Archaeologies of *Archaeologies of the Contemporary Past*: An Interview with Victor Buchli and Gavin Lucas[1]

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JCA: Our first question is of a historiographical nature: how did you come up with the idea of organizing the conference session that is at the origin of the book *Archaeologies of the Contemporary Past* (Buchli and Lucas 2001)?

VB: I have to say I really don't quite remember. Gavin and I had been talking about the question between us and it seemed like a good follow-up to our "excavation" of a council flat and a good opportunity to try out the ideas that were emerging from that experiment and learn more from others that were working in related ways.

GL: My memory is very hazy on this but I think it was Victor's suggestion originally, and of course it was very much an attempt to reflect on—and reinvent?—the "archaeology of us" which Rathje, Schiffer and Gould had promoted in the late 1970s and early 1980s. I believe our conference session was even called "Rethinking the Archaeology of Us."

JCA: Despite the emergence of an archaeology of the present during the 1970s and early 1980s (Gould and Schiffer 1981), the field did not manage to trigger mainstream

1. This interview with Victor Buchli and Gavin Lucas was undertaken over email during the Summer/Autumn of 2013 and coordinated by Alfredo González-Ruibal on behalf of the editorial team: Alfredo González-Ruibal, Rodney Harrison, Cornelius Holtorf and Laurie Wilkie. An initial set of questions was drafted and agreed amongst members of the editorial team, and a series of follow-up questions (indicated by the presence of author's initials) were subsequently posed in cases where individuals hoped the interviewees might expand on particular points. These have been maintained in the text to allow the reader to follow the various threads which each interviewer chose to pursue.

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interest until the publication of your edited book, which reinvented this kind of archaeology and opened new paths. How do you explain this decline and later revival?

VB: I think the timing was probably right to re-engage with the questions put forward by Schiffer and Gould. As material culture studies more broadly conceived was becoming increasingly established as a field of study, with a significant amount of empirical and theoretical work undertaken and the launch of the *Journal of Material Culture* in 1996, it seemed like a good time to look at what Schiffer and Gould had established and how it might be reconsidered in the light of these developments. In many ways, what Schiffer and Gould were proposing was ground-breaking, and I think archaeology was not ready intellectually to absorb the full impact of their work. When we were engaging with it, the rise of material culture studies created the intellectual space to consider the significance of what Schiffer and Gould had opened up more broadly. The greater reflexivity of ethnographic practice also suggested that ethnography and archaeology were very much about "us" and not the "other," which provided a framework for how the archaeology of "us" might begin to be thought through.

GL: I think the decline—or rather failure to launch—of Schiffer and Gould's original program probably relates to the fact that it was perceived—wrongly so to some extent—as part of the broader agenda of middle range theory. The problem was, archaeological studies of contemporary, western society (the archaeology of us, effectively) were viewed analogously to studies of contemporary non-western societies; that is, as methodological experiments, not as an attempt to understand the present. Even Hodder's study of bow ties and pet foods was in this vein. And even where an emphasis was made on their contribution to understanding the present, as with Rathje's original garbage project, it was—in many cases at least—mixed with the methodological element and I think it was this methodological aspect that was generally perceived as the main point of such studies.

Explaining the later revival, however, is somewhat harder, yet I suspect it relates to broader changes in the academic arena which have helped to blur disciplinary boundaries. Obviously the rise of material culture studies in the 1990s and its disciplinary eclecticism is central here, as it meant that it was a lot more acceptable for archaeology to engage in studies of contemporary life for its own sake, rather than for methodological reasons. Suddenly, archaeologists were part of a wider group of scholars with a shared interest in a specific field of enquiry. Our book thus entered a very different and more receptive academic environment than Schiffer and Gould's. One might also cite the increasing rise in interest in later historical archaeology around the same time, which was pushing the chronological boundaries of archaeology ever closer to the present.

