After Modernity

Archaeological Approaches to the Contemporary Past

RODNEY HARRISON
and
JOHN SCHOFIELD

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For Vicky and Emily

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1

Introduction

How can we use the methods of archaeology to explore contemporary social phenomena? In what ways can the approaches of a discipline that has been developed to explore the distant past be used to understand the present, and should we even try? How can the 'excavation' of the recent past bring to light new insights into what it means to be 'us'?

These are the questions that have absorbed a new generation of scholars who seek to draw on the skills of archaeology to study an increasingly contemporary past and attempt to make the familiar past 'unfamiliar' (cf. Graves-Brown 2000*a*) by exploring its hidden, forgotten, and abject qualities and utilizing the powerful rhetoric of archaeological recovery in the retrieval of recent memories through the study of present-day material culture. This book aims to explore what happens if we take an archaeological approach to contemporary, late modern, post-industrial societies. It acts as an introduction both to the ways in which archaeologists approach the study of the recent and contemporary past, and to the interdisciplinary field of modern material culture studies more generally. We hope it will be of interest not only to students and practitioners of archaeology, but also to scholars who work within the broad interdisciplinary field of modern material culture studies—anthropologists, sociologists, historians of technology and science, and psychologists—in developing a new agenda for the study of the materiality of late modern societies. Because knowing more about our own society and how it functions is an issue of broad

public concern, we have also tried to write this book in such a way that the reader who is not a specialist, but who has a casual interest in the manner in which archaeologists and others study contemporary material culture, will also be engaged by it.

The book's principal focus is the archaeology of developed, post-industrial societies during the second half of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first. Our emphasis is the period after about 1950, though the examples in Part II deliberately focus on the years after *c.*1970, a time which for us is literally the contemporary past, the period of our own lives and experiences. This period encompasses the end of the Cold War and the beginning of the 'internet age', a period that sits firmly within what we would recognize to be one of 'lived and living memory'. This period is often seen as discrete in exhibiting distinct features relating to the growth of new communicative technologies and electronic media, the globalization of technology, and the rise of new modes of capitalism associated with a sense of alienation and 'haunting' by the past. While there will be many people who have lived memory of an era before this one, we focus on this epoch as a distinct period, which we denote using the label 'late modern'. In using this term, we seek to make a distinction between it and the modern period. The term 'modernity' is generally associated with the development of centralized nation-states and industrialization, capitalist and mercantile economies, urban and suburban modes of living, and the emergence of long-distance communication and trading networks (e.g. Giddens 1991). A number of scholars (e.g. Lyotard 1979; Harvey 1990; Jameson 1991; Augé 1995; Appadurai 1996) have argued that the late modern (or super-/post-modern) period should be seen as exhibiting distinct characteristics that separate it from the modern period, including

- the growth of new communicative technologies and electronic media;
- the globalization of technology, and its association with altered patterns of production and consumption;
- the widespread experience of mass migration and the associated rise of transnationalism (in terms of capital, technology, labour, and corporations);

- new modes of capitalism involving more flexible forms of capital accumulation and distribution; and
- further growth of availability of leisure time (see further discussion in Ch. 5).

This is the first fully authored book to focus on the archaeology of the late modern period. Nonetheless, in reviewing the field of the contemporary past as it has developed within archaeology, it has often been necessary for us to refer to the archaeology of earlier time periods—the First and Second World Wars, for example—because it has relevance to the development of the field over the past two decades. This does not dilute the importance or the urgency of developing late modernity as a specific area of focus for archaeology. On the contrary, it is important to trace the antecedents of this field of study so as to understand the circumstances of its emergence and its relationship with archaeology as a broader academic pursuit. For reasons we will discuss in more detail in Chapter 5, we have consciously chosen the term 'late modern' rather than 'postmodern' to attempt to emphasize some of the continuities between the modern and late modern periods. As Jameson (1984; cited in Thomas 2004: 3) notes, the use of such terms as 'modernity' and 'postmodernity' has the tendency to establish a sense of homogeneity within, and heterogeneity between those periods that may not exist. Like Thomas (2004: 3), we suggest the terms 'modernity' and 'late modernity' be thought of more as social and technological *processes* than as entirely distinct time periods, to avoid making too clear a distinction between them and erasing the sense of continuity in certain longer-term processes that run through both periods.

