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## discussion article

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### Archaeology and contemporaneity *Gavin Lucas\**

#### Abstract

This paper discusses the concept of contemporaneity as it is used in archaeology. In particular, two general usages are examined. The first concerns the idea of contemporaneity in the context of archaeological dating and chronology, the second relates to the characterization of the archaeological record as a contemporary phenomenon. In both cases, related concepts are explored, namely synchronism and anachronism respectively. The paper offers a critique of these conventional usages of the idea of contemporaneity and argues for an alternative, linking this with the concept of consociation, a term coined by the phenomenologist Alfred Schutz in the early 20th century.

#### Keywords

contemporaneity; time; synchronism; anachronism; consociation

#### Introduction

The concept of contemporaneity in archaeology is a rather deceptive one. On the one hand, it is a widely used term and one whose meaning seems entirely self-evident; on the other hand, and as I shall argue in this paper, it is a rather complex concept entangled in tacit ways with our broader disciplinary perception of time. Over the past twenty years or so, there has been a growing and quite diverse literature on time and archaeology (e.g. Murray 1999; Karlsson 2001; Lucas 2005; Holdaway and Wandsnider 2008), yet in all these texts it is difficult to find any sustained engagement specifically with the idea of the contemporary. In this paper, I want to investigate what are perhaps two of the most common dimensions of the concept of contemporaneity as it is used in archaeology today. The first concerns how contemporaneity is articulated in the context of archaeological dating and chronology; that is, what we mean when we state that two sites, for example, are contemporary. In particular, I shall highlight what is a very common and usually implicit understanding of contemporaneity in this context, namely synchronism. The second revolves around the common acknowledgement that the archaeological record is a contemporary phenomenon. Here, I shall

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highlight another, often implicit idea connected to this, that of anachronism. Both synchronism and anachronism are influential sub-concepts which subtly and often unconsciously shape our use of the term ‘contemporaneity’. Moreover, I will suggest that they share the same basic articulation of time, resulting in what I call an enveloping concept of contemporaneity where objects are defined as contemporary in relation to a unit of time. In contrast, I argue for a more relative definition, where contemporaneity is defined as a relation between objects. I will start by exploring the idea of contemporaneity in chronology and dating.

### Contemporaneity in the archaeological record: a critique of synchronism

One of the most important goals of archaeological methodology since the 19th century has been the control of chronology, specifically the ability to date sites, structures or finds as closely as possible. There is no doubt that the advent in the 20th century of scientific dating techniques such as dendrochronology and radiocarbon have yielded inestimable benefits for the discipline and the current developments of Bayesian analysis for radiocarbon dates are no exception (e.g. see Aitken 1990; Nash 2000). However, I would like to ask us to pause and consider for a moment why we should seek tighter and tighter chronological resolution. It seems so self-evident that we do not even question it. But self-evident truths are often the most dangerous. To help articulate this question, let us go back to the first radiocarbon revolution, which was so eloquently narrated in Colin Renfrew’s book *Before civilization*: C14 suddenly stretched our chronologies, and in Europe especially for the Neolithic (Renfrew 1978). What this meant was that sites which might have been considered contemporary were now revealed to be 500 years or more apart. It changed the understanding of prehistory immensely – especially many of the then current orthodoxies about diffusion. The Bayesian revolution of more recent times also expands our chronologies, but not so much outward as inward, in terms of the resolution (e.g. see Baillie 1997; Buck and Millard 2004). Sites that were previously considered contemporary are now recognized as being 50 years or more apart. The concern for controlling time in archaeology is thus arguably about distinguishing the contemporary from the non-contemporary – and, as a consequence, the later from the earlier or vice versa.

