Construction

1. First, fold each A4 sheet in half along the vertical axis.

2. Using a craft knife or scalpel, cut a horizontal slot along the centre dotted line of the first A4 sheet. (pages 1/2/13/14)

3. Then cut along the dotted lines on all the other sheets. Make sure to cut to the very edges of the paper.

4. Stack the folded sheets in ascending order with the even numbers at the top. Curl the bottom half of the second A4 page (pages 3/4/23/24).

5. Thread the curled page through the centre slot of the first A4 page. Repeat this process with the third (pages 5/6/21/22), fourth (pages 7/8/19/20), fifth (pages 9/10/17/18), and sixth A4 sheet (pages 11/12/15/16) with the even pages in ascending order.

6. When all the pages have been threaded through, check the pagination. Finally, fold the booklets in half along the horizontal axis.
Art as Interpretation
Contemporary art is being used increasingly to interpret historic places. In the United Kingdom, English Heritage has worked with others on a ‘Contemporary Art in Historic Places’ initiative including interventions by artists at places as diverse as Felbrigg Hall (Norfolk), and Orford Ness (Suffolk – see below). In the United States a joint initiative by Boston National Historical Park and the Institute of Contemporary Art involved New England artists re-interpreting the city’s historic fabric. Artist Krzysztof Wodiczko for instance interviewed the mothers of murder victims in Charlestown, which had a high rate of unsolved homicides in a neighbourhood where the code of silence ensured no-one would be held accountable. By night, Wodiczko projected a film of the interviews on Bunker Hill monument. Arts critics raved, and some residents raged. But as the artist said, ‘Let the monument speak’.

My main contention here is the view that art can provide a significant new dimension to the understanding and interpretation of place. As Feversham and Schmidt have said, “There is an argument that contemporary art has a vital, if largely unsung, role in the interpretation of the meaning of historic places’.

The research practices and social impact of contemporary art have become increasingly significant. Archaeologists, artists and other practitioners have become increasingly aware of the potential of ‘art to enhance our understanding of material and immaterial records of the past and for the interpretation of the present’. The examples of contemporary art at the 1999 exhibition ‘Memory and Modernity: Contemporary Archaeology and Art’ (see above) have shown that the use of contemporary media can be used to enhance our understanding of the past.

Therefore, contemporary archaeology is not the same as traditional archaeology but rather a new and innovative approach to understanding the past. The examples of contemporary art at the 1999 exhibition have shown that the use of contemporary media can be used to enhance our understanding of the past.

Constructing Place: When artists and archaeologists meet

John Schofield

DIFFUSION

Liquid Geography
disciplines in their approach towards material culture. The limited attention paid to merging artistic practice with archaeology is surprising therefore, notwithstanding Colin Renfrew’s wide-ranging and influential study of modern art and archaeology, and work by artists such as Anne and Patrick Poirier who have been doing art about archaeology and art history for over three decades. Focusing mostly on the challenging and often contentious subject of conflict heritage this essay will review instances of artists working with, and providing interpretations of, contemporary archaeological sites to demonstrate how the different perspectives of artists and archaeologists, taken together, can build understanding of the world around us.

Three types of application will be considered:

1. Art as an archaeological record; the idea that we create as well as consume material culture;
2. Archaeological investigation as performance;
3. Art as interpretation, as narrative, and as characterisation.

In each application close similarities in art and archaeological practice are emphasised. For example, Bourriaud sees art as producing relationships with the world with the help of signs, forms, actions and objects; he refers to the contemporary artist as a semionaut, inventing trajectories between signs. Both statements are equally true of archaeology. Further, what is significant in archaeology is the process of doing it, more so than the results of the endeavour. Here Bourriaud notes how contemporary art is not outcome of a labour; it is the labour itself, or the labour to be.
have understood, or only imperfectly mastered, what we think we know.8

Furthermore, images like

no other kind of relic or text from the past can offer (...) a direct testimony about the world which surrounded other people at other times (...) The more imaginative the work, the more profoundly it allows us to share the artist’s experience of the visible.8

Art as Archaeological Record

Inevitably artistic intervention becomes archaeology. Once these new places and things are created, their creation is in the past, and thus archaeological, at least by anything other than the most conventional and literal of definitions.9 I recently argued for the recognition of modern graffiti as archaeological evidence for example, intimating the character of urban space, giving voice to subcultures within urban communities and their resistance to gentrification and globalisation.10 The same is true of Land Art which has particular relevance given its references to earlier archaeological sites and monumental architecture.