Throughout the book, we focus particularly on post-industrial societies, and the urban and suburban lives of the majority of their inhabitants. In this sense, our perspective is largely Western, and certainly does not include people still living in small-scale societies in the modern world. However, by doing this, we are not suggesting that such people are any less a part of the contemporary or late modern world. Instead, we want to focus on methods particular to this form of late modern lifestyle that has not been considered in detail by archaeologists, rather than other forms of modernity that might be studied using more conventional archaeological methods

suitable for the study of small-scale societies. Nonetheless, the ways in which such groups are caught up in globalized webs and networks of trade, communication, and consumption means that they are equally implicated in the circulation of objects, images, and information that are most often associated with post-industrial societies, and that some aspects of the everyday lives of such groups might also be studied using the methods outlined in this book. Indeed, many of the methods we discuss here come from prehistoric archaeology, not surprisingly given that many of those who work in this field have come to it from the study of prehistory (see further discussion below).

ARCHAEOLOGIES OF THE CONTEMPORARY PAST

The idea for this book emerged from an important and comparatively recent initiative within the related fields of archaeology and heritage, being the archaeology of the recent and contemporary past, a field of study that has grown dramatically over the past decade. The term 'contemporary past' has come to have a specific meaning for practitioners in the field, and it is important to pause to consider it in more detail here. While it might appear to be an oxymoron, the term refers to the tendency within contemporary post-industrial societies for the present to become almost immediately historicized, for the past to be perceived as imminent within the present. For this reason, unlike other historic periods and thematic studies of interest to archaeologists, the contemporary past is a period for which precise definition requires constant review and updating; unlike earlier periods or epochs ('the Neolithic' for example), the contemporary past moves with us into the future. The contemporary past is that period with which we are most closely familiar: the present, the age that we live in and have lived through, whose fabric and landscapes we shape and that influences our everyday lives and actions. The contemporary past is the past of *our* generation, and the generations immediately before and after, of which memories and stories are first- or second-hand, as the period of time we can most closely and clearly envisage and recall. It is called contemporary not simply

because it is 'now' and recent but because it is not 'closed' in interpretation nor emotional influence. Further, the contemporary past is about lived experience; about human life. In this sense, the archaeology of the contemporary past overlaps closely with heritage, which for us is more a social phenomenon than something physical. The study of the contemporary past allows older models of heritage to be updated to find meaning for new audiences, for example recent immigrant communities, and those disadvantaged by the power structures of post-industrial societies. It is about vernacular experience and everyday life, and how the lived experience of the present forms as heritage in the longer term. It is a critical part of the public understanding of history because it belongs to everyone and everyone has a view about it.

The 'contemporary' period cannot be fixed to a precise chronological bracket, and unusually it might be best to see this as a period defined in reverse, from the present day back to a time when the past seems (subjectively) no longer recent (2010–1950, as opposed to the more conventional form of 1950–2010). Traditionally, the end of this period has been viewed as the point at which living memory fades (as now, for example, for the Second World War), but clearly this framework is open to interpretation depending on the point of view of the observer. It is not just the date range that is unusually subjective. Because we have lived and experienced this period directly, it is inevitable that our opinions about the landscape, and the buildings and places within it, will be strongly held; and because they are predominantly personal views, they will also be multiple and diverse. Archaeological sites of the contemporary past are places that in some ways we know all about, but in others can seem almost as mysterious and 'distant' as sites of prehistory or of the medieval period. Archaeology once focused exclusively on these earlier remains largely because only its approaches could reach so far back. But recently archaeologists have realized that their distinctive approaches and perspectives also have relevance for understanding very recent and present-day material culture. Although some might argue that archaeology has always been perceived to be a methodology rather than a discipline, we argue that the word 'archaeology' has become more methodological in its meaning than one that defines a particular period of interest.