In many ways, establishing contemporaneity has been a more important – and urgent – problem for archaeologists than establishing succession or sequence. Childe, writing on the eve of the radiocarbon revolution, argued that the most pressing concern of the day was tying together regional sequences by means of what he called synchronism (Childe 1956, 104–10); that is, establishing which part of one sequence was contemporary with which part of another, and so on. The radiocarbon revolution certainly made this possible in a way that cross-dating could never achieve with any reliability. What Childe did not foresee, of course, was the degree to which European prehistoric sequences, previously considered broadly synchronous, were in fact off by hundreds, if not thousands, of years (Renfrew 1978). But methods of absolute dating are only one means that archaeologists use to establish contemporaneity. The most common has always been typology – that is,

using finds of the same type to infer broad contemporaneity. We do this both within a site to establish contemporaneity between features or layers but also, of course, between sites. Indeed, prior to the radiocarbon revolution, cross-dating using find types was the main method of linking separate sequences.

Within sites, establishing contemporaneity is actually something one *cannot* do using stratigraphy; stratigraphy *only* gives sequence or succession, even if it can bracket or constrain contemporaneity. Contemporaneity is something one has to infer, either using similar methods to those used between sites, or from morphological aspects of layers and features such as the compositional similarity of deposits or spatial alignment of features (such as rows of postholes; e.g. Carver 2009, 281–87). Indeed, on poorly stratified sites – a rather more common occurrence than most field manuals like to admit, especially in arable or deeply ploughed areas – contemporaneity becomes the most important tool one has to establish sequence, for example by grouping features with similar fills or those on a similar alignment, and then using time-diagnostic finds or radiocarbon dates to order these groups into a sequence. Seriation, one of the oldest archaeological dating techniques, uses solely typological methods with frequencies and/or co-occurrence to create sequence; it is a method which essentially works by separating contemporary from non-contemporary material. Indeed, methods which start from the problem of dissecting the contemporary from the non-contemporary form a central part of archaeological inference in various aspects of fieldwork, although they are often marginalized in conventional manuals (see Lucas, forthcoming, for further discussion of this).

Despite the emphasis conventionally placed on establishing succession, it seems to me that Childe was as astute as usual; the real problem, the real *challenge* in many ways, facing archaeologists is not working out succession but establishing contemporaneity, or what Childe called synchronism. Such an emphasis does not eschew sequence, but rather sequence becomes derivative or secondary to contemporaneity. Indeed, arguably all the attempts to improve our chronological resolution, as suggested above, are really about increasing our ability to distinguish the contemporary from the non-contemporary. It is not enough to know these two burials date to the 9th century B.C.; we want to know which decade or quarter of that century. The quest for tighter resolution is the quest to refine what we mean when we say that two sites or features are contemporary (or not). And this leads me on to the critical question I want to pose about contemporaneity. What *do* we mean when we say that two things are contemporary?

The *Oxford English dictionary* defines contemporaneity as something which belongs to a certain time or period; when archaeologists talk about contemporaneity in the context of dating, they usually mean something which belongs to the same time as something else, where the term ‘time’ here is taken to mean a certain period or span of years. These definitions are significant because it is clear that contemporaneity is conventionally and broadly understood as a relation to a temporal period: two objects are contemporary because they both date to the early 16th century, for example. It effectively tries to reduce contemporaneity to an instance of synchronism.

Here, the term Childe used for contemporaneity – synchronism – is highly apposite. Synchronism implies the temporal alignment of two things, like two dancers moving in tandem; the implication is one of perfect alignment or symmetry, such that when one is even slightly out of step, we say they are ‘out of sync’. Implicitly, I would suggest that this is how we routinely use the concept of contemporaneity in archaeology; when we say that two objects or sites are contemporary, we mean that they are ‘in sync’. Yet we know that this is actually rarely the case when we are talking about the temporal relation between two objects; indeed, in some of our oldest techniques, like seriation or find combination, lack of synchronism is actually a necessity. Types *have* to overlap in order to draw out a sequence. This is an explicitly non-synchronous idea of contemporaneity. Another way of saying this is that contemporaneity is not a transitive relation: just because *A* is contemporary with *B* and *B* is contemporary with *C*, it does not follow that *A* and *C* are contemporary. Transitivity only applies if the temporalities of things all align perfectly, as is implied under synchronism.