RH: What about the relationship of what came to be known as "archaeologies of the contemporary past" to ethnoarchaeology? Kathryn Fewster (2013) has argued that what was known in the 1970s and 1980s as "modern material culture studies" in archaeology, and subsequently became known as "archaeologies of the contemporary past" following the publication of your book, owes its intellectual origins to a particular form of North American postivist processual ethnoarchaeology which was concerned largely with analogy, but ignored subsequent developments in "post-processual" ethnoarchaeology in North America and the UK during the 1980s and 1990s, which placed greater

emphasis on reflexive ethnography and subjectivity. She argues that this has resulted in a current tendency towards an informant-less (or at least, "informant-lite") archaeology of the present in which archaeological data are prioritized over other forms of information, and archaeological interpretations over other understandings of the meaning and values of the materials at hand. Do you think this is an accurate characterization? And how would you respond to this critique in relation to your own work in the book?

VB: I would say this characterization of "informant-lite" archaeology is accurate in many ways and underlines the importance of methodologically eclectic approaches. Our book was an attempt to actually embrace the lack of informants. This was an experiment in prioritizing other forms of knowledge, namely the non-discursive, and non-textual. Such forms of knowledge prioritize certain kinds of experience over others which are politically inflected and privilege certain kinds of knowledge and certain kinds of people. Nonetheless there is a great variety of contemporary experience which is not witnessed by such forms of knowledge: the unspoken, the unconstituted, the non-discursive, the non-textual, voices which cannot be articulated and which cannot be presenced in any other way except by the techniques archaeology affords.

GL: I would agree entirely with Victor's characterization of this. The prioritization of archaeological material, at least in our case (it may not apply to the studies from the 1970s and 1980s) had nothing to do with a positivist/processual stance or the elision of subjectivity. As for ignoring the developments in post-processualism, it was in many ways a reaction to the assumption that all material culture was somehow captured in webs of meaning. As Victor says, the motive was to explore the unconstituted, the non-discursive, but clearly with an acknowledgement of how this works in relation to constituted structures of meaning and discourse.

JCA: After *Archaeologies of the Contemporary Past* your research seems to have moved away from the topic. You have explored themes such as temporality, archaeological fieldwork (Gavin), domesticity, modernism, design and immateriality (Victor). Why didn't you continue working on the archaeology of the present as a main research line? This is particularly striking, since your chapters in the book seemed to set up an agenda for the subdiscipline.

VB: I'm not so sure that I moved away from it. The experiment was really an attempt to understand how material culture studies "works" within archaeology and more broadly. My interests since have probably been in keeping with questions of modernity, housing and the domestic and how we understand the nature of material culture and the kinds of socialities it produces—in many respects interests emerging from the questions Gavin and I were investigating in the book. I'd like to think it's been a natural evolution, rather than a departure from these interests.

GL: I think of that book very much as the result of my collaboration with Victor around the project on the council flat and TAG session. I would probably never have really taken things this far by myself, and although it proved very influential and important for me theoretically, when our project ended and

the book was done, so was our collaboration—and thus my interest in this field, at least as a primary focus of research. Of course Victor and I remain friends and I continue to follow his work closely, but I think it was largely a case of a moment in time where we came together and produced something that was a blend of both of us.

The agenda you mention in the book was, if I recall correctly, mostly the by-product of an attempt to create a coherent volume and we spent a lot of time working on how to tie the individual papers together and give the book some unity. We did not want it to simply be a set of loosely related chapters typical of many edited volumes, let alone conference proceedings. I remember at one point we even toyed with the idea of just co-authoring the whole book by ourselves rather than the edited one that was published—but it would have involved more work than either of us was prepared to do! In the end, we opted for writing several section introductions, which helped frame the book and create the agenda you are probably speaking of.