Academic research into the contemporary past is common to a range of academic fields—in history and literature, sociology, and increasingly now in archaeology, anthropology, heritage, cultural geography, and the arts. In this way, we might think of the term 'contemporary' as akin to 'landscape' (with which it shares a core of subjectivity and perception), in being an inherently all-embracing field of interdisciplinary study. In joining this broader community of interest, archaeology brings three specific (and arguably unique) perspectives: first, that archaeological investigations, whether of the contemporary past or of early prehistory, begin with material culture, the stuff that people leave behind; second, there is a time depth that characterizes archaeological studies—a recognition of longer-term processes in which only geologists share similar insight; and third, due to their long-term temporal purview, archaeologists recognize that change happens—and that it is generally better to work with the principle of change than trying to prevent it.

WHY STUDY THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE CONTEMPORARY PAST?

Despite all this, some may find the idea of an archaeology of the contemporary past ridiculous, or just contradictory, being an unacceptable departure from archaeology's literal definition of studying ancient things. There are those that question what there is to know about the contemporary past that we do not already know from other sources. Yet there are many reasons why the archaeology of the contemporary past has emerged as an area of public, as well as academic, concern over the past decade. In this book we consider a series of themes to account for the development of the archaeology of the contemporary past, exploring its emergence within a distinct set of social and technological circumstances. These themes have their genesis in the work of archaeologists who have been involved in setting an agenda for the field over the past decade (especially Graves-Brown 2000*a*; Buchli and Lucas 2001*a, b, c, d*; Olivier 2001; Shanks, Platt, and Rathje 2004; Buchli 2007; González-Ruibal 2008; Piccini and Holtorf 2009), but in

developing them we have drawn equally on the insights of various perspectives on contemporary material culture from other disciplines. Here we briefly introduce these themes, before moving on to discuss the structure of the book in more detail.

Speed, Experienced as the Acceleration of Space and Time

We argue that the speed of technological and social change of late modern societies has meant that the recent past seems to recede more rapidly, and in this sense, becomes obscured at a rate not known before in human history. Paul Virilio (1994, 2000; see also Tomlinson 2007) comments on the ways in which the later twentieth century has experienced an acceleration of time, or a sense of speed, that leads to a situation in which humans are so overwhelmed by the reversal, acceleration, and simultaneous nature of time that space itself becomes an element of time. This produces a sense of 'time-in-flux' that comes to be experienced as a fundamental part of the late modern landscape (see also Harvey 1990). As Augé (1995: 26–30) notes,

> We barely have time to reach maturity before our past has become history… the recent past—'the sixties', 'the seventies', now 'the eighties'—becomes history as soon as it is lived. History is on our heels, following us like shadows, like death… time overloaded with events that encumber the present as well as the recent past. This can only… make us more avid for meaning… it is our need to understand the whole of the present that makes it difficult for us to give meaning to the recent past.

It is this sense of rapid change that both justifies an archaeology of the recent past, and has led to it becoming a topic of broader public interest. As the past appears to recede at an ever-increasing pace, the recent past becomes increasingly distant from individual and collective memory. This means that even the recent past is easily overlooked and quickly forgotten (Connerton 2009). As part of the educative apparatus of the state through its place in heritage (Appadurai 2001), archaeology has a role in creating officially sanctioned histories of the recent past that nourish national histories. At an unofficial level, as a discipline firmly rooted in material evidence, archaeology has a role in both challenging these official histories, and bringing to light the aspects of recent history that

they seek to overwrite. At the heart of the archaeology of the contemporary past lies a desire to reconcile ourselves with a recent history that moves at such great speed that we feel both remote from it and disoriented by its passage.

A Present Haunted by the Past

Late modern societies could be argued to exist in a present that seems *haunted* by the past (Huyssen 2003; Buchli 2007). This is often coupled with what we might consider to be its flip-side, retro, or a sense of nostalgia for the modern past (Guffey 2006). We see these two related phenomena as both the reason for the development of the archaeology of the contemporary past as a distinct field and an issue that the archaeology of the recent past should seek to address. We consider the rapid acceleration in official processes of heritage throughout the late twentieth century as a closely linked phenomenon (see also Harrison 2010*b*; Ferguson, Harrison and Weinbren 2010). Both archaeology and heritage are involved in a therapeutic process of retrieval and memorialization of the past. For this reason, the archaeology of the contemporary past cannot be perceived simply as another form of period study; instead, it needs to be viewed as a critical engagement with the spaces in which the past intervenes in the present. The palimpsest nature of the late modern period and its archaeology cautions against a narrow focus on the archaeological remains of late modernity. The archaeology of the contemporary past is an archaeology of all time periods and the way in which the material remains of the past are mobilized and help to create the present. The acknowledgement of late modern societies as haunted by the past leads us to a consideration of archaeology's redemptive potential.

