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Buildings Archaeology Without Recording

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This short paper makes no claims to be deeply theoretically engaged. It might actually be boringly practical. It concerns a series of workshops undertaken over the last five years in a variety of different contexts, all based around the central notion of using artistic inspiration to create useful public engagement with built heritage. The workshops are fairly simple. Participants work together to locate, develop and communicate an archaeological understanding of a building or landscape without having to also take time to learn any practical fieldwork methods. In fact, in most cases, the workshop is titled *Buildings Archaeology Without Recording* and all recording technologies are banned, with the occasional exception of pen and paper.

Each workshop aims to interpret a place that might already be familiar to those taking part. After an introduction to a broadly artistically inspired contemporary archaeology (I

experiment with trying particular artists' practical approaches to new places and sites to see if what I learn from that enhances my archaeological interpretation of them), participants are let loose, in pairs or small groups, to investigate their location with reference to different themes such as sounds, words or found objects. The idea is that each person or small group taking part will very quickly develop a unique understanding of the space, a micro-archaeology or detailed interpretation that is different from those of their fellows. After some time, usually an hour, the group reconvenes to communicate their archaeologies, generally in the form of a group-led tour of the space. In my experience everyone speaks, which is, I think, because by this point everyone knows that they know something nobody else knows and they are eager to pass it on. What happens next depends on the group and location. We may expand the micro-archaeologies by investigating more complicated themes or continue discussion towards some form of conclusion, depending on the context. Either way, part of the end point is a complex, archaeological understanding of a place or landscape, developed entirely by participants (in general, non-archaeologists) and centred on allowing everyone taking part to develop and communicate their own expert interpretations of the site.

Inspiration

The artistic inspiration for the workshops can be summed up fairly briefly. My PhD research (in Creative Arts) was based around working with public artists through their creative processes to see how they interpret landscapes in different ways, how they turn these interpretations into artworks and what happens when they put these works back into the landscape. Contrasting this with my own archaeological approaches to the same landscapes, I found great potential for the two approaches to combine, or rather for archaeology to incorporate more artistic approaches to investigation and interpretation. This is a form of "site-specific archaeology", by which I mean that there is potential to learn more from sites by allowing them to dictate their own modes of investigation. The idea that established methodologies may occasionally obscure things or predetermine conclusions will be familiar. The idea of site-specific archaeology allows the archaeologist to adapt their practical and interpretive methods to suit the particular nature of a site when they find it, responding to its particular political and social contexts.

The workshop format has also developed as an alternative approach to public engagement with buildings archaeology. Public workshops that show and teach archaeological practical methods are, of course, fun and informative, and can be useful. However, there are times when it is of more use to leave out the teaching of a practical method which most event participants will never use again and focus instead on interpretation, which anyone can do at any time and which has certain practical applications in daily life, from choosing a place to live to playing a role in urban development and regeneration. Thus, although nominally concerned with buildings archaeology, these workshops do not teach building recording. Instead, they provide an engagement with forms of observation, interpretation and discussion that move buildings archaeology beyond its preoccupations (which rightly remain central to formal buildings archaeology) with draughtsmanship and the understanding of physical structure to the understanding of buildings as dynamic,

inhabited spaces. For the lead archaeologist too, the format removes the easy "fall-back" position of imparting knowledge of a practical method and replaces it with a more equal relationship wherein, from the beginning of the investigative section of the workshop, everyone has equal access to the knowledge required to join the subsequent discussion.

Hyde Park Picture House

Although developed since 2011, the first full workshop took place in 2013 as part of the centenary celebrations of Hyde Park Picture House in Leeds, where it was commissioned by artists in residence Conway and Young. This time named *Digging Above the Surface*, the workshop was a public event split into two two-hour sessions. Ten people took part and five pairs looked at the building for an hour with the following themes: Structure, Found Objects and Rubbish, Words, Sounds, Surroundings. After feeding back and some discussion, groups in the afternoon focused on some larger topics: The Building and Film, Building–Person Interactions, The Wider Landscape, and Storytelling and Oral History. Figure 1 is a sketch of the building on the day, taken from participants' notes as it appeared in a subsequent report.

