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Session ID	46
Session Title	Archaeology and heritage studies in, of, and after the Anthropocene
Start Time	Tue Dec 17 09:30:00
Room	777/80

What does it mean to live in a self-proclaimed “age of humans”? And what is the role of archaeology and heritage studies in the current planetary “crisis” which this age is widely recognised as having heralded? Over the past decade, the “Anthropocene” has stimulated significant comment across archaeology and heritage studies, appearing in a number of different guises--as temporal marker, extinction crisis, human niche, climatological catastrophe, socio-cultural formation, economic and political critique, and posthumanist rallying cry to name but a few. But these debates and discussions have tended to happen in isolation from one another, limiting their usefulness and impeding broader discussion of the significance of the concept for archaeology and heritage studies more generally. The aim of this session is to facilitate interdisciplinary conversations across a broad range of scientific, artistic and humanistic approaches to the Anthropocene (and associated past, present and future environmental and climate related issues) to begin to explore the ways in which archaeology and heritage studies might reorganise themselves to address the new research agendas which such interdisciplinary approaches, and the broader recognition of these associated contemporary planetary crises, urgently demand.

(Please note: themes from this session are continued in the first part of the linked Session 47, Persistent Pasts: Engaging with Conflict Legacies in the Present, which contains a number of Anthropocene/Conflict related papers, and participants are encouraged to resume the discussions by joining that session following this one).

9:30	Rodney Harrison, University College London	Session Introduction	
9:35	Elizabeth Graham, UCL; Lindsay Duncan, UCL; Dan Evans, Lancaster University	Is the Future just a load of Rubbish?	<p>My team and I have been turning attention to what we think is the major environmental crisis to be faced: rates of soil degradation exceed those of soil formation by more than an order of magnitude. Are we doing enough to replenish lost soil? The answer is 'no'.</p> <p>To address the problem, we are studying the contributions to soil formation and to soil nutrient dynamics—of the decay products of ancient and historic human activity: domestic and industrial waste, human waste, abandoned structures, and not least, dead bodies. The decay of what humans have left behind has produced constituents--chemicals, minerals, organics-- that do not just 'influence' but produce what we call 'earth' or 'soil'. What starts out as waste, in time becomes a growing medium for plants. This process, however, is not recognised in pedogenesis nor, before our project, has it been studied in archaeology. Yet archaeologists have the tools to trace past discard behaviours and, with soil scientists and environmental engineers, characterise their modern impact.</p> <p>The implication is that society needs to pay greater attention to what we do with our waste and our dead. Dealing with rubbish and other waste products as landfill 'sinks' is the wrong strategy, as are methods of treating the dead such as cremation, embalming, and sealed coffins. Time tells us that waste has a heritage but its legacy has been misunderstood. Now we offer a new approach.</p>

9:55	Geneviève Godin, UiT the Arctic University of Norway	Monsters and the Anthropocene: Things in the Grey Zone	<p>The image of the monster has often been harnessed in discussions around planetary crises and threats to the individual – the microplastic invasion, vampire capitalism, Frankenfoods, and so on. The disciplines I aim to bridge are those of the literary and cinematographic arts, and archaeology. How do we extract meaning from the world we live in, if not through our own categories? And how do we explain it to ourselves, if not through the stories we tell? I here wish to address the question of what it means to live in the ‘age of humans’ through a uniquely human construction: that of the monster, as it has been crafted in novels and films.</p> <p>The Anthropocene may be said to have led to a reconfiguration of what nature is, of where it begins and ends, and of whether anything can ever be truly ‘natural’. Mary Shelley’s <i>Frankenstein</i>; or, <i>The Modern Prometheus</i> (1818) is the quintessential literary expression of the anxieties of the First Industrial Revolution around the limits of nature and technology, humans and non-humans, and life and death. Victor Frankenstein’s creature therefore offers a powerful metaphor for processing the increasingly blurry categories of what constitutes life and the order of things, and the monstrous qualities that can emerge from this grey zone.</p> <p>By looking at the discarded objects of the Anthropocene as monsters, I hope to shed more light on the invisible barrier between humans and unruly things, and interrogate the distinction between valuable heritage and mere debris.</p>
10:15	Phil Stastney, MOLA	Scale-framing: an Anthropocene reading of peatland archaeological and palaeoenvironmental datasets	<p>Peatlands across north-western Europe contain both rich archaeological records and sensitive palaeoenvironmental archives, and intuitively these would seem to be able to provide us with much-needed long-term perspectives on human-environment interactions in the recent past. In practice, however, it is still far from clear exactly how these archives should be interpreted, and so the contribution of the peatland ‘archaeo-environmental’ record to discourses around the Anthropocene remains limited. The interpretation of combined archaeological/palaeoenvironmental datasets is complicated by a number of methodological challenges, and as a result there is a profound difficulty defining appropriate spatial and chronological scales of analysis: broad scales risk conflating small-scale trends, whilst at smaller scales the incompleteness and inherent uncertainties of the data become foregrounded. Unsurprisingly, given the inherently interdisciplinary nature of peatland archaeo-environmental investigations, approaches from other disciplines, such as the field of ecocriticism, may offer a way forward. One approach explored in this paper is to attempt an ‘unframed’ reading of peatland archaeological records. Not only may ‘unframing’ circumvent some of the challenges that bedevil the comparison of archaeological and palaeoenvironmental records in general, but it may also provide a means of ‘narrativizing’ these types of datasets, and so contribute to our coming to terms with the Anthropocene.</p>
10:35	Gabriele Oropallo, New York University in London	Stray Materials as Information in Flux	<p>The idea of a nature that can be harmed or rescued through human technology reflects a still deep-rooted notion of nature and culture as opposed polarities rather than a continuous macro environment of information. Raymond Williams argued the boundary between “nature” and human society is cultural; and most importantly, that the very creation of “nature” is the direct byproduct of two or more human beings coming together to form a society (1980). People looking at each other form a circle with an inside and an outside: the civilized and the wild; the cosy indoors and the great outdoors; conservation and the tragedy of the commons; the plan and the act of God; the contract and the force majeure.</p> <p>Based on one’s perspective, the Anthropocene should be a time of collapsing walls or collapsing dams. This flux of materials is a two-way exchange: it involves rising waters and fast-travelling tornados as much as greenhouse gases and microplastics. The volume of the spills between the cultural domains of the human-made and the natural mounts up. Their magnitude calls into question the extent to which coordinated human intervention on their shifting surroundings (the environment) is legitimate and the ability of technology to control the forces of nature.</p> <p>Leroi-Gourhan famously argued technology projects from culture. This paper will test the extent to which study of artefacts in the Anthropocene can benefit from investigations into the environments of information that shape materials, and their serial arrangement into scaled-up artefacts. Study of these environments of information enhances and extends the contextual study of the programme of artefacts, to the programme of the materials themselves.</p>
10:55 BREAK			BREAK

