Visual Archaeologies: Editorial Introduction

Alfredo González-Ruibal
Institute of Heritage Sciences, Spanish National Research Council
alfredo.gonzalez-ruibal@incipit.csic.es

For the last three decades, archaeologists have been trying to develop new ways of telling the past – or manifesting it – through text and new media. Visuality, in particular, has gained much prominence through the development of new forms of digital imagery. At the same time, there has been a call for more aesthetic explorations in archaeology that go beyond the hyperreality of virtual archaeology and deploy both old and new media in creative ways, including photography (Pétursdóttir and Olsen 2014), video (Witmore 2004), drawing (Wickstead 2013; Hale, this volume), performance (Pearson and Shanks 2001), comic strip art (Brate and Hanberger 2012; Kiddey *et al.* 2016; Starzmann and Papoli, this issue; Zarankin, this issue), art installation, collage and other artistic work (Bailey 2014, 2017). In fact, archaeologists (and antiquarians before them) have always been experimenting with different forms of visual discourse, from early engravings and watercolours to digital photogrammetry. There is no doubt that the visual has a dark history of domination in modernity, and archaeology is part of this (Thomas 2008; Wickstead 2009); but the visual can also be a tool to explore aspects that often fall outside the realm of conventional scientific practice, such as the self (Harrison and Schofield 2009), as in the work by Starzmann and Papoli and by Zarankin (this issue), marginalized lives (Kiddey *et al.* 2016); archaeological practices outside academia (Finlay, this issue), the process of knowledge production and sharing (Brate and Hanberger 2012; Hale, this issue) and, more generally, everything that is outside the focus of mainstream research.

In this exploration of the margins, visual experimentation and contemporary archaeology coincide, as both are interested in what is left out, for being too recent or banal. Here we can include several essays included in the present issue, such as the work of Pablo Arboleda on the material effects of the real-estate crisis in Spain; Sreedeep Bhattacharya's trip to a tourist destination in India after the travellers have departed and Eve Campbell's documentation of contemporary shrines of the Virgin Mary in Ireland. Neither Arboleda nor Bhattacharya are archaeologists, but their sensibility toward the material, ruination and the mundane is shared by contemporary archaeology. Campbell, in turn,

Journal of Contemporary Archaeology 7.1 (2020) 1–3
ISSN (print) 2051-3429 (online) 2051-3437 https://doi.org/10.1558/jca.42565

relies on one of the foundations of the discipline – typology – that has been tapped so successfully by artists (Becher and Becher 2004).

Developing new visual tools is not just good for presenting results, but also for a more reflexive and creative understanding of the process of (collective) knowledge production, as seen in Hale's essay, or in Finlay's: careful recording of an abandoned workspace of an avocational archaeologist, which brings up important questions about the nature of archaeological documentation. Epistemological reflection is also present in the auto-archaeologies of Zarankin and of Starzmann and Papoli. Both Zarankin and Papoli are archaeologists working on the contemporary, and both have a long-term commitment with the dark side of the recent past and with creative experimentation (e.g. Papoli *et al.* 2013; Zarankin and Senatore 2014). It is perhaps not a coincidence that they have chosen the same medium – comics – to express themselves. Comics have been used in archaeology before but, aside from a few exceptions (Brate and Hanberger 2012; Kiddey *et al.* 2016), more as an educational tool to reach the wider public than as a viable form of presenting and discussing research. Comics as a documentary method has instead recently been explored widely in journalism and anthropology: documentary comics include the works of Sacco (2007; see also Walker 2010) and Igort (2016), whereas illustration has been playing an increasingly important role in ethnography (Ramos 2004; Causey 2017; Estalella 2020). There are even theses and ethnographic monographies that have been published in comic format (Hamdy and Nye 2017).[1] It is regrettable that a discipline in which drawing has always played such a prominent role has not reflected more on this practice, in contrast to writing (Joyce 2002; Lucas 2019) and photography (Shanks and Svabo 2013; McFayden and Hicks 2019). Critique, in fact, has focused on the content of what is being represented (particularly archaeological reconstructions), not on the medium. But the medium, as Hale shows in this issue, can also be good for thinking: work presented in this issue presents new possibilities for discussing the epistemic and rhetorical implications of illustration in archaeology.

It is not a coincidence that the intersections between visuality and contemporary archaeology have figured so prominently in the *Journal of Contemporary Archaeology* from its beginnings (Pétursdóttir and Olsen 2014; Kiddey *et al.* 2016; Thomas *et al.* 2017). On the one hand, the visual is often the best way to convey the complex nature of our times, to overcome the limitations of logocentric arguments and to look at what is left outside discourse; but on the other hand, the archaeology of the contemporary past is, and has to be, open, reflective and experimental – even risky. It has to challenge conventional ways of practising the discipline, while building bridges towards other forms of expression and different fields of practice. Visual experimentation is an excellent way to start.