For participants, the workshop provided an opportunity to reconsider in depth, using evidence-based interpretation, a building they already knew as users. The artist-inspired approach to the space removed the "obligation" to incorporate technical training into the workshop and instead focused on understanding and communication, the theme-based

the grills are still full of ash...are the fire buckets really old or painted to look the part?...a food order for a veggie samosa...a scotch egg in the lost property...direction of the queue changed over time...two tickets for one offer in the local pizza shop...is an empty ring case a sign of a proposal here?...presence of a clock in the auditorium divides audience opinion...BYOB events (bring your own baby) end up with a mix of nappies and alcohol bottles under the seats...popularity of cinema drives up prices of nearby houses...no Leeds people on the staff...the cinema operates as a local landmark...it shows films from around the world and appears in films around the world...Keith takes the stub from you as you go in...it's a Leeds Safe Space...is the clock the real world intruding on fantasy?...when leaving, the audience go from an infinite space into a tiny lobby...the smell of gaslights...power cables run through Edwardian vent grilles...what makes certain stones on the pavement crack?...splashes of red paint under the window...skateboards, walking stick, cars, bus, people's shoes walking past...a beer bottle in the phone box outside...plants grow in the pavement cracks...ten year old posters on the side of the building, they look new...Bollywood nights...cinema opened in the year the First World War started...gets you out of the house, but when we lived over the road we never came...it's a date venue...nicer people come here than other cinemas...why is it decorated when it's always dark?...the space is really flexible and really inflexible at the same time...it has very little private staff space...nice to buy ticket from a person...womb...info board shows past, present and future films...ticket stub from Ross-on-Wye...a community notice board on the wall...'Breastfeeding Welcome'...Armitage Shanks...energy crisis flyer points to the mega-future...old hosepipe next to modern fire extinguisher...vegan friendly kiosk...three cup sizes...50p more to sit on the balcony, screen tilts towards it...confused once with Hyde Park in London!

FIGURE 1. Partial results of the Hyde Park Picture House workshop, from the event's report document.

micro-archaeologies allowing for the kinds of creative interpretation that might become secondary considerations in a more formal buildings archaeology workshop.

Really, there is not intended to be any "take-away" from this workshop for anyone who wasn't there, and a problem I regularly encounter with the wider project is that its benefits and successes are hard to explain to people who haven't taken part. It is public engagement with archaeology without one eye on the subsequent academic analysis or the impact assessment.

Cube Microplex, Bristol

In 2015, a version of the workshop was incorporated into a weekend of archaeological investigation of The Cube Microplex in Bristol, arranged by Angela Piccini and David Hopkinson. Here, a cinema and art space about to undergo a major renovation started the process of working out "what to keep" with an investigation of the building using themes much like those outlined above for Hyde Park Picture House. The major difference here was that a majority of participants were artists (with a handful of archaeologists). In that situation, as in others with academic groups, the highest hurdle is the banning of recording technologies. When people approach investigation of places and spaces with firm ideas of their own working practices or disciplinary norms, being sent off with just a pencil and paper (or preferably nothing at all) can feel like a step into the dark, but herein lie the greatest benefits.

At The Cube, two artists were tasked to think about the building in terms of sound. Wandering between groups I encountered them mid-conversation, having great trouble getting started because they were so drawn to their usual practice of digital sound recording and creative use of that recorded sound. I left them to think further on the problem. Returning to the pair some time later, they had made progress. Not knowing how to start, they had decided to simply make a list of what sounds they could hear, only to end up with two largely different lists; partly prioritising different sounds in the listing, but also literally not being able to both hear the same. Not only was this a fascinating point of relevance to all aural experience of architectural space, it made two people think very differently about the way they relate to sound. The sound discussion continued through the day as the pairs combined to lead a 75-min long, minutely detailed archaeological tour of this contemporary space, a little more than an hour after giving archaeology serious thought for the first time (Figure 2).

It is not for me to "allow" people to be archaeologists or otherwise, but I do believe that you do not have to be a formal producer of archaeological products like papers, site reports, coursework or spoil heaps to think and act like one (i.e. to be one). A major conclusion of these workshops for me has been that there are real benefits to archaeology in creating situations for people who do not consider themselves archaeologists to do archaeology on their own terms. That does not mean sending untrained people to go and dig things up, of course; merely, that making situations where archaeologists and non-archaeologists can interpret human–object relations together with, as far as is possible, no knowledge hierarchy, is beneficial to all involved. Too often, we forget that public engagement with archaeology is for archaeologists to learn from too and not just a transmission of expert knowledge.