Non-synchronism is also recognized in other ways archaeologically. For example, objects in archaeological contexts can be contemporary in some ways and not in others. Two objects might have been made 50 years apart and thus be non-contemporary in terms of manufacture, but have been deposited at the same moment and thus indeed contemporary. This is, of course, something that has been discussed widely by archaeologists, not least in Scandinavia in relation to the definition of closed or secure find combinations from Worsaae and Montelius to the present day, and is understood as critical to correct dating (e.g. Rowe 1962; Gräslund 1987).

What both of these examples illustrate – examples of some of the earliest archaeological methods in chronology – is a very different concept of contemporaneity to the *OED* definition. The difference comes down to a very simple point. In the cases of seriation and find combination, contemporaneity is defined as *a relation between objects*, which is made possible because objects are acknowledged as having variously extended lives. This is perhaps why it is also easier to apply a non-synchronous model of contemporaneity to processes over events: processes such as the emergence of agriculture take place over long periods of time and it is much easier to acknowledge overlap than with, say, a short-term event like a burial. Defining contemporaneity of two burials will perhaps always be done in terms of synchronism, not only because of the limits of our dating resolution, but also because of the contrived separation of the punctual nature of the event against the protracted character of process.

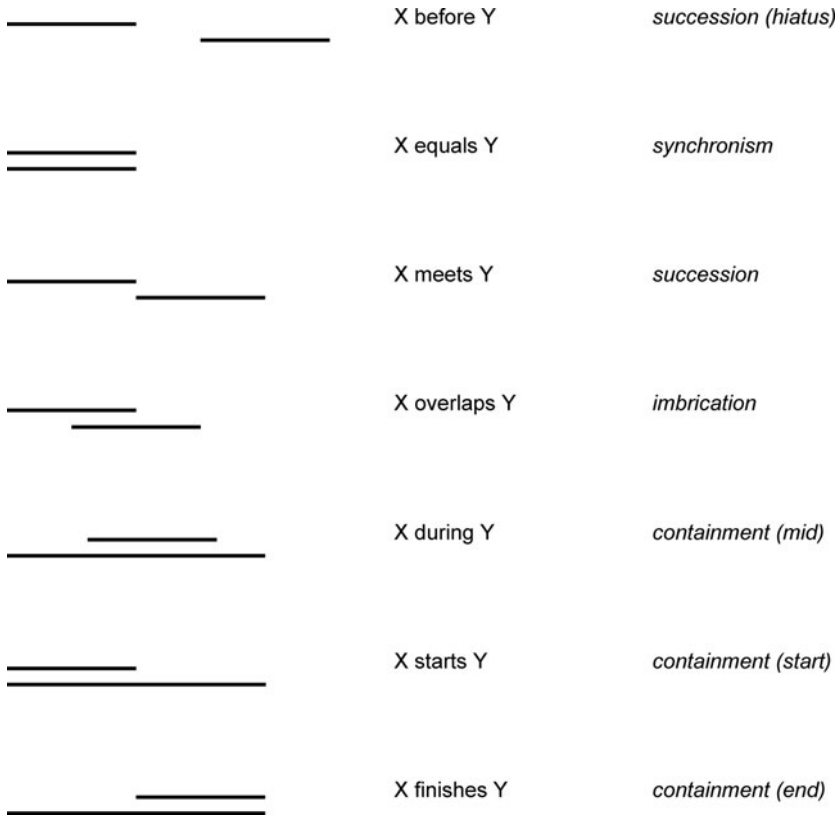
But whether one is talking about events, processes or objects, chronology should always remain purely a scale of measurement here for coordinating the relations between these things. Two objects (or events) are not contemporary because they both date to the late 4th century B.C.; they are contemporary because their life spans overlap or imbricate. Chronology is solely used as a means to establish this overlap (or not). In the case of absolute dating and its tacit synchronism, however, contemporaneity is implicitly defined *in relation to a period or unit of time*. It is what you might call an enveloping concept of contemporaneity, where sites or objects are forced to fit into pre-given time

ranges. The smaller you can make these ranges (i.e. increase resolution), the more precise your ascription of contemporaneity. I would argue that we too easily fall into the second – and arguably inadequate – definition of contemporaneity because of the dominance of chronology as our model of time.

