

<!DOCTYPE html>

Session ID	28
Session Title	Beyond Biographies: Composite things in time and space
Start Time	Wed Dec 18 14:00:00
Room	790

The Grimthorpe shield was excavated from a Middle Iron Age grave in East Yorkshire in 1868. It is generally discussed as a singular shield, but a recent re-examination of this object concluded that it was formed from a mixture of new and old fittings, some of which probably once belonged to older shields. How should we think of this object? Although it has been crystallised through deposition in its current configuration as a single shield, it is simultaneously several other objects at once, presenting an interesting paradox. This session emerges from the observation that complex, composite objects, such as the Grimthorpe Shield, do not always fit comfortably within existing models used by archaeologists to explain the processes of things in time and space. Object biographies have long been a popular way of describing the 'lives' of objects and recent discussions have suggested ways of building upon or going beyond this concept. However, we argue that composite things can present problems in these approaches, creating tensions between the whole and its parts. We aim to explore new modes of envisaging the ontological complexities of composite objects and other types of assemblage, with emphases on scale and the paradox between singular and multiple. We welcome papers that seek novel approaches to composite things and assemblages in time and space, using examples from any archaeological period(s) and covering topics such as:

- Modification
- Repair
- Curation (ancient and modern)
- Fragmentation
- Refashioning
- Recycling
- Re-appropriation

14:00	Helen Chittock, AOC Archaeology Group; Matt Hitchcock, University of Manchester; Matthew G. Knight, National Museums Scotland	Beyond Biographies: Introducing composite things in time and space	<p>The concept of object biographies has formed a key framework for the study of archaeological artefacts during the past three decades. It uses the human life as a metaphor to explore objects in time and space, and has been hugely successful in allowing archaeologists to study the intertwining existences of people and things.</p> <p>It is increasingly acknowledged, however, that this approach has its limitations. Criticisms of object biographies hinge on the anthropomorphisation of things and the artificial simplification of their complex stories. Objects can be composed of multiple narratives, or indeed multiple other objects, as this session on 'composite things' highlights. Unlike people, they do not die and their transcendence of human lifespans means their functions and meanings shift over time. They can be rediscovered, reconfigured, reappropriated, fragmented and incorporated into later contexts.</p> <p>Recent discussions have sought ways to address the limitations of object biographies and in this introduction we aim to present a brief overview of some alternative ways of thinking through things in time and space. We will briefly present examples from our own research, attempting to capture the ontological complexities of composite objects and other types of assemblage.</p>
-------	---	--	---

14:20	Jody Joy, Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Cambridge	'Timeless' objects? Unravelling the histories of composite things	<p>In two recent papers, Siân Jones (2010) and Cornelius Holtorf (2013) have respectively highlighted the role of the past relationships and experiences of artefacts, as well as inherent properties of 'pastness', in creating authenticity. Authenticity can be 'wrapped' around artefacts through their past relationships and experiences. Similarly, a perception of 'pastness' imbued through wear, tear and repair, even if entirely created in the present, can bestow something with the quality of being in (or from) the past. Experiences, relationships, damage and repair can all be viewed as stages in the life of a thing, a part of its biography. But, when a repair includes another object at what stage does a thing become something else? As Kopytoff (1986) stated, an object can have many different kinds of biography, but where does the biography of one thing end and that of a composite made up of multiple things begin? This paper addresses these issues through the example of artefacts from the British Iron Age which have very obvious repairs. Iron Age metalworkers were highly skilled and very capable of executing nearly invisible repairs, yet artefacts such as a bronze cauldron from Kyleakin, Isle of Skye, or the so-called grotesque torc from Snettisham, Norfolk have been crudely mended using bits of other things. Melanie Giles (2012, 154) has argued that composite objects can act to crystalise a 'social geography of relations' stretching across time and space. It is argued in this paper that by creating composite objects using materials and fragments from other objects, artefacts like the Kyleakin cauldron were imbued rather with plurality, binding them physically to multiple histories and allowing composite artefacts simultaneously to belong to more than one moment in time.</p>
14:40	Staffan Lunden, University of Gothenburg	Making objects, making heritage	<p>The influential idea that objects, much like humans, have "lives" or "biographies," highlights how objects and their meaning(s) and use(s) change over time. The concept "object biographies" thus challenges some aspects of the perceived stableness of objects. However, the analogue between people and things may obscure other essentialist notions about objects. People – according to dominant Western ideas about the "individual" (from Latin <i>individuum</i> "indivisible") – have a defined beginning (birth) and end (death) and are seen as physically stable entities during life.</p> <p>The chronological and physical contours of objects are less stable: what was once a complete object may have been separated into new objects, and objects may be produced in groups (pairs, threes) etc. Hence, what constitutes one object may be questioned. Moreover, there is reason to ponder when an object's "life" begins. Habitually, interpretations in museum labels focus on the meaning(s) and use(s) of the object in its post-production phase, that is after the object has been created – or "born" using the human analogue. This focus often entail a focus on society's privileged social strata. Yet, what happens if one shifts the gaze to the production phase of object?</p> <p>Drawing from diverse examples, including Benin bronzes and a brachiosaurus, the presentation discusses how questioning the "oneness" of objects in museum representation and paying attention to the "production" phase (or production phases) of the (museum) object brings forth hidden histories of colonialism, gender and class. Thus, our perception of the making of "the object" matters for the making of heritage.</p>
15:00	Sophie Moore, Newcastle University	The secret lives of Pithoi: Long-term Anatolian storage solutions from a 6th century house at Sagalassos, Turkey.	<p>The ways in which we use objects, as producers, exporters, consumers and archaeologists leave traces on the material world. This paper uses objects with unusually long use lives, large storage vessels of the Roman and Byzantine periods known as pithoi, to look at what endures. Tracing what we have come to think of as the 'life course' of the vessel lets us get only so far. What seems more interesting to me is to use the object's biography as a starting point, and to expand analysis into the different assemblages within which the vessels become entangled, and how the nature of the object shapes the entangled action around it.</p>
15:20 BREAK			BREAK