JCA: Some of the issues that you discussed in your book, such as waste, the abject, the unconstituted, trauma or presence/absence, seem to have fallen somewhat out of favour among contemporary archaeologists, especially in the UK and the US. They are core concerns, however, among archaeologists and anthropologists working with human rights violations (e.g. Crossland 2009; Weiss 2009; Renshaw 2011), but this is evolving as a particular subfield in itself (as also happens to be the case with the archaeology of modern conflict, e.g. review in Moshenska 2013). Interestingly, seven out of 11 case studies in your book deal with issues of conflict or trauma, as opposed to four on daily life. Would you agree that there was some emphasis on conflict in your book that is now being replaced by a stronger focus on the everyday, which is less overtly political (e.g. Holtorf and Piccini 2009; Harrison and Schofield 2010)? If you do, what do you think are the reasons for this shift?

VB: I think what you describe as an emphasis on trauma might be more an artefact of the volume itself and the process of collecting work, putting it together and trying to make sense of it. We were trying to makes sense of what work was currently being undertaken by archaeologists on the recent past and present, and what underlying themes could be discerned from it at that time. I think that since then, a lot of new work and associated themes have emerged. The emphasis on the everyday has always clearly been there and the everyday in many respects can be thought of as the most coercive and traumatizing in its banal and insidious way. I do not think that aspect has necessarily shifted. However, I do sense that within heritage studies the issue of the contemporary past is important for widening the understanding of heritage and the communities it impacts upon. I think from my perspective that this aspect of the contemporary past as a practice that suddenly engages wider community interest and engagement with heritage and the consequences of changes in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries is an important one for consolidating wider interests and facilitating political engagements.

GL: I think there was an emphasis on conflict in our book—or at least a focus on painful or violent situations, and that was because we wanted to foreground the potentially redemptive or therapeutic aspect that archaeology could bring to these situations. One of the things about doing an

archaeology of the present is that it is almost impossible to maintain any pretence of detachment, that such archaeology was simply a contribution to knowledge (in the traditional, purely empiricist sense) —which is also why such an archaeology was never *just* another period specialism. Now of course all archaeology has a political and ethical dimension, but the temporal proximity of an archaeology of the contemporary past seemed somehow unique in this regard and demanded a more engaged stance.

Connected to this is ultimately the question of relevance—and here I may be imposing a more retrospective than recollective take on the issue, but it does seem that doing an archaeology of the present foregrounds the question of the broader relevance of all archaeology. We were acutely aware that such an archaeology would seem perverse, obscene even, to some, in line with similar arguments often cast at archaeology which dealt with the nineteenth century or later historical periods in general. "Why conduct such an archaeology when we know so much more from documents?"—the usual criticisms and queries which arise in relation to later historical archaeology. But that was precisely the point—archaeology had to be more than about knowledge. The very obscenity of an archaeology of the contemporary past was an attempt to reflect back on the discipline as a whole a bigger question: "Why are you relevant?" Now of course this was a question that had been posed long before us and was by then firmly established, especially through Marxist- and feminist-influenced archaeology. But somehow it seemed that an archaeology of the contemporary past sharpened the edge of this question in a way that traditional archaeology did not.

Whether this political and ethical stance in archaeologies of the present has receded, I don't know. If it has receded, it may be due to the very same reasons that made such an archaeology take off in the first place: its connection to the growth of material culture studies in general, which is very much concerned with the everyday. Maybe that is the price one had to pay for this research to become an established subfield of archaeology.

CH: How did experiences in your personal lives in the contemporary world shape your initial view of what a contemporary archaeology could and might be? How did such things inform your initial hope for what it should achieve? Which contemporary events, processes or gained insights about our present-day world contributed later to changing these views and hopes?

VB: For me it was probably informed by my work in the Former Soviet Union, coming in just after the collapse of the Soviet Union and attempting to make sense of such sudden radical historical and social change—because in a very real sense I was working amidst what in many ways were the literal ruins of a passing era. Some things move too fast, events transpire and their traces disappear too quickly or are not available to traditional social science methods. I felt that a heavily empirical material approach as developed within archaeology and material culture studies could help to make sense of radical and sudden change when other methods are not amenable to make sense of it.