One of the advantages of adopting the first definition, i.e. making contemporaneity a relation between objects, is that it forces us to ask about the *meaning* of contemporaneity in terms of the longevity of the objects being related. This means that the question of chronological resolution has to be made relative to the temporality of the objects under investigation. Asking, for example, whether two sites are contemporary, where both sites' occupations span several centuries, why would we need a resolution tighter than a century? Obviously there are many objects whose longevity falls below the threshold of our current dating techniques so I am certainly not arguing that we abandon the goal of refining our chronological tools. My argument is rather that we should not always assume that tighter resolution is intrinsically better; it has to be relative to the temporality of the objects under investigation.

Another advantage of making contemporaneity a relation between objects is that it allows overlap or imbrication, a property which has long been exploited in archaeological techniques such as seriation and find combination. However, this property has subsequently been marginalized in more general interpretive accounts which favour a more segmented view of time. It is no great revelation to state that the basic model of time used in archaeology is linear; whether one is dealing with stratigraphic sequences, radiocarbon dates linked to our calendrical system, or simply period divisions, time is perceived as flowing in one direction (see e.g. Lucas 2005). One of the problems with this idea of linearity is that temporal succession or sequence is conceived as a series of intervals or points derived from divisions of a line. The line is primary, the intervals are secondary or derivative. As a result, there can be no gaps between them and no overlap either. However large or small the segments into which you cut the line (e.g. years, decades, centuries), each segment runs tight up against those on either side. This is the form of the classic timescales we use, both clock time and calendrical time. This model of time consequently dictates the range of temporal relations we employ, of which there are only three: before/earlier, after/later and contemporary – where contemporaneity is, of course, essentially synchronism. These concepts are enshrined in dating tools such as stratigraphy or *terminus post quem* (TPQ) and *terminus ante quem* (TAQ). What other tools, like seriation, demonstrate is the paucity of this triad and the need for a more sophisticated model of articulating the temporality of objects and especially the concept of contemporaneity.

There is actually a very useful model already in existence which has only recently been explored by archaeologists working in computing (Binding 2010). It is a time-interval algorithm developed in the context of research into artificial intelligence by James Allen (1983) in the 1980s and it proposes *thirteen* different temporal relations (what are now called Allen operators) as opposed to the three most currently in use in archaeology (figure 1). Immediately, one sees how the idea of overlap or imbrication actually covers multiple possibilities and varieties, and some work employing these algorithms has already been explored as part of an English Heritage-funded



**Figure 1.** The main temporal relationships under Allen's temporal logic; six of them can be inverted, resulting in a total of thirteen possible relations (source: author, after Allen 1981).

project on digital technologies called STAR (Semantic Technologies for Archaeological resources; see Binding 2010). It seems to me that their potential application for developing more sophisticated chronologies in archaeology is quite high. To give just one obvious example, using the full panoply of Allen operators instead of the usual three temporal relations in constructing stratigraphic matrices would enable a much more sophisticated model of site development – and most of the complexity will revolve around the variations of imbrication.

In summary, then, the linear model of time we use has essentially driven us to adopt a very impoverished concept of contemporaneity, one which effectively is reducible to synchronism because contemporaneity is defined as a relation to a unit of time. In this section, I have argued for foregrounding an alternative concept, one which already has a deep pedigree in archaeological method but which has been marginalized, the idea of contemporaneity as a relation between objects. If we draw on this idea, issues of dating and chronological resolution become points to argue for rather than to take for granted; they become relative to our interpretation of objects, rather than

vice versa. In the next section, I want to explore another dimension of this issue and I will argue that the same impoverished model of contemporaneity as synchronism has affected the way we look at the archaeological record.