Archaeology as Exorcism and Its Redemptive Potential in Creating Public Memory

The twentieth century was a period in which super-modern forms of conflict developed (González-Ruibal 2008), and which saw the rise of

totalitarian states, many of which committed acts of atrocity against their citizens (Olivier 2001). This trend has continued into the late modern period, alongside the rise of globalised terrorism (Appadurai 2006). In such circumstances, the role of archaeology in the recovery and interpretation of artefacts and assemblages—the staple of archaeological endeavour—becomes a metaphor for the recovery of memory. Of course, archaeology is not an objective practice, but (like heritage) a creation of the past in the present through a process that draws on the material evidence it creates. This puts archaeology in a unique position to engage actively and creatively with the recovery of lost memory and the therapeutic process of reconciliation (Shanks 1992: 78; Buchli and Lucas 2001*a*: 16). These themes have been explored most thoroughly in relation to the forensic excavation of mass graves, crime scenes, and sites of natural and cultural disasters (e.g. Cox 2001; Doretti and Fondebrider 2001; Hunter and Cox 2005; Funari and Zarankin 2006; Ferllini 2007; Gould 2007; Ballbé and Steadman 2008; Cox et al. 2008; Steele 2008; Sterenberg 2008; Zarankin and Funari 2008; Bagwell 2009), but we can also think about the therapeutic process of remembering and memorializing the recent past in relation to other aspects of hidden memory, such as the archaeology of homelessness (Buchli and Lucas 2001*c*; Zimmerman and Welch 2006; Harrison 2009*b*). In this sense, archaeology has a particular obligation to those people whom society pushes to its margins—the abject, the poor and the subaltern. Archaeology can act as both a form of *exorcism*, by bringing to light and casting out those hidden and haunting aspects of the past, and a form of *redemption*, in reconciling communities and nations with their recent hidden histories.

Non-place: Isolation, Solitude, Melancholy and Nostalgia

Some of the most characteristic aspects of late modernity (or using Augé's term, 'supermodernity') are associated with the experiences of 'non-places' and their dissociative spatial elements that produce a sense of isolation, solitude, melancholy (cf. Buchli 2007), and nostalgia. The term 'non-place' was developed by Marc Augé (1995) to describe a whole series of types of space in contemporary

societies—airport lounges, shopping malls, motorways—which he suggests are to be distinguished from 'places' in the sense in which these spaces are not relational, historical, or concerned with the establishment of a sense of identity (all those things which characterize the traditional social anthropological interest in 'place'). For Augé, these 'non-places' are primarily associated with the experience of travel or transit, and are characterized by a feeling of solitude and the emptying of the consciousness in response to their generic or formulaic nature.

As we discuss later in the book, archaeologists are in a unique position to explore non-places, as their constitution is primarily based on their materiality. They employ generic architectural design elements based around mass-produced objects and spaces and can be associated with processes of 'Disneyization', mass customization and 'McDonaldization'; all processes that we argue are based in the relationships between people and the material world. An archaeological exploration of non-places will allow us to understand not only their affect, but also the ways in which they are composed and their involvement in relationships between human and non-human agents within late modern societies. Our archaeological exploration of non-places is closely aligned to our exploration of another important late modern phenomenon, the increased use of 'theming' and the concentration within goods and service provision on selling 'experience' rather than 'product', which has been discussed as one of the organizing principles of an 'experience society' by Pine and Gilmore (1999). By exploring the archaeological manifestations of the post-industrial 'experience economy', we highlight the new role of the imagination in late modern societies (after Appadurai 1996) and the ways in which theming has begun to infiltrate all areas of contemporary life.