GL: This is a difficult question to answer and I am not sure I could point to anything specific. The best response that I can give is that this research occurred just after I had flipped from prehistory (which was the focus of my doctoral thesis) to later historical archaeology, and connects with the broader reasons for that shift: a desire to engage with a past which seemed more relevant to the world I lived

in and my own personal history. (I should add that this is meant as a personal statement and not a general reflection on the relevance of prehistory!)

LW: Ruth Tringham (1991) once famously commented on the tendency for prehistorians to see their ancient subjects as faceless blobs. Contemporary Archaeologists face a different dilemma—one that has the potential for too much intimacy between researcher and subject. Accordingly, what ethical risks do you see or can you imagine emerging from contemporary archaeological practice?

VB: I would hope a greater responsibility to the subjects of our research, because we are directly accountable to them in terms of articulating the voices of people and groups who are not able to be presenced by any other means. I am thinking here of Larry Zimmerman's extraordinary work amongst the homeless, where the precise empirical material methods traditionally developed by archaeologists help to articulate the experiences of people who are not able to do so through other conventional social science methods.

GL: The question of intimacy has, I think, always been a problem, whatever period—or subject—you study. I am reminded here of Jill Lepore's paper "Historians Who Love Too Much" (2001), where she explores the balance between intimacy and distance in the context of microhistory. But archaeologists have also always faced this dilemma in terms of the contradictory epistemic virtues of detachment/objectivity, on the one hand, and a prolonged familiarity and proximity to their subject, on the other. However, there is the question of whether these virtues gain a different ethical dimension when the subject of research is living people—or people with living descendants who claim to speak for them. It surely does, because such intimacy is no longer a purely epistemic issue but an ontological one insofar as what one does has the capacity to affect the lives of the subject or their representatives. And this responsibility is especially sharpened when the subjects have little power to represent themselves, as Victor points out.

AGR: How has your experience with the archaeology of the contemporary past informed your other research (in terms of methodology, the themes that you have explored, the shaping of your sensibility towards materiality, temporality or the everyday)?

VB: For me at least it makes me more aware of the different kinds of material registers at play as concerns the kinds of data different methodologies afford and the wider interpretive possibilities and the kinds of communities of knowledge they enable. Again, Larry Zimmerman's work here is exemplary and very instructive, and similarly the sorts of insights gained from Rathje's seminal garbology work are especially important when considering issues surrounding environmental sustainability, design and planning in the present. There is an enormous amount of research that needs to be done to address these issues of sustainability, and an archaeology of the recent past can help us greatly, just as Rathje showed us how. Similarly, I am struck by the different constituencies an archaeology of the contemporary past addresses. These are more diverse, more democratic—engaging wider segments of the population more so than traditional social science methods often are able to address and which traditional heritage practices tend to engage with.

GL: I am not sure I have a concrete answer to this. Certainly it was very influential at a theoretical level, in terms of reflecting on the practice of archaeology and has thus broadly affected my subsequent research; but in terms of the specific aspects you mention I find it difficult to point to anything specific.

JCA: The current focus on the archaeology of the everyday in the UK and US tallies well with an expansion of the concept of heritage and heritage practices. In your book, heritage is not a central concern and in fact it is approached in chapters that deal with traumatic or conflicting memories (Apartheid, Second World War). Today, instead, there is a greater interest in heritage as a creative, community-oriented set of practices. How do you understand the strong relationship between the archaeology of the contemporary past and heritage and the potential dangers and benefits of such relationship?