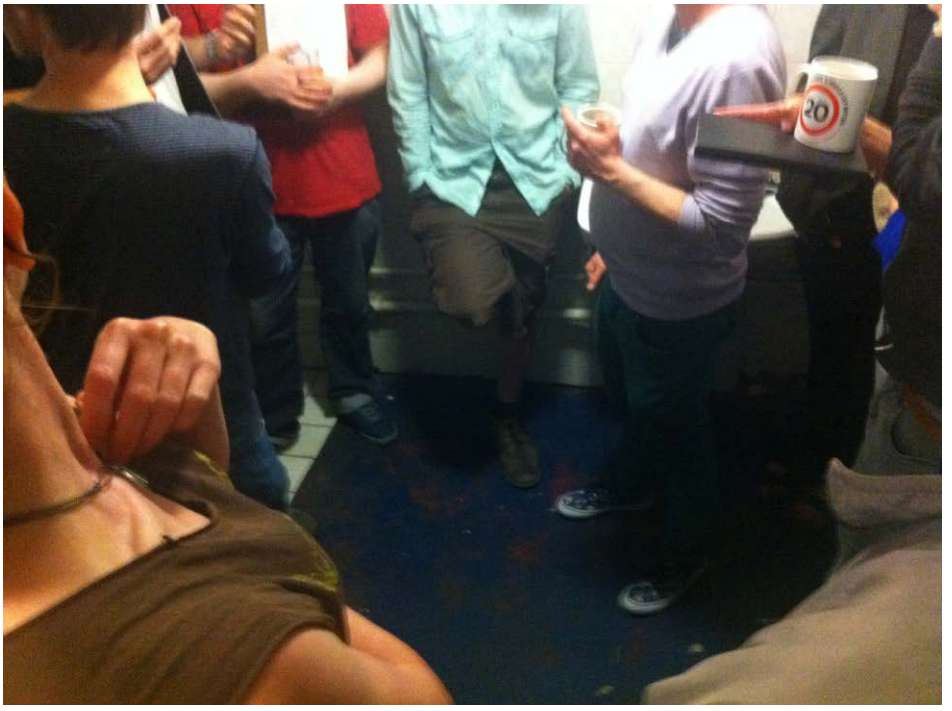

FIGURE 2. Workshop participants in the men's toilets of The Cube Microplex, discussing graffiti stratigraphy and whether the urinal cistern could be played as an instrument.

Political Turn

More recently, the recurring workshop has moved from experimenting between art and archaeology to an expanded focus on politics and public engagement. As mentioned above, one of the important aspects of the workshops is that they allow people to build evidence-based understanding of places that give them a level of expertise on that place and, in general, the confidence to express it. From here, it is easy to see the potential for this way of working to be used to help people develop evidence bases for engagement with and intervention in the planning system.

Increasingly, developers are incorporating genuine community consultation into the early stages of development projects. The reasons are not always purely benevolent and can be connected to calculations of better long-term profit from socially sustainable development or attempts to remove objections to proposals at later stages, but regardless of underlying reasons, increased consultation means more opportunities for people to have some say in the shape of development in the places in which they live.

In these contexts, public archaeologists might reasonably conclude that they have a responsibility to help people engage with planning and community consultation. That is regularly done with the production and dissemination (through formal planning application) of impact assessments and so on, but there is also potential to teach people to understand differently the places in which they live and on which they have the expert voice. In 2015, at the invitation of the architecture platform You&Me and Daisy

Froud, an architectural consultant, I was able to run a workshop as part of the public consultation process for a programme of façade decoration in Thornton Heath in south London. Members of the public were invited to an archaeology workshop in which we first discussed the stage of the project (most participants had attended previous consultation events) and then outlined what contemporary archaeology could bring to understanding and communicating the nature of the development space. Due to the specifics of the project, we used more targeted themes than previously, looking at Sound, Beauty, Objects, History, the wider world in Thornton Heath and connections to the rest of London, among others. We walked the streets for an hour before returning to our meeting room for groups to describe their observations, which were used to develop first a series of interconnecting themes that described the character of the area, and thereafter a collection of objects and ideas that would be, theoretically, for retention or removal. The work is ongoing and will result in due course with an artist commission to decorate a number of building fronts along the High Street.

This work contributes towards a physical impact on the environment and must be primarily judged in that context as it becomes enacted, initially over the next year and in perpetuity thereafter. At present though, we can highlight one useful point of wider analysis. This is that the workshops in Thornton Heath saw an artistically inspired archaeology being used to engage people in urban regeneration, using an expanded archaeological methodology to create a new understanding of a specific place that is feeding directly into shaping its future. This is planning not purely through the expertise of remotely educated, trained and experienced architects, consultants and heritage professionals, but through the particular expertise, with a new and detailed evidence base, of local residents. The aforementioned professionals remain, of course, but hopefully with a greater appreciation of the importance of letting the place dictate its development than might be the case on other projects (Figure 3).