### **Contemporaneity of the archaeological record: a critique of anachronism**

It is almost a truism to say that the archaeological record is a contemporary phenomenon. It has been articulated by Binford (1983) as an epistemic problem and by Shanks (2012) as the ontological basis for archaeology: we do not have access to the past, but only to what remains of the past in the present. This is a point that has been long appreciated, but its understanding has changed – and changed dramatically, I believe – since the 19th century. Today, the emphasis is given to the gap or distance between present and past, but in the 19th century there was no gap – the past was present in the present. Today, the contemporary nature of the archaeological record is often considered a problem to be solved. For antiquarians, its contemporariness was, in contrast, what made a study of the past possible in the first place. I want to spend some time exploring this distinction, and to do it by connecting the concept of contemporaneity with another related term – anachronism.

Various words have been used to characterize the nature of the archaeological record: ‘remains’, ‘vestiges’, ‘ruins’, ‘relics’, ‘traces’ and ‘fragments’. The list could go on, and while many terms are still current, some have a certain antiquarian ring to them (e.g. ‘vestiges’). What is striking, however, about these antiquarian terms is that they foreground an aspect of the archaeological record that was of great theoretical concern in the 19th century, but one we completely bypass today. What characterizes the terms ‘relic’ or ‘vestige’ is their *untimeliness*: they are from another era, anachronisms, survivals. Indeed it is no coincidence to observe in texts from the mid- and late 19th century the close relationship that existed between material remains and what came to be called survivals; that is, extant customs or practices which no longer have any obvious purpose, like vestigial organs (see Lucas 2012 for an extended discussion of this issue). In fact, up to the middle of the 19th century, the word ‘antiquities’ was commonly used to refer to both; it was only with the crystallization and separation of academic disciplines in the last quarter of the 19th century that such differences also started to emerge, and with them a loss of sensibility to issues such as the temporality of the archaeological record. It is very instructive to read Edward Tylor’s work on survivals in this regard, because he quite explicitly saw survivals and relics (terms Tylor himself used) as the twin pillars of the study of the past (Tylor 1865).

What is important about this characterization of the archaeological record is that it is very much defined in relation to the contemporary; what makes relics and survivals significant is their *non*-contemporariness to other objects or customs. Their status as anachronisms formed the very basis and possibility of studying the past. However, it is also interesting to see how this concept of anachronism changed orientation at the end of the 19th century and into the early 20th – a change that was very much aligned with the consolidation or professionalization of the academic disciplines of history and archaeology. For with the advent of professionalization came a new concern for systematizing

knowledge. This period saw the growth of publications on historical and archaeological methodology, and with it a growing sense of the impact of the scholar on interpretations of the past. Issues of objectivity and the removal of subjectivity, expressed through concepts such as historical distance and hindsight and the curse of presentism (or the fallacy of *nunc pro tunc*), became central to such methodological reflections (e.g. Ashplant and Wilson 1988a; 1988b). In short, anachronism was no longer about objects or practices from the past, occurring in the present, but rather about the historian or archaeologist projecting their conceptual frameworks or agendas into the past. The arrow of anachronism was reversed, so to speak.

In archaeology, this epistemic concern mostly crystallized around the role of ethnographic analogy. Where relics and survivals had worked alongside each other, survivals now morphed into something else for archaeologists. Lubbock and Sollas's works were written just as this change was happening. Australian Aborigines were both survivals from and analogies for the Palaeolithic. There is a definite ambiguity about which. Over the course of the 20th century, the role of historic and contemporary peoples and material culture as analogies for interpreting the deeper past became central to bridging the gap between past and present. Such a role became consolidated through middle-range research and middle-range theory from the 1970s. However it was expressed, though, the central problem of analogy has always been the same: the danger of making the past too much like the present (Wylie 1985). One solution, of course, is to embrace this through the principle of uniformitarianism: the past *is* like the present, because the same basic processes are operating now as they did then. This may work for geology, but archaeologists differ greatly on how applicable such a principle is to human society or culture, although it is interesting to note a recent resurgence in this issue in the context of cross-cultural universals (e.g. see Lloyd 2010; Shyrock and Smail 2011).