VB: As I mentioned earlier, the more unexpected development regarding the archaeology of the recent past has been in relation to heritage. I think this has been for a number of reasons. First, such an archaeology legally falls outside the bounds of traditional heritage concerns, being too recent to be protected by preservation and heritage bodies such as English Heritage. As such it opens up a novel terrain. Second, by opening up a novel terrain it engages new constituencies, namely those not catered to by the dominant values entrenched within traditional heritage approaches. Thus it operates in an area where new constituencies arise and creates the opportunity to challenge dominant heritage values. This has been the area of the most exciting explosion of interest in the archaeology of the recent past. Similarly, because this is a kind of "abject" and forgotten area of concern it belongs to no one and everyone at once and thus affords the opportunity for many unexpected alliances and practices. Here I am thinking of the surprising interaction between heritage practitioners, archaeologists of the recent past and artist practitioners. There is an enormous overlap in method, media and focus between archaeologists of the recent past and artist practitioners, as Vilches (2007) has discussed since elsewhere. We felt this intuitively at the time and wanted to incorporate more artists in the original volume. Copyright restrictions and cost, etc., made this complicated and prohibitive. As I recall now, we very much wanted to intersperse images of relevant artworks and commentary throughout the text but it was too difficult to do so. In the end Rachel Whiteread was very generous allowing us to use her work on our cover, to at least suggest this area of common practise, method and concern.

GL: I think one of the reasons why heritage was downplayed in our book is because we did not want to get embroiled in administrative or bureaucratic discussions about preservation, which seemed to be predominant back then. At that time, the more dynamic heritage discourse that is blossoming now was only just kicking off even if there was already some important works out. Writing that book today, it would no doubt be very different.

For me, the relation between the archaeology of the contemporary past and heritage is ambiguous and it partly hinges on how we define what is called the archaeology of the contemporary past. On the one hand, the archaeology of the contemporary past was meant as a kind of new period specialism—the archaeology of the present. On the other hand, it immediately has to engage with a central paradox of archaeology, namely that all archaeology is really about the contemporary past

insofar as the archaeological record is a present, not past, phenomenon—a point made by Binford decades ago. But what is unique about the archaeology of the contemporary past is that unlike other period specialisms, it cannot bypass this dilemma by separating past and present. This is partly what the term contemporary past was intended to convey—a term, by the way, which we sadly did not coin but took from Laurent Olivier's chapter in the volume. Now, one of the consequences of this dilemma is that an archaeology of the contemporary past could then equally be about Neolithic tombs as it is about beer cans; but if it does have such extension, then does it really differ at all from heritage studies?

To some extent this latter issue can be resolved by dropping the term contemporary past and simply calling it an archaeology of the present; this means that while such an archaeology can overlap with heritage studies, it also means it is about many other things besides. It is not really about the past, but the present. However, this does not resolve the original dilemma about the contemporaneity of all things archaeological and in fact only reinforces a separation of present and past which was exactly not what we wanted to do. Such dilemmas are why the concept of an archaeology of the present or contemporary past is so challenging theoretically, as it forces us to think about temporality and how we articulate it in the context of archaeology.

RH: It does seem to me that there is an important distinction which has emerged from the work stimulated by your book between conceptualizing the subfield as an "archaeology of the contemporary past" or an "archaeology of the present," which touches directly on the dilemma you mention. The idea of a "contemporary past" seems to contain within it an act of distancing, of ***historicizing*** the present, which is incompatible with the observation you make about the contemporaneity of all things archaeological. But then to speak of an archaeology "*in* and *of* the present" (cf. Harrison 2011) would work against it operating as a form of period study, as it would just become "archaeology." Besides the temporal focus, what (if anything) do you see as distinctive about this as a subfield? And would you characterize it as a subfield at all?

VB: I would disagree that the 'contemporary past' historicizes the present; it distances, yes, it makes the familiar strange, most emphatically. And this is a critical intervention performed with a set of analytical tools traditional to archaeology in order to suggest new orders of knowledge about the recent past that other methods, namely those that are discursive and textual, overlook or are unable to constitute for profoundly political reasons.

GL: For me, what is most distinctive about the archaeology of the contemporary past, beyond its obvious temporal character, is that it forces us to reflect on issues and concepts in our discipline that we usually don't. In a way, it is a heuristic signature because many of the points it brings to the fore, such as the non-discursive or the concept of contemporaneity itself, are actually issues which apply to any period of research in archaeology. It is through an archaeology of the present that we discover a new perspective on our own discipline. If this is so, it does, however, raise the question of whether such an archaeology can continue to perform this kind of heuristic function. For now at least, I see no signs of exhaustion.