11:25	Helen Chittock, AOC Archaeology Group	Towards an Archaeology of Repair	<p>Repair is a unique craft, constituting both a form of making and a form of maintenance. The field of 'repair studies' is currently emerging within the social sciences, drawing on the material and metaphorical aspects of mending (e.g. Graziano and Trogal 2019). As repair comes to the fore in light of the current geopolitical and environmental concerns of the Anthropocene, calls have been made for a revaluing of the practice (e.g. Dant 2010).</p> <p>Although repair underpins everyday life in industrialised societies, it has never before been investigated archaeologically on a large scale. This paper considers the potential contributions that an archaeology of repair might make to the revaluing of the practice in the 21st century and to repair studies more broadly. It will argue that the values and functions of repair vary in time and space, presenting a series of short case studies on repair practices from diverse cultural contexts: Iron Age metalwork from Britain; ceramics from the Roman world; medieval manuscripts from northern Europe; ceramics from 15th-21st century Japan. These brief vignettes of differing repair traditions are used to demonstrate that repair itself is a broad and heterogeneous category and that it can reflect wider philosophies relating to the treatment of materials. Ultimately, I ask the question: what might the shifting ontological character of repair in the past tell us about the value of repair in the present?</p>
11:45	Monika Stobiecka, University of Warsaw	The Anthropocene curiosities: prefiguring future archaeological artifacts	<p>Recent debates on heritage in the age of Anthropocene deliver us two main scenarios for the future — the overwhelming technologization as a remedy for the apocalyptic disasters, or the happy Apocalypse, where “all the monsters are welcome”. While the first is based on techno-optimism (or even techno-fetishism), the second recalls the romantic tradition characterized by the appraisal for ruins, destruction, and decay.</p> <p>In this talk, I will inspect the possibilities for another scenario in the contemporary art of the Anthropocene, namely by analysing Agnieszka Kurant's artwork entitled “The Aliens' Archaeology” (2019) exhibited during the “Human-Free Earth” display in the Ujazdowski Castle in Warsaw. Kurant's artwork is an artificial pyramid-shaped fossil made of bezoars. This nature-cultural artifact provokes multiple questions concerning human and inhuman timescales, materiality, and the planetary human impact. Being a modern curiosité, “The Aliens' Archaeology” may well refer to the recent scientific discoveries of “plastiglomerates”, found on the volcanic beaches of Madera and the Canary Islands.</p> <p>My presentation's aim is to treat Kurant's artwork not as an aestheticized hybrid that enchants the Anthropocene, but rather as a specimen from the contemporary cabinet of curiosities. Referring to the tradition of 16th and 17th-century Wunderkammern will allow me to pose questions concerning the epistemic and ontological value of future (trans)heritage, its hybrid status and possible ethical impact on the discussions about the Anthropocene.</p>
12:05	Koji Mizoguchi, Kyushu University	Detecting the 'signs', or how we can conduct archaeologies in a responsible manner for contemporary society	<p>This paper argues that one of the ways to conduct archaeological practices conducted in the epistemological-ontological condition, characterised with the concept/term of 'Anthropocene', in a responsible manner for contemporary society is to detect a type of signs that emerged in material culture prior to the rising of social crises/collapses.</p> <p>This type of signs we recognise in material culture can be characterised often as the enhancement of the nature of what had already existed and the intensification of their use. In order for the sense of ontological security, so to speak, to be sustained under an increasingly difficult circumstance, its media needs to be 'reinforced' in one way or the other. The consequences of such 'enhancement'/intensification' varies, but in many cases, they changed the way in which things are done to a significant extent, and such changes might lead to human harms.</p> <p>Archaeology can create a repository of knowledge concerning what and how such cases of enhancement/intensification came about and what specific consequences they yielded. Such repository can be referred in order to react to future drastic social change events and to minimize human harms caused by them.</p>
12:25	Rodney Harrison, University College London	Discussion	

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