The Role of Archaeology in Presencing Absence

In their groundbreaking edited volume *Archaeologies of the Contemporary Past* Buchli and Lucas (2001*a, b, c*; see also Buchli 2007) mapped out a series of themes that they saw as characterizing the archaeology of the recent past, which have been very influential on

the development of the field. They pointed to the linked themes of production/consumption, remembering/forgetting, disappearance/disclosure, and presence/absence, in which they emphasized the role of the archaeology of the contemporary past in 'bringing forward or indeed materialising that which is excessive, forgotten or concealed' (2001*b*: 171). They suggested that as a result of this role, 'this body of archaeological work begins to appear qualitatively different from more conventional archaeological projects and other disciplines working on the recent past' (ibid.). A theme that was very prominent throughout *Archaeologies of the Contemporary Past* was that of the subaltern, and the idea that archaeology has a major role to play in foregrounding those aspects of contemporary life at the margins that are constantly being overwritten by dominant narratives.

In this book, we place a great deal of emphasis on the quotidian, or 'everyday', traditionally the focus of archaeological endeavour. We do this because it is often the everyday which is most easily overlooked. By its very definition, it is ordinary, perhaps dull, and certainly not perceived to be worth detailed investigation. However, it is the quotidian aspects of life that are most important in defining who we are (de Certeau 1984; Perec 1997; Olivier 2000). If we overlook the everyday, we overlook what it means to be 'us', and run the risk of remembering only the noteworthy, or the unusual. We also place emphasis on the subaltern, and the marginal spaces in society that are easily overlooked. But we do not wish to emphasize the marginal as a space of binary opposition with the centre; instead, we are influenced by the work of Homi Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* (1994) and hope to establish an equality that emphasizes diversity and multi-vocality, even symmetry (Hicks 2005; Webmoor 2007; Webmoor and Witmore 2004, 2008; Witmore 2006) in archaeological practice. We see an important space in the archaeology of late modernity both for a focus on the 'great and important' as well as the everyday. Indeed, many of the events of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century have been shocking and profound—genocide, political killings, riot, and protest—but such things should not be emphasized at the expense of the quotidian, or the meaning of the archaeology of the contemporary past will be lost.

Now We Are All Archaeologists: A Note on Inclusivity and Autoarchaeology

The concept of multi-vocality is central to the archaeology of the contemporary past (Olivier 2001: 187), because it is the archaeology of 'us'. In many ways, we can all be archaeologists of the contemporary past, because it is a critical inquiry into what it means to be ourselves. We all have direct access to the field sites (our towns, cities, and neighbourhoods), and access to the tools with which to analyse them (free aerial photography using Google Earth, or whole catalogues of contemporary artefacts for sale on eBay for example). The point of an archaeology of the contemporary past is to decentre the underlying aspect of modernist archaeology and anthropology which is about producing a sense of an 'Other' to ourselves (Thomas 2004, see further discussion below); we make ourselves the subject of our research. In this book we consider specific archaeological investigations into our own lives under the title 'autoarchaeology', but we need to see the whole intellectual project of the archaeology of the contemporary past as relating to the breakdown of fundamental divisions between subject and object, researcher and 'other', us and them. The archaeology of the contemporary past is a new, inclusive archaeology for a multi-vocal, postmodern age. While the archaeology of earlier periods is typically undertaken by 'experts', the archaeology of the contemporary past can be more democratic, more participatory in nature. We can all be archaeologists if we choose to think of our subject matter, or our way of examining it, in this way. Some may prefer to think of themselves as artists or artist-archaeologists (like Boyle Family, see Ch. 4), and others as urban explorers. But despite these differences of emphasis, there is a strong element of 'contemporary archaeology' in all of us.

Archaeology as a Form of Material Witness

The nature of the media and its control by external forces means that late modern societies have rendered much of their recent past unknowable, either by processes of active concealment or passive forgetting. Rather then promoting multiple perspectives on the

present, the saturation of media coverage and its ‘plague of fantasies’ (Žižec 1997) often leads to the rapid development of a dominant, authorized account which is difficult to challenge. As a discipline focused on material evidence and concerned with revealing and bringing to light that which has been hidden, archaeology has a distinct role to play in developing alternative perspectives on the recent and contemporary past as a form of material witness (e.g. Buchli and Lucas 2001*d*). We have already mentioned the role of archaeological forensics in the legal system, but we can think more broadly here of archaeology as a form of documentation, like documentary photography, for example, which has a role in bringing forward those things that are hidden from view and placing them before the public (e.g. Boulton 2006, 2007). Once again, this aim of a contemporary archaeology relates to its desire to establish a fair, multi-vocal, inclusive history of the recent past and its present.