JCA: While there was a strong focus on "materiality" in the volume, it did not necessarily anticipate the form of the current "material" and "ontological" turns which seem

closely aligned with current approaches to the archaeology of the present and have had such an important influence on the social sciences and humanities more generally. Do you think the archaeology of the recent past and present has something distinctive to contribute in this regard?

VB: Because the archaeology of the contemporary past is so avowedly productive—it presences absences and does so by constituting an archaeological record of sorts—it shares a lot in common with the work of artist practitioners as I mentioned earlier. There is a greater emphasis on making and a concern for the effects of such material enterprises which classical ethnographic approaches are less immediately engaged with. In this respect, it has a more hands-on and "in-the-world" experience of the materiality of things and their consequences and the wider social and material effects of such archaeological interventions.

GL: I do think the archaeological method with its attentiveness to physically interact with things—to handle them, decompose them, record them and just generally engage with them at a very carnal level—gives it a very different perspective on materiality to ethnographers or historians, who might have a more corporeally distanced relationship to material culture. However, I am not so sure this is enhanced in archaeologies of the recent past or present; in fact, there might even be a danger of the opposite, with such archaeology being more like ethnography or historical research on material culture than prehistoric archaeology, because of its ability to draw on other sources and methods—interviews, archival research, etc. The aspect of physical engagement is then diluted. But neither is this inevitable.

JCA: In your opinion, what are the main differences between the archaeology of the contemporary past and material culture studies?

VB: Well, I would say the main difference is method really, and with that comes the different kinds of interventions that an archaeology of the recent past can make. Because it constitutes the unconstituted, as we said in our book, it works in a very different way from ethnography, which mostly deals with the ready-at-hand. Ethnography, relatively, does not produce a new body of material culture (though one would righty dispute this from the point of view of collecting), whereas archaeology almost by definition does so through the process of "excavation," or other techniques used in the archaeology of the recent past. In this case it is more revelatory, and I would argue more politically engaged, because it intervenes in a radical way, whereas ethnography does not in quite the dramatic way that archaeology does (and the emphasis on drama and performance is very important here). Similarly, by making the familiar strange, archaeology works in a more profound way to confound and confront the world as seen, in part by virtue of its ability materially to presence absence, whereas ethnography takes it on mostly "as it is." For this reason, archaeology has a more effective power, I would say.

GL: Of course there is a lot of overlap, but I would have to repeat my answer to the last question: it largely hinges on the method, on the particular mode of engagement archaeologists bring to their study of material culture.

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RH: Is this also a question of disciplinary positioning and the defence of what Tony Bercher (1989) terms "academic tribes and territories?" (see further discussion in Graves-Brown *et al.* 2013) I wonder if Victor might be willing to elaborate on this point, in the light of the ways in which you have subsequently come to work across "archaeological" and "anthropological" contemporary material culture studies? I'm thinking of the title of your new book, ***An Anthropology of Architecture*** (Buchli 2013) here. What do you think is at stake in the naming of contemporary material culture studies as "archaeological" or "anthropological"?

VB: In this respect I feel very much indebted to the tradition of the four-field approach in anthropology in North America, in which I was first trained at Columbia and in which I work here at UCL in the department founded by Daryll Forde. Archaeology is anthropology and differs from the other fields only in method. I do not subscribe to any meaningful differentiation except in method.

AGR: Do you consider that an archaeological approach to the materiality of the present could help us rethink the deep past, considering the different time scales and materials involved? If so, how?

VB: I think it can help in terms of considering the variety of creative responses to the material conditions of daily-life, which in turn could produce a more comparative ethnology in terms of the deep past and the recent past. The positivist practices of analogy, however, can be supplanted by an appreciation of the extraordinary diversity and ingenuity of human behaviour across time and space. I think an attentiveness to the material and different material responses, with their respective nuances and contingencies, is enormously helpful in understanding how the material conditions of the deep past might work and how we might be affected by those very same conditions in the present and ***vice versa***—both constitute a "radical alterity," to paraphrase Colin Renfrew (2003), with which to make sense of our worlds.