In summary, then, I would suggest that in the 19th century, the archaeological record itself was the anachronism. Today, it is our own subjectivity, imposed on interpretations of the past, that is anachronistic, which in the context of archaeology is principally expressed through the role of analogy. At the same time, though, we do not tend to worry much about this either any more; indeed, we accept subjectivity and analogy as often necessary elements in the interpretive process, a hermeneutic fusion of horizons. Indeed, we accept that the past is always a contemporary construct – which does not of course mean that it did not happen or that we pluck our interpretations out of thin air. But analogies and the danger of presentism should not be given too much epistemic weight. The playful status of analogy today in archaeology is perhaps well captured in a genre of contemporary images which work with the idea of anachronisms (figure 2). These images are interesting, because in many ways they are negatives of the way 19th-century antiquarians may have viewed past objects. Such modern images perhaps recapture for us how 19th-century antiquarians may have felt about encountering remains from the past – the same sense of matter out of place, temporally speaking. We do not feel like this about archaeology any more. Perhaps we never did, but it is a provocative thought nonetheless because it reminds us of the theoretical status that anachronism once held for our discipline.





**Figure 2** Abraham Lincoln with a boom box; this image was posted widely on the Internet in 2011 (original source unknown).

Despite this, I am uncertain whether anachronism itself is a very useful idea. The crux of the concept refers to an object or custom or way of thought which is out of its proper time. And this raises the question of what constitutes the ‘proper’ time for an object or thought. No doubt archaeology itself has helped to create the perceived proper temporal order for things, but more generally this is probably the legacy of modernist thinking insofar as the trope of modernity defines the very possibility of something being untimely. And this brings us back to the idea of contemporaneity as a relation to a period of time, which I discussed earlier. What makes something untimely is an idea of contemporaneity which works off the notion of the present as an era or period. For 19th-century antiquarians, archaeological remains were non-contemporary because they did not belong to the present – that is, the modern era. The present, as distinct from the past, and the modern as distinct from the ancient or premodern, are the classic chronoschisms of modernity, but they also perform the same function as any periodization: they make contemporaneity a question of belonging to a certain unit or stretch of time. This is exactly the same chronotype being played out here, as with my earlier discussion of chronology.

By the same logic, though, we can rethink contemporaneity in other terms. More precisely, we can adopt a concept of contemporaneity where contemporaneity is principally about the temporal relation between things, rather than between things and an abstract measure of time. This is the challenge: to think about contemporaneity without drawing on the tropes of synchronism or anachronism. When we say that the archaeological record is a contemporary phenomenon, what we really mean is that it is a phenomenon of our present time, where the present time is conceived as a temporal envelope,

defined by synchronicity and distinguished from the past (or future). But if we eschew this conception, then how should we conceptualize contemporaneity? We could use the same terminology I developed in the previous section, of imbrication or overlapping and even characterize it through those Allen operators. But somehow the stakes appear to change once one of the objects involved in a temporal relation is oneself. The contemporaneity of the present is more than the contemporaneity of two things overlapping for a given interval or unit of time. The difference here is that contemporaneity in the former needs to be articulated through a *tensed* conception of time (i.e. past–present–future) as opposed to a purely *successional* one (earlier–later) – that is, it needs to articulate a concept of the present but in such a way that it does not reduce it to a time period or *punctum* in a successional view of time. This difference is especially felt in discussions regarding the status of archaeologies of the contemporary past, as Harrison (2011) has recently alluded to, where the concept of contemporaneity is deeply problematic.