The Politics of Contemporary Archaeology

It remains for us to make some brief observations here on the politics of the archaeology of the contemporary past. Clearly, given the discussion above, the archaeology of the contemporary past must be political (González-Ruibal 2008: 256). Many archaeologists working on aspects of the recent and contemporary past would understand their work to be part of a broader, critical practice that seeks to engage with larger political issues (e.g. Buchli and Lucas 2001*a*; Buchli 2007; Steele 2008: 425). There are three, interlinked aspects to the politics of archaeologies of the contemporary past. The first of these relates to the politics of archaeology itself, as a discipline linked to the educative apparatus of the state, and that bases itself on a model whereby archaeologists are the expert arbitrators on the past, as they have privileged access to the materials with which to create stories about it. The second relates to the archaeological act, as a creative engagement with the past in which it is produced in the present. The third dimension involves the engagement of archaeologists with forms of activism through their research practices, and through the topics on which they choose to focus their attentions.

As González-Ruibal (2008: 259) notes, 'How can we survey a concentration camp, excavate a trench or a mass grave, or study a derelict ghetto without getting involved in politics? By focusing on the destructive operations of supermodernity (war, failed development projects, mass emigration and displacement, industrialization and deindustrialization) archaeology can be an original critical voice in the social sciences.' The three interlinked dimensions of an archaeological politics will be considered throughout the book in relation to the role and significance of an archaeology of late modernity and the present past.

ARCHAEOLOGY AND POSTMODERNITY

Julian Thomas (2004, see also 2009; Schnapp, Shanks, and Tiews 2004; Shanks, Platt, and Rathje 2004) has recently argued that archaeology is intimately connected with modernism, indeed, that archaeology could only have emerged as a distinct discipline under the particular social and intellectual conditions of modernity. He points not only to the connection between archaeology and the foundation stories of modern nation-states, but the reliance within archaeological thought on distinctively modern perceptions of the relationship between new knowledge and material things. He also notes the ways in which archaeology (and 'excavation' in particular) has continually been drawn upon by other modern disciplines as a metaphor for understanding the relationship between knowledge and its intellectual pursuit, through a string of linked images relating to concealment and discovery. He sees archaeology and modernity as connected by a series of preoccupations, including the ordering of time, the idea of a normative with which to contrast a non-normative (or 'Other'), with ideas of human development, the relationship between historical change and human reason, and analytical and comparative perspectives (2004: 224–6). Thomas concludes by asking what place there is left in a postmodern world for archaeology if its existence is tied to a set of historical circumstances that could be said to be declining (p. 223). Similarly, a number of authors have begun to question the role of archaeology

under the changing economic, social, and material circumstances of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century (e.g. Hodder 1999; Olsen 2001).

Thomas (2004: 223) suggests that rather than dismiss archaeology as modernity declines, we need to develop a 'counter-modern' perspective on archaeology for a new age. Within a counter-modern archaeology, politics and ethics would take a central place. The emphasis would lie in discussion and the promotion of diversity. Archaeology would come to embrace considerations of meaning and rhetoric. In beginning to chart an agenda for the archaeology of late modernity, we hope to take up Thomas's challenge. As we have discussed above, the fact that the archaeology of the contemporary past is about us, and not an 'Other', represents a major break with the relationship between archaeology and the project of modernism. The archaeology of the contemporary past is not about difference, but diversity, and the process of turning the archaeological lens on ourselves. Nonetheless, it is important, as Thomas notes, to be constantly aware of the origins of the archaeological approach in the philosophies of modernism, and to question the ethics and politics of archaeologies of late modernity. This is particularly the case when dealing with the intimate details and memories of individuals' recent histories and lives. Clearly, when dealing with recent history, the ethical questions that should be a part of all archaeological practice (Moshenska 2008) become even more urgent.

THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE RECENT AND CONTEMPORARY PAST IN PRACTICE

One thing to note at the outset is that at the present time, very few archaeologists have had training specific to this period and to the particular issues of investigating the archaeology of the contemporary past. Many of those 'specializing' in this area of archaeology have come to it from the study of earlier time periods, and many from studies and specialisms in prehistory or from historical archaeology. However, in the years ahead, this will change, and will probably

bring with it fundamental changes both to archaeology as a discipline and to the nature of projects undertaken by archaeologists of the contemporary past. Another interesting point is the sheer number of practitioners who have embraced this late modern archaeology. Whether they work for agencies, local authorities, or commercial units, many have discovered the archaeology of the contemporary world and found it to be a worthwhile and captivating endeavour. Projects that explore the late modern period are popular and it seems increasingly so.

Alongside this enthusiasm has been a growing awareness of the importance of conserving archaeological sites relating to the recent past, in particular Cold War and other military sites, but also the remains of more quotidian life. Although this is not a book about heritage, we explore the influence of heritage on archaeological practice at various points owing to the important role that heritage management plays both in archaeological employment and as an indicator of broader relationships between our society and its past. These issues will be considered in more detail as part of the background history in Chapter 2 and again in Chapter 5.

One of the distinguishing features of the archaeology of the recent and contemporary past is its dual perspective on both places and material practices that are essentially extinct or have ceased to function, as well as on those places and practices that are still functioning. For example, within the book, we explore the archaeology of theming and the experience economy through Hall and Bombardella's (2007) exploration of the materiality of a functioning casino in Cape Town, South Africa, before moving on to look at the archaeology of an abandoned theme park in Derbyshire in England. This need to develop techniques appropriate both to the study of living, functioning places and objects as well as those that have been abandoned and have fallen out of use is one of the key challenges for an archaeology of the contemporary past. We suggest that it is this dual perspective on both living and extinct material practices that gives this area of study particular relevance. We explore these issues in more detail in the second part of the book.

STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

The book falls into two parts. Part I, Surveying the Field: The Development of an Archaeology of the Recent and Contemporary Past, takes a look at the expansion of the field over the later part of the twentieth century, and its emergence as a recognizable subdiscipline after the new millennium, in an attempt to characterize it and provide some methodological and theoretical background to its development. Chapter 2 explores the history of archaeological approaches to the contemporary past, showing how it developed out of the interests of the New Archaeology in the 1960s and 1970s and post-processual archaeology in the 1980s and 1990s in the use of contemporary case studies to answer archaeological debates about the relationship between material culture and social behaviour. It shows how the archaeology of the recent past began with a focus on the First and Second World Wars, and then the Cold War, eventually to encompass a field concerned with the broader archaeology of 'now'. In Chapter 3, we explore the nature of the field methodologies applied by archaeologists of the recent and contemporary past, and consider whether they might be understood to be distinct to other forms of archaeology. In Chapter 4, we look at the relationship between archaeology and other disciplines that focus on contemporary material culture, in particular anthropology, contemporary material culture studies, and art. And in Chapter 5, we explore some reasons why archaeologists might have developed an interest in the contemporary world and the period of late modernity in particular, through an investigation of some of the conditions that make it distinct from the periods that preceded it. This discussion forms the background to the second part of the book, in which we explore the archaeology of some of these distinct features of late modern societies.

In Part II, Archaeological Approaches to Late Modern Societies, we look in more detail at how we might approach the archaeology of contemporary post-industrial societies, with reference to a series of case studies, the bulk of which relate to the archaeology of the period after *c.*1970. We have organized this part of the book around a series of

traditional areas of archaeological focus—Artefacts (Ch. 6), Sites (Ch. 7), and Landscape (Ch. 8). Each chapter includes several core case studies in which we take an archaeological approach to the artefacts, sites, and landscape of the late modern period. Inevitably, given our particular experiences, there is some bias towards case studies that we have been directly involved with, predominantly in the UK, but also in the United States, Australia, and Europe. In Chapter 9, 'Non-Places and Virtual Worlds', we address some of the most distinctive features of late modernity—the new materialities of non-places; virtual worlds; experience economies and the work of the imagination; and hyperconsumerism and globalization. This chapter provides the groundwork that allows us to look forward in the book's Conclusion (Ch. 10) to explore some of the future research directions for the archaeology of the recent and contemporary past.