a range of issues:

- The implications for archaeological thinking, scholarship, and practice. How does it re-contour what we understand archaeology to be, and its possibilities?
- The role of the archaeological imagination in non-archaeological disciplines. How it reframes our thinking about the fields of anthropology, geography, history, art history, and art?
- How do archaeological sensibilities to the material recraft our research objects, assemblages, questions, and methodologies (e.g. ethnoarchaeology)?
- How does it reconfigure our understanding of archives and modes of archiving?
- How does it rework our conceptions of scale, our senses of time and space (as objects of study and contexts of inquiry), and the relationships we draw between past, present and future?
- How does archaeology's sensitivity to the long-term reframe how we approach memory and loss, remembrance and forget, trauma and therapy, decay and endurance?
- How do archaeological sensibilities engage – and redefine in the process -- complex historical-political constellations like capitalism, modernity, race-thinking, and empire?
- How archaeological attunements make us think differently about things and non-things, about action and causation, about agency and determination.
- How archaeological sensibilities alter forms of narration, modes of exposition and presentation, as well as the media and messages of research. How do they interface with audiences and publics?
- How does archaeological attention to the small, the fragment, the broken and the incomplete reframe our approach to the study of time and materiality in the contemporary era?

In raising these questions and exploring these possibilities, we hope that the event will enable participants and their audience to take the pulse of archaeology at a pivotal moment of change, a time when it seems most undisciplined, to assess its character as a mode of inquiry, to chart out its *raison d'être* and new horizons of thinking it opens.

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CONFERENCE PROGRAM

Wednesday 6 July 2022

8:30-9am	Breakfast
9-9:20am	Opening Remarks
	F.G. Richard: "Archaeological sensibility"
9:30-12:30pm	Session 1: Aesthetic Engagements
	A. González-Ruibal: "The poetics of archaeology"
	A.-V. Houcke: "Cinema as archaeological practice"
	U. Rizvi: "Archaeology by design"
	S. Mirza: "The sensing of landscape"
	<u>Discussion</u>
12:30-2pm	Lunch
2-4:15pm	Session 2: Histories of the Future
	B. Efrati: "Waste: From prehistory to dystopia"
	E. Gilheany: "Icescapes of Nunatsiavut: Archaeological attunements to weather and place"
	G. Gordillo: "The great deceleration: On ruination and revolution"
	<u>Discussion</u>
4:30-6:30pm	Projection of <i>La Piedra Ausente</i> (2013)

Thursday 7 July 2022

9-9:30am	Breakfast
9:30-12:30pm	Session 3: Conjurations
	S. Dawdy: "Archaeology as a spiritual practice"
	M. Trivedi: "Traces and habits: Rethinking the archaeological insensible"
	Y. Navaro: "More-than-human memory: Engaging in non-human in the aftermath of genocide"
	C. Kobelinsky: "'Respecting' the border dead in Catania: Affective engagements with disregarded material traces"
	<u>Discussion</u>
12:30-2pm	Lunch
2-5pm	Session 4: Curations
	R. Hadad: "Anathema: Sacrificial practices and the sense of ruins in the archaeological Near East"
	S. Rozental: "Estelas en el río"
	A. Amaral: "The making of a Maroon archive"
	C. DeSilvey & M. Grünfeld: "Letting be(come): Curating decay at the museum"
	<u>Discussion</u>
5:30-7:30pm	Joint 'Archaeological Sensibility'/'Undoing Things' reception & <i>Sensing Landscape</i> screening