GL: Any study of a contemporary context can aid in understanding the deep past; this is of course simply an old idea shared by the earth sciences and social sciences through the traditional concepts of uniformitarianism, analogy and so on. This does not have to be solely about ethnoarchaeology or middle range research but could just encompass any broad, theoretical insights into the study of the past gleaned through an archaeology of the present. At the same time, however, there is also always the danger that such approaches blind us to what might be different about the past, or, even more significantly, what different things the archaeological record might reveal as opposed to a study of material culture in the present. The contexts in which things present themselves does matter.

JCA: The *new* archaeology of the contemporary past (as opposed to the *old*—1970s—one) has come hand in hand with an emphasis on ruination across the social sciences and the arts. Yet ruins were virtually absent in your book. Why?

VB: Again, I would say that was more an artefact of the session and the editing. This is what we found and engaged with. Without question, ruination is a very significant aspect

of the archaeology of the recent past, but the question of the abject and decay was always present in the book, as was hinted by the Rachel Whiteread cover. That the more recent archaeology of the contemporary past should engage with ruination seems quite natural and in keeping with the insights developed earlier.

GL: I am not sure I have a good answer to that. A trite response would be simply that ruins were not on the academic fashion list back then, but now they are. But maybe it also reflects the same dilemma previously mentioned and a blindspot in our original agenda concerning the focus on the present. In trying to make an archaeology of the contemporary past a period-based study, we inadvertently sustained a coarse separation of past and present even though our actual intention was to collapse the two. As such, ruins, alongside the traditional archaeological record, were perceived as distinct from living, active material culture. A bad assumption, but one we may have unconsciously made—though again this may be a retrospective rationalization.

CH: What, in your opinion, is the future of contemporary archaeology?

VB: I have to say I am still struck by the extraordinary potential of the abject terrain claimed by archaeologies of the contemporary past—not claimed by anyone yet available to everyone. The unexpected collaborations, such as those witnessed between archaeologists of the contemporary past and arts practitioners for one, and also in terms of the potential of the archaeology of the contemporary past to address those areas of contemporary life that are not immediately discernable through discourse or text as other social science methods are dependent upon. Rathje's Garbalogy project was an extraordinary testimony to the power of the method in the face of discursive and textual forms of knowledge that could not allow access to the motives and behaviours that structure daily-life, notably in terms of foodways. The issue is even more pressing now when we consider issues of sustainability, which neither text- nor discourse-based approaches can adequately understand, but which archaeological techniques applied to the present, with its emphasis on material processes, can address. Neither should be taken one without the other, but as a hybrid and eclectic method which archaeologies of the contemporary past and its methodological tool kit can provide significant insights towards.

GL: Looking at the growth of the field over the last decade in terms of conferences and publications (not least the launch of this journal), it is clear that contemporary archaeology has become well established. Its future, however, is somewhat hard to predict, and for reasons that came up earlier in this interview. My feeling, at least, is that a lot hangs on how this field chooses to identify itself: is it a period specialism (the archaeology of the present) or a theoretical challenge to the very temporal *episteme* of archaeology? And I think a genuine choice has to be made. It cannot cut both ways indefinitely. Paradoxically perhaps, it might have a longer life as a distinct field if it pursues the first option, for the latter option is surely only a first step towards a very different kind of discipline to that which we currently know. If contemporary archaeology manages to shake our discipline to the extent hinted at, then who knows what new disciplinary configurations will fall out of the bag? But whatever they are, they will all be forms of contemporary archaeology and the term will simply be redundant.

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Gavin Lucas (left) and Victor Buchli (right) at Jesus College, Cambridge, in the mid-1990s (Photograph used with permission).

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