

## □ Editorial

As a number of authors have already noted elsewhere, the “archaeology of the contemporary” initially appears to be an oxymoron. Surely archaeology, as *archaiologia*, is precisely and properly the science of *ancient* things? But to characterize archaeology’s concerns as exclusively residing in the material culture of the past would be to occlude a long-held interest in the study of contemporary material culture which has been a part of the very “prehistory” of the discipline, at least insofar as it developed its current disciplinary orientation in Anglophone contexts during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It is an interest which can be traced through the work of Pitt Rivers in the late nineteenth century; to that of Childe in the early twentieth century; through “Binfordian” North American processual ethnoarchaeology in the 1960s (e.g. Binford 1967), and the alternatives which grew out of it in the 1970s and 1980s (e.g. Gould 1980; Gould and Schiffer 1981; Leone 1973, 1981; Rathje 1978, 1981; Redman 1973; Salwen 1973; Schiffer 1978); to the work of British post-processual archaeology and ethnoarchaeology in the 1980s and 1990s (e.g. Hodder 1982; Shanks and Tilley 1987a, 1987b).<sup>1</sup> Similarly, in Francophone archaeology and anthropology there is a long tradition of scholars working with both ancient and contemporary material culture (e.g. Leroi-Gourhan 1943; Lemonnier 1992; Schlanger 1994; Olivier 2000). To do so would also potentially obscure what emerged as perhaps one of the most important insights that developed out of these later British post-processual archaeologies and ethnoarchaeologies, which showed how the archaeological *past* is fundamentally bound up with, and always remade in, the *present*—that archaeology is both a product and producer of *present pasts* (see discussion in Shanks 2012). As Olsen *et al.* (2012, 6) put it, this constitutes a recognition that the past is “spatially coextensive with the very labor that attempts to articulate it,” and a truly contemporary archaeology must attend to both dimensions.

But if all archaeology is thus *in* the contemporary, what purpose is there in distinguishing an archaeology *of* the contemporary? Out of the variable and uneven interest in the archaeology of the present and recent past exemplified in the references listed above, it is possible to trace the accelerated emergence over the past decade of a nascent “subfield” of archaeology which has become concerned explicitly with an archaeological approach to the recent past and present. In pointing to highlights along the trajectory which has led to this emergence, one might conventionally begin with the work of William Rathje on the Tucson Garbage Project, established in 1973 (see Rathje and Murphy 1992) and

1. See more detailed accounts of these disciplinary trajectories in Buchli 2002; Hicks 2010; Fewster 2013.

the edited volume *Modern Material Culture: The Archaeology of Us* (Gould and Schiffer 1981), and then emphasize the coming together of the various seeds which this work had sewn in the two edited volumes which were published at the turn of the millennium: *Matter, Materiality and Modern Culture* (Graves-Brown 2000) and *Archaeologies of the Contemporary Past* (Buchli and Lucas 2001). One might also mention the development of the Contemporary and Historical Archaeology in Theory (CHAT) Group in the UK in 2003 and its annual international conferences, and, more recently, make note of the subfield's "coming of age" in the form of an Oxford Handbook dedicated specifically to the topic (Graves-Brown *et al.* 2013). While this is not to assume a particular hagiography of this subfield, we think it is nonetheless relevant to point to these as indicators of an increasing interest in this as an area of research and publication. Indeed, something we wish to encourage within the journal is the development of alternatives to these conventional histories of the subfield, which explore as yet unexcavated historiographies of a focus on the contemporary within other regional archaeological traditions. For example, we might think here of early work from Chile and Spain which maps a similar intellectual trajectory to that which we have discussed from Anglophone and Francophone traditions above (e.g. Alcaide 1983; Bellan 1993; Gutiérrez *et al.* 1996).

While it might be possible to articulate the present moment as witnessing a sort of "tipping point" in terms of the range and scale of interest in the topic, it is nonetheless obvious that as a newly emerging disciplinary orientation, the subfield is currently stymied by the lack of an appropriate forum within which to conduct coherent, sustained, international discussion and hence to assist in, and maintain, its long-term development. Emerging from a number of different quarters, this important, critically engaged and rapidly expanding subfield of research on the archaeology of the recent and contemporary past has for some time fallen uneasily between a range of other disciplines, research areas and journals. The *Journal of Contemporary Archaeology* will act as a dedicated international forum in which to negotiate and re-negotiate the boundaries of this emerging subfield; to develop new methods, concepts and approaches; to critically debate key terms, data and standpoints; and to collaborate on setting future research agendas for archaeologies of the recent past and present. Our aim is to bridge the current divide between North American, British and other European archaeologies of the recent and contemporary past, and to foster a space not only for alternative agendas emerging elsewhere but also for broader international dialogue on issues of common concern beyond dominant Anglophone archaeological perspectives. Through our engagement of a diverse and highly competent international editorial board, we hope to encourage submissions from all global regions and archaeological traditions, and to explore the relations between archaeologies of the present and recent past and the humanities and social sciences more broadly. We encourage the submission of work which will foster debate both within and outside of archaeology as it is conventionally defined.