This distinction can be related to a rather old philosophical discussion by McTaggart at the start of the 20th century, where he contrasted two types of time series, *A* (past–present–future) and *B* (earlier–later), and argued that it was impossible to reduce one to the other (McTaggart 1908; also see Lucas 2005). Part of the problem with McTaggart's analysis, however, lies in his attributing a serial or successional nature in the first place to the tensed (*A* series) view of time. When it comes to talking about the past, present and future, I would suggest that we have to dispense with any notion of succession altogether. In order to see how this might affect our understanding of contemporaneity, let me develop this point through an analogy. A few years ago, I had a discussion with an eminent archaeologist about two types of handkerchief user – the folder and the scruncher, depending on how you retained the handkerchief in your pocket for use. The folder always has the handkerchief neatly folded over on itself in a flattened square or rectangle, while the scruncher has a messy ball. Our conversation did not shift into one about time, but the distinction is an interesting one to use when the two sorts of handkerchief are viewed as representing two different chronotypes. In the folded handkerchief, time is successional through the neat layers of the folded handkerchief. What belongs in one fold belongs there and nowhere else. This object is Neolithic, not Bronze Age or Iron Age. With the scrunched handkerchief, time is messy and any two points on it can touch. An object made in the Neolithic can also irrupt into the Iron Age or in fact our own present.

The analogy of the scrunched handkerchief is actually a famous metaphor used by the French philosopher Michel Serres in his conversation about time and contemporaneity with Bruno Latour (Serres and Latour 1995, 60), and one which has often been quoted in archaeology (Witmore 2006; Holtorf 2002). With the folded-handkerchief chronotype, contemporaneity is clearly defined in relation to an era or period – a fold in the handkerchief. With the scrunched handkerchief, however, contemporaneity is defined by the particular relation between any two or more points on the fabric. It is a point of contact. Serres has also used another metaphor, that of percolation, where time not only folds back on itself, but also is filtered as through a

sieve (Serres and Latour 1995, 58). Some events or objects persist in their effects while others cease. These might sound like rather vague metaphors and indeed they perhaps are – but that is also because we still lack an adequate vocabulary to articulate this new conception of time. This is what Serres was searching for. The idea of succession seems more concrete because it has been made so through centuries of use. The idea of percolation seems abstract and vague because it is still an idea; it needs working through. Such work has already begun (e.g. Witmore 2006; 2009; 2013), for in reflecting on the archaeological record, percolation seems an eminently appropriate concept: some objects from the past irrupt into the present, others slip away forever, others simply wait or pause – they may or may not re-emerge.

Fundamentally, I would suggest that a central concept here is that of persistence, an issue which preoccupied other philosophers of time at the start of the 20th century, especially Bergson (1991) and Husserl (1966). In a way, persistence returns us to the antiquarian notion of the relic and the very possibility of archaeology: the persistence of the past *in* the present. I believe that this is a very positive idea that we simply have forgotten or take for granted today. What I would do, however, is drop the idea of anachronism which accompanied this notion for antiquarians; our task is rather to step sideways and explore *modes of persistence*, the reason being that we are talking about the temporality of *things* in relation to one another, not time per se. It is a temporality much closer to memory in the way it operates than conventional, historical time (see Olivier 2011 here for an extended discussion on this). Thus the contemporaneity of the archaeological record is not about its existence in our present, but rather about its particular mode of persistence that interconnects past, present and future.

In bringing this issue around to the temporality of things, we have in many ways ended at the same place as the previous section. In both cases, the vernacular concept of contemporaneity in archaeology was shown to be inadequate and linked to the ideas of synchronism and anachronism respectively. In both cases, the important question hinges on the temporality of things – their imbrication on the one hand and their survival or persistence on the other. In both cases, we need to expand what these terms mean, to draw out a taxonomy. There are multiple forms of imbrication, as Allen's temporal logic has shown; there are also diverse modes of persistence, as indicated by Serres's metaphors. To develop a more complex and useful concept of contemporaneity in archaeology, ultimately we need to understand how temporality is bound to an object's identity and how it mediates its relation to other objects. To that end, I want to close this paper with a third and final section which explores the idea of consociality.