Indicative of this process of ‘becoming’ was Cornelius Holtorf’s incavation in 2001, in which eight contemporary and mundane domestic assemblages were buried in the garden of a Berlin townhouse. As Holtorf explains,

whether one incavates or excavates, archaeologists (...) construct the past and its remains like artisans with the loss and the problem: fragments indicating (...) Incavating is not however about faking archaeological evidence, about drastically diminishing the cultural impact of what is being hidden in the ground. Instead, what is incavated is archaeological evidence in itself (...).

The same is true of various works of Land Art. Holtorf observes that the most conventional and literal of definitions.

Thus the works of artists working with aspects of conflict have contributed to the

...
Away from District Six, on a more intimate level, and as a means to interrogate personal and collective relationships to South African British colonial history and its current personal and public residues of identity, the break-up and fracturing of society and the loss of things precious to the soil. The project should be approached in a similar way: understanding it as an attempt by a group of artists to grasp the manifold aspects of space, place and movement of carnival, and reflected on the dispersal of characters and made historical references to place and history. Andrew Porter’s work (untitled) ties in closely with Roderick Saul’s. My Wayist challenged the incessant wind that residents remember; it recalled the colour, textures and movement of carnival, and reflected on the dispersal of people. A frame with cloth fragments represented the dispersal of people and the hole from which it was taken. I wanted this to give the viewer to place the excavated soil back into the grave to lay the soil to rest.

Footnotes
1. Roderick Saul, Martine J. Whyte, the incessant wind that residents remember; it recalled the colour, textures and movement of carnival, and reflected on the dispersal of people. A frame with cloth fragments represented the dispersal of people and the hole from which it was taken. I wanted this to give the viewer to place the excavated soil back into the grave to lay the soil to rest.
2. The artist [Leora Farber] uses her skin as a figurative and metaphorical site of intervention, for the grafting of tensions, ambiguities, and the many fragments, both physical and narrative, that commemorate both an era and its people. See www.grafarc.org for graffiti archaeology images and reference.
5. See www.gairspace.org.uk/htm/bourr.htm
17. C. Holtorf: Combat archaeology: material culture and modern conflict.
22. C. Holtorf: Combat archaeology: material culture and modern conflict.
30. C. Holtorf: Combat archaeology: material culture and modern conflict.
32. C. Holtorf: Combat archaeology: material culture and modern conflict.
34. C. Holtorf: Combat archaeology: material culture and modern conflict.
Importantly though, and this comes out most strongly in the third category presented here – art as interpretation – artists may be better able to capture and document the contemporary character of these places of conflict (their Zeitgeist) than archaeologists and historic geographers could ever achieve. This is because they share with archaeologists an acceptance of reality combined with an eye for detail, but examined and represented through the developed senses their training, experience and instincts provide. Of course geographers, archaeologists and heritage professionals will have a role to play, in map representation for example, and understanding change, but artists may sometimes be better able to capture the essence of the place, and people’s contemporary perceptions of and interactions with it. And it may be their lack of constraint, their ability to work often as free-agents that enables them to do this. As the film maker Dziga Vertov said in 1923:

I’m an eye. A mechanical eye. I, the machine, show you a world the way only I can see it. I free myself for today and forever from human immobility (...) Freed from the boundaries of time and space, I coordinate any and all points of the universe, wherever I want them to be. My way leads towards the creation of a fresh perception of the world. Thus I explain in a new way the world unknown to you.

Art is subjective, and individual, and may be it is this that gives art the freedom to capture the character of place in the way it does.