To this end, we see the word "contemporary" in the journal's title as carving out a distinctive area of focus in at least three broad domains — temporally, spatially, and ontologically — each of which presents a series of shared interests which signal possibilities for cross-disciplinary engagements which we hope contributors to the journal will feel encouraged to explore. Temporally, JCA is concerned both with archaeologies of the

contemporary world, defined as belonging to the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, as well as with reflections on the socio-political implications of doing archaeology *in* the contemporary world. Here, we see a particular affinity with emerging interdisciplinary interests in critical heritage studies, which explore the material-discursive processes and practices by which the past is made present in a variety of different contexts. Reflections on such processes, and the spaces within which pasts, presents and futures are actively assembled, will take place at a number of different spatial scales, some of which are distinctive to the recent and contemporary past—those facilitated by contemporary micro- and macro-technologies, for example (Edgeworth 2013)—and in a range of places and “non-places,” both “virtual” and “real” (e.g. see Harrison and Schofield 2010). The temporal and spatial dimensions of the “contemporary” similarly evoke the need for a critical engagement of archaeology with global social, political, ecological and economic issues of the present moment. In making reference to ontology, we not only cite archaeology’s engagement with a broader contemporary “ontological turn” within the humanities and social sciences, but also the implications of the ontological aspects of archaeological knowledge production. In acknowledging archaeology as constitutive of the pasts it produces in the present, archaeology thus also emerges as a discipline which is fundamentally concerned with *assembling futures*.

We have intentionally only gestured towards, rather than defined, a broad set of interests here, but we want to be clear that the “contemporary” signals something broader and more significant than simply a temporal focus for the journal. We believe that the archaeology of the contemporary provides a platform for rethinking archaeology and archaeological themes irrespective of the time period under discussion. Similarly, while JCA’s focus is archaeology broadly and loosely defined, we encourage articles from and collaborations with a range of adjacent disciplines which consider recent and contemporary material-cultural entanglements, including (but obviously not limited to) social and cultural anthropology, art history, cultural studies, design studies, cultural geography, heritage studies, history, media studies, museum studies, psychology, science and technology studies and sociology.

In order to meet these aims, we will publish a number of different article types, and we encourage authors to explore the possibilities inherent in these different formats.

**Discussion Articles** raise timely methodological and/or theoretical issues and include several specially commissioned comments from experts in the field and a reply from the author, published in the same issue. Discussion articles generally run to 7,000–10,000 words in length, and we aim to publish at least one such article annually.

**Research Articles** are generally shorter, at up to 8,000 words in length, and may contain more empirical data, be more case-study driven, or contain discussion of more focussed theoretical or methodological issues.

**Interviews** are occasional edited discussions between an author (or artist/creative practitioner) who has made (or is in the process of making) a key contribution to the subfield and other researcher(s) who share interests in the interviewee’s general area of practice or research. These interviews will generally be commissioned by the editors; however, we would welcome initial approaches about suitable candidates as interviewees and interviewees.

**Forums** are composed of a series of short 2,000–3,000 word responses to a previously circulated question or issue of contemporary archaeological interest. Forums will normally be “curated” by a guest editor or specific member of the editorial team, and a call for responses to Forum topics published on the journal website. Please write directly to the editors to discuss possible topics for future Forums.

**Photo Essays** may include up to 20 images and should include 2,000–3,000 words of text. We aim to publish one photo essay in each issue. Photography has emerged as central to the archaeology of the present and recent past, and the photo essay feature will provide an important way of engaging critically with photography and its role in contemporary archaeology.

Acknowledging the key place which digital media have come to occupy within this emerging subfield, and with the view to encouraging more experimental publication formats, JCA also provides space for the publication of additional interactive and **web-only content** on its website. We encourage authors to discuss possible additional online materials (in the form of digital video, additional supplementary materials, hyperlinked texts, etc) with the editors at the time of submission.

**Book Reviews** will be published online only, and should normally be between 500 and 1,500 words in length, while Review Articles (a single article reviewing more than one book) may be up to 3,000 words in length. Under certain circumstances, authors may be invited to respond briefly to reviews, and their responses will be published online.

In closing, we return to the oxymoronic qualities of an archaeology of the contemporary, because these seem to us to raise significant issues which reflect on the journal's objectives. The literary value of the oxymoron lies in the attention it can draw to that which is often assumed to be “normal” and hence overlooked. We are reminded here of the questions raised by George Perec's discussion of the importance of a focus on what he termed the “infra-ordinary”:

What speaks to us, seemingly, is always the big event, the untoward, the extra-ordinary... Railway trains only begin to exist when they are derailed... Aeroplanes achieve existence only when they are hijacked... In our haste to measure the historic, significant and revelatory, let's not leave aside the essential: the truly intolerable, the truly inadmissible... “Social problems” aren't “a matter of concern” when there's a strike, they are intolerable twenty-four hours out of twenty-four, three hundred and sixty-five days a year... How should we take account of, question, describe what happens every day and recurs every day: the banal, the quotidian, the obvious, the common, the ordinary, the infra-ordinary, the background noise, the habitual? (2008, 209–210)

An archaeology of the contemporary similarly has an important role to play in exploring and exposing not only the spectacular, violent, shocking extremes of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (e.g. see González-Ruibal 2008), but also those objects, places and events which appear to be the most mundane, banal and common. For as often as not, it is that which appears most “normal” which turns out to be the most significant and genuinely shocking of all (e.g. Shove 2003).

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