<p>15:50 Daisy-Alys Vaughan, Newcastle University</p>	<p>Displaying Composite Histories: Creating and curating biographies with the Shefton Collection of Greek and Etruscan Archaeology</p>	<p>Throughout the course of their lifetimes, objects undergo a complex series of transformations in meaning and significance. In museum displays, however, objects are presented almost exclusively in relation to their 'original' contexts and are problematically presented as having a singular, ancient existence. Narratives relating to alternative periods of use and re-use are often neglected, with little acknowledgement of the complex and diverse journeys these objects have encountered to end up where they are today.</p> <p>This paper addresses how the theoretical approach of object biographies can be taken further and implemented in a practical way within museums. It can provide a framework for bridging the gap between ancient and modern contexts and facilitating the engagement of visitors with more varied narratives, spanning multiple periods of an object's history.</p> <p>Using the recent 'Collecting Classical Antiquity: Brian B. Shefton 100 Years' exhibition at the Great North Museum: Hancock as a case-study, this paper looks at the application and impact of object biographies within a museum setting. In particular, this paper considers the installation of a 'Life History' projection of a Greek pot within the exhibition as an experimental approach for envisaging biographies within museums. The projection brought to life the changing environment of one pot throughout its 2,500 years of existence. It traced the object's journey throughout antiquity, the more recent past and the present, provoking discussion about the changing status of artefacts and showcasing the constantly evolving curation of objects, alongside the more physical changes encountered through fragmentation and conservation of objects.</p>
<p>16:10 Anna Garnett, Petrie Museum, UCL</p>		<p>Of the 80,600 objects in UCL's Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology, around 4000 are from Sudan. This number includes assemblages of casts made from objects excavated by Honorary Curator Anthony J. Arkell (1898-1980) and his Sudanese workforce in the mid-20th century. After the Second World War, Arkell led the first official excavations of the Sudan Antiquities Service at a Prehistoric site in the grounds of Khartoum Hospital where he established the existence of a pottery-using culture associated with bone and stone tools characterised as Mesolithic. From 1949-1950 Arkell then led excavations at Shaheinab, the site of an early Neolithic culture that he termed 'Khartoum Neolithic'. Finds from these excavations were shared between UCL and the Sudan National Museum in Khartoum to promote teaching and research on Sudanese antiquity. In the 1950s, plaster cast sets of some of these objects were distributed to museums across the world that wished to use them for teaching and display. Arkell's handwritten distribution list, and related correspondence, are kept in the Petrie Museum Archives.</p> <p>In this paper, I will explore the varied and multiple histories of these extended assemblages through the intended use of the casts as teaching aids at UCL and beyond, and their curation in the past and present. Focusing on bodily engagement and concepts of authenticity and reproduction, I will discuss how the ongoing curatorial history of the object casts and their parallels might inform an alternative approach to object biography.</p>
<p>16:30 Jennifer Peacock, Independent Researcher</p>	<p>Context is key: Historic Houses as Archaeological Assemblages</p>	<p>When we go to visit a historic house, what do we see? A collection of a person(s) belongings within their home; an accumulation of 'stuff' within different rooms; 'things' in a house. The interpretation of these collections is a difficult task. What do we focus on? Today, there is often an emphasis on the human stories associated with these places but, in doing so, it can feel as though the objects are overlooked. This is often because we know next to nothing about these objects beyond their date, place of manufacture, and sometimes their maker. But does this really need to limit interpretations? We often have far less information when studying objects within an archaeological context, and yet the stories we can tell are frequently far more nuanced. Drawing on examples from Anglesey Abbey, a National Trust property in Cambridge, this paper will explore the idea that, by considering historic houses as archaeological assemblages, we might be able to view their contents in a brand new light.</p>

16:50	Julian Thomas, University of Manchester	Beyond Biographies in Neolithic Material Processes	The notion of 'object biographies' has served archaeologists well in thinking beyond static 'made' things, incorporating process and practice into our analyses, and considering the fluctuating relationships between people and things. However, in recent years some dissatisfaction with this framework has started to develop. For some, the biographic approach reduces objects to surrogate humans, neglecting the inherent alterity of their 'thingness'. Equally, Tim Ingold's discussion of the 'flux of materials' emphasises the way that substances flow through forms toward dispersal, while the growing interest in 'object itineraries' stresses the discontinuous, fragmentary and place-connected character of thing-histories. In this session, composite artefacts are presented as a challenge to the notion of object biography, which requires that the approach be augmented or transformed. In the Neolithic, artefacts composed of multiple materials are certainly present (arrows with stone tips; ceramics with various fillers; axes with wooden hafts; pots that had been drilled and repaired), but these are rather less elaborate than the composite objects that began to proliferate from the Early Bronze Age onwards. None the less, the ways in which materials were assembled and dispersed, in contexts ranging from middens and pits to mortuary deposits, arguably demands the same revision of our existing ways of working.
17:10	Andy Jones, University of Southampton	Discussion	
17:30	END	END	END