Artistically and in opposition to the rest, the latter weekends created
its distinctive interpretation, a camp site occupied periodically outside and in opposition to the Test Site there, residents created a more literal ‘re-enactment’ forms the basis of Jeremy Deller’s The English Civil War Part II, in which a full re-enactment of the 1984/5 Battle of Orgreave was staged, with former miners and policemen taking each other’s roles. As Polly Feversham and Leo Schmidt put it: “Whilst the Wall stood, it served as a work of public art, a blank slate for the expression of private and public resistance.”

At Peace Camp (Nevada), a camp site created from scratch in the Nevada desert, residents created an expression so daring that led to a clash.

10

Like backfilling earth in District Six, intervention here represents a negotiation of space and identity, though in this case the incavation is more intimate...more shocking.

In Berlin artistic installation and intervention since 1989 follows earlier traditions of decorating the West-face of the Berlin Wall (fig 2). As Polly Feversham and Leo Schmidt put it: “The gentle politeness of the needlecraft action, executed in the pleasantries of my (...) surroundings, is undermined by the horror of self-violation.

The Wall stood, it served as a work of public art, a blank slate for the expression of private and public resistance.”

And it was

Art is subjective, and individual, and may be it is this that gives art the freedom to capture the character of place in the way it does.
Architecture is one of the most tangible records of the way we live. Buildings tend to encapsulate our hopes and fears at many levels while also reflecting the persistent human will to plan events. This is evident whether we are considering the monumental edifices of the twin towers in New York, or this modest group of structures at Daruntah. In both contexts we can discover a language of intentions in the character and fabric of the structure.  

Character also incorporates sound, whether the sounds of the place itself, unfiltered and raw, like the creation based on distinctive auditory characteristics (Fig. 6) or the performance of work in place, for the very specific combination of effects it can have on people’s perception of it. An example of this last category is Louise K. Wilson’s Orford Ness: a Record of Fear, in which she invited singers to perform madrigals in some Cold War test cells.

One can also directly experience places, testing and enduring them in order to understand their impact on perception and behaviour. Stephen Turner recently spent a month, unaccompanied, on an abandoned and isolated sea-fort in the Thames Estuary. The building was constructed during the Second World War as part of the anti-aircraft defences for London. It was later re-used to house pirate radio stations in the 1970s, which always seem to be concealing something. The middle distance is more unobtrusive, while something happens over the horizon. The fort might be considered as an archaeological landscape, doing archaeological work in a conventional sense, and actors in a wider study of people’s interaction with the environment.

Archaeology as Performance

The colours are generally muted, greys and light browns, mineral purples and ochres; even the rare greens seem faded. Above all, whether in the mountains or the desert, very little seems to obtrude on the landscape, which is made up of foreground and background, but only rarely of middle ground; when something does appear in the middle distance (a rider, a tree, a ruined tower or wrecked vehicle), it does so with unexpected presence.

That some reference is made by Heizer to the concrete and monumental architecture of the Test Site seems obvious. It also seems unlikely, given the timing of the formation of Peace Camp, that the protestors’ landscape art didn’t also in some way be affected by the enigmatic structures left behind by America’s various nuclear and space programmes, which by the 1970s were already beginning to seem anachronistic. Heizer’s Land Art is substantial. In the character and fabric of the structure, doing archaeological work in a conventional sense, and actors in a wider study of people’s interaction with the environment, the enigmatic structures left behind by America’s various nuclear and space programmes, which by the 1970s were already beginning to seem anachronistic.

Architecture is one of the most tangible records of the way we live. Buildings tend to encapsulate our hopes and fears at many levels while also reflecting the persistent human will to plan events. This is evident whether we are considering the monumental edifices of the twin towers in New York, or this modest group of structures at Daruntah. In both contexts we can discover a language of intentions in the character and fabric of the structure.
His study was both exploration, as well as an interaction with people and with place. It was also an extremely good field survey which, like the Boyle Family’s Institute, did for archaeology what we were later to do for ourselves. (fig 4)

Some artists now record archaeological practice as art (fig 5). Louise K Wilson has done this at Spadeadam, a Cold War missile testing site in remotest Cumbria. In a recent discussion of her collaboration with archaeologists studying the site she said that:

As an outsider to the means and processes of archaeological surveying, it was becoming interesting to read what the archaeologists were doing...