This is clearly a different context for application of the workshop's ideas, and so it is not to denigrate its previous iterations to say that the work in Thornton Heath demonstrates a new maturity in the aims of the workshop series. Hopefully, as this project progresses and the lines from the consultation to physical intervention and public responses to it can be seen, a new and useful critical context for this application of the art-archaeology workshop idea will arise.

Context and Critique

I realise, of course, that as presented here these workshops sound incredibly simple – basic, even. What this paper has left out, however, is the years of theoretical and empirical research that contributed to understanding that something of this kind was necessary and that it would be useful to work to develop an event format that would be engaging over a matter of hours, that would impart a level of archaeological understanding in an innovative way, that would create a situation where archaeologists and non-archaeologists could learn from each other on an equal footing, and that would have potential benefits to archaeology beyond the "impact" of the primary public engagement. Principally, the need for the work was identified through critique of prevalent ideas in the art world around socially engaged practice and the notion of relational aesthetics

FIGURE 3. **Participant notes, Thornton Heath workshop.**

(for which see Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics* [2002] and Claire Bishop's critique of the idea [Bishop 2004]), both of which often fall down on the relevance of the political engagements they try to create and on the identity of participants. Allied to this is critique of my own perceived tendency for archaeology workshops to revolve around the teaching of technical skills (drawing, digging etc), and not on the kinds of archaeological observation, interpretation and communication that can be useful in people's daily lives away from archaeology.

It has proven a difficult idea to explain to people. Large amounts of the art and other episodes of creativity with which archaeologists here engage is political. We might go so far as to say that political engagement, at a variety of scales, is the UK's national popular philosophy, and much contemporary art reflects and works within that. This does not necessarily translate easily and I have found myself in more than one conversation where the idea that an archaeologist might incorporate artistic methods into their work to engage differently with site-specific politics has been impossible to communicate, most notably within archaeology itself. Maybe this is because the workshop series is not an archaeology of art, archaeology as art or art as archaeology – those more easily recognisable forms outlined by Harrison and Schofield in *After Modernity* (2010). Rather, it is an intentionally combined method, a Venn diagram with a huge overlap,

just excluding those bits of each discipline that worry about certainty, boundaries and norms. I usually call my practice *art-archaeology*, which I define as "the archaeological investigation of art with the intention of making better archaeologies", and my workshops are an outcome of some of my art-archaeology thinking. Despite this, I do find the term "creative archaeologies" a useful one, but only as long as we use it to be inclusive of everything that wants to be defined in that way. I suppose there is an interesting question of whether the modes of investigation described by Harrison and Schofield fit into the description "creative archaeology". Art as archaeology and archaeology as art may do so more clearly; archaeology of art perhaps less so, although this broad categorisation is entirely dependent on the specific modes of investigation or practice involved in individual projects. And that is perhaps the strength of "creative archaeologies" as a term; that it provides a space for people to define themselves through experimental practice rather than by subject.

Here, something as simple as being inspired by the ways in which artists approach new working spaces has contributed to a different archaeology; fun and experimental, yes, but also with potential to be of better use in some contexts than more formal applications of our accepted methods. Nevertheless, the project remains distinctly archaeological in its interpretive sequence from investigation, to development of an evidence base, to interrogation of that evidence and finally to conclusions and new directions.

These criticisms aside, the developing workshop series stands, I hope, as a successful example of an artistically inspired archaeology creating new forms of public engagement with archaeological themes. Removing particular knowledge hierarchies by not teaching established practical methods, the workshops provide a case study in the transfer of archaeological expertise away from professional archaeologists to the inhabitants and users of specific places and spaces, something which I think is increasingly necessary for archaeology to stake a claim to be truly socially engaged.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to the hundred or so individuals who have taken part in *Buildings Archaeology Without Recording* and to the people who have thus far commissioned the workshops, given me permission to run them or helped out on the day: Sarah Whatmore, Chris Gosden, Jen Conway and Jessie Young (Conway&Young), Angela Piccini, David Hopkinson, Carlos Lopez Galviz, Nadia Bartolini, Daisy Froud, Alicija Borkowska and Iris Papadatou (You&Me architects), Lorna Richardson and Kate Tiernan.

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