1. I would like to thank Adolfo Estalella for sharing his reflections on comics, drawing and ethnography. See an excellent Twitter thread starting here: https://twitter.com/adolfoestalella/status/1260132764264927232

References

Bailey, D. 2014. "Art//Archaeology//Art: Letting-Go Beyond." In *Art and Archaeology*, edited by I. Russell and A. Cochrane, 231–250. New York: Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4614-8990-0_15

____. 2017. "Art/Archaeology: What Value Artistic-Archaeological Collaboration?" *Journal of Contemporary Archaeology* 4 (2): 246–256. https://doi.org/10.1558/jca.34116

Becher, B. and H. Becher. 2004. *Typologies of Industrial Buildings*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Brate, M. and P. Hanberger, 2012. *Places, People, Stories: A Graphic Novel.* Foreword and Appendix by C. Holtorf. Kalmar: Linnaeus University. Available online: https://issuu.com/petterhanberger/docs/pps_original_120916_digital_issu

Causey, A. 2017. *Drawn to See: Drawing as an Ethnographic Method*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. https://doi.org/10.1111/aman.13235

Estalella, A. 2020. "El dibujo etnográfico. Delinear modos de indagación." Available online: http://estalella.eu/open-doc/el-di

Hamdy, S. and C. Nye. 2017. *Lissa: A Story About Medical Promise, Friendship, and Revolution*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. https://doi.org/10.5771/0257-9774-2019-2-595

Harrison, R. and J. Schofield. 2009. "Archaeo-Ethnography, Auto-Archaeology: Introducing Archaeologies of the Contemporary Past." *Archaeologies* 5 (2): 185–209. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11759-009-9100-5

Igort. 2016. *The Ukrainian and Russian Notebooks: Life under Soviet Rule*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Joyce, R. 2002. *The Languages of Archaeology: Dialogue, Narrative, and Writing*. Oxford: John Wiley & Sons.

Kiddey, R., A. Daffnis, J. Hallam and M. Brate. 2016. "Journeys in the City: Homeless Archaeologists or Archaeologies of Homelessness." *Journal of Contemporary Archaeology* 2 (2): 235–244. https://doi.org/10.1558/jca.v2i2.29592

Lucas, G. 2019. *Writing the Past: Knowledge and Literary Production in Archaeology.* London: Routledge.

McFayden, L. and D. Hicks, eds. 2019. *Archaeology and Photography: Time, Objectivity and Archive.* London: Bloomsbury.

Papoli, L., M. Dezhamkhooy and M. Naeimi. 2013. "A Report on a Party and the Guests." *Archaeologies* 9 (1): 132–161. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11759-013-9233-4

Pearson, M. and M. Shanks. 2001. *Theatre/Archaeology.* London: Routledge.

Pétursdottir, Þ, and B. Olsen. 2014. "Imaging Modern Decay: The Aesthetics of Ruin Photography." *Journal of Contemporary Archaeology* 1 (1): 7–23. https://doi.org/10.1558/jca.v1i1.7

Ramos, M. J. 2004. "Drawing the Lines." In *Working Images: Visual Research and Representation in Ethnography*, edited by A. I. Alfonso, L. Kurti and S. Pink, 148–156. London: Routledge.

Sacco, J. 2007. *Safe Area Goražde: The War in Eastern Bosnia 1992-95*. Seattle: Fantagraphics.

Shanks, M. and C. Svabo. 2013. "Archaeology and Photography: A Pragmatology." In *Reclaiming Archaeology: Beyond the tropes of Modernity*, edited by A. González-Ruibal, 105–118. London: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203068632.ch1

Thomas, A., D. Lee, U. Frederick and C. White. 2017. "Beyond Art/Archaeology: Research and Practice after the 'Creative Turn'." *Journal of Contemporary Archaeology* 4 (2): 121–129. https://doi.org/10.1558/jca.33150

Thomas, J. 2008. 'On the Ocularcentrism of Archaeology." In *Archaeology and the Politics of Vision in a Post-Modern Context*, edited by J. Thomas and V. O. Jorge, 1–12. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars.

Walker, T. 2010. "Graphic Wounds: The Comics Journalism of Joe Sacco." *Journeys* 11 (1): 69–88. https://doi.org/10.3167/jys.2010.110104

Wickstead, H. 2009. "The Uber Archaeologist: Art, GIS and the Male Gaze Revisited." *Journal of Social Archaeology* 9 (2): 249–271. https://doi.org/10.1177/1469605309104138

____. 2013. "Between the Lines: Drawing Archaeology." In *The Oxford Handbook of the Archaeology of the Contemporary World*, edited by P. Graves-Brown, R. Harrison, and A. Piccini, 549–564. Oxford: Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199602001.013.012

Witmore, C. L. 2004. "Four Archaeological Engagements with Place Mediating Bodily Experience through Peripatetic Video." *Visual Anthropology Review* 20 (2): 57–72. https://doi.org/10.1525/var.2004.20.2.57

Zarankin, A. and M. X. Senatore, M.X. 2014. "*Storytelling*, *Big Fish* y arqueología: repensando el caso de la Antártida." In *Multivocalidad y activaciones patrimoniales en arqueología: Perspectivas desde Sudamérica*, edited by M.C. Rivolta, M. Montenegro, L.M. Ferreira and J. Nastri, 111–130. Buenos Aires: Fundación de Historia Natural Félix de Azara. https://doi.org/10.5354/0719-1472.2011.18166