### Consociality and writing archaeology in the contemporary mode

The concept of consociality derives from the writings of Alfred Schutz, a phenomenologist working in the mid-20th century. In his studies on the phenomenology of the social world from the 1930s, Schutz made an important observation that what matters in understanding social relations and time is not contemporaneity but consociality (Schutz 1967). Any two people might be contemporaries, and live at the same time in history, but if

their paths never cross and they never affect each others' lives, this relation is irrelevant. Thus we might question the meaningfulness of being able to demonstrate that a farmer living near Cahokia in the 13th century A.D. was a contemporary with a peasant living near London at the same time. What matters is that they shared the same physical space as well as time, that they constituted a we-relation, as the phrasing goes. This notion of consociates actually lies at the basis of how we often use the term 'contemporaries' – of course, people of the same generation or age cohort – but Schutz wanted to emphasize the importance of not separating space from time.

Now although Schutz's concept of consociality is important, we do need to give it a less phenomenological flavour because, as it stands, it entails problematic consequences. For example, teaching to a room full of students would constitute them as my consociates, even if only temporary, but the president of the United States is technically not my consociate, only a contemporary. We have never met, we probably never will, and in no way do we constitute a 'we', in the way 'we' do when I am present in a classroom with my students. On the other hand, the president is affecting my life – perhaps not to the same extent as he affects others – but nonetheless it is hard to use physical proximity as a primary way to define consociality. We all know the cliché about a butterfly flapping its wings in South America and the weather changing in Central Park; chains of causation need to be integrated into this idea of consociality. We need to de-phenomenologize it. A second and related thing we need to do is to disconnect it from its association purely with people. People can be consociated with things and even things can be consociated with other things.

However, in redefining consociality this way – an actor-network-theory (ANT) version of consociality, if you like – have we not torn down the original distinction between contemporaries and consociates and just replaced one term with another? At one extreme, you could say that everything is connected, and therefore everything is consocial. At a very general level, this may well be true, but it is not terribly helpful. The task is rather to trace *gradients* of consociality, and identify the more important relations between things. Part of doing this requires that we have good control over the space-time coordinates of these relations. In archaeology, high-resolution dating helps this. But this is only part of the job. If we are to preserve the distinction between contemporaries and consociates, then, it will be a difference of degree rather than one of kind. However, in tying the conception of consociality to agency, we are now faced with a new problem. Let us turn Schutz's original point on its head. Can two people be consociates without being contemporaries? To give a blunt example: can I be a consociate of Abraham Lincoln? Schutz had other terms for consociates who were not contemporaries – 'successors' and 'predecessors' – but if consociality is defined differently, as I have just done, then such terms become redundant. Indeed, the whole idea of successors and predecessors reverts back to a successional conception of contemporaneity which is what we have been trying to avoid in this paper. Surely agency or affect can be distributed through time as well as space? Surely Abe and I can be consociates? Is not that, after all, the point of Serres's crumpled handkerchief?

I would argue so, but, as with the original distinction, we need to qualify it, especially in terms of reciprocity. If Lincoln and I are to be defined as reciprocal consociates – that is, people who can affect each other – then one argument would be that we both need to be alive at the same time. Clearly we are not; Lincoln died in 1865, 100 years exactly before I was born. This is not to suggest that he or his past actions have not affected me today; they surely have, however weakly. But because he no longer exists and ceased existing before I came into existence, it is difficult to argue that I can affect him in anyway whatsoever. Our consociation is one-way, or asymmetrical. The same is not true of Lincoln's bloodstained coat, which he wore the night of his assassination; this still exists (owned by the Ford Theatre where he was shot), so I can affect it and it can act upon me. Indeed, I can affect objects of all kinds directly or indirectly associated with Lincoln, and as a result alter the present perception of who he was.

Now one could claim that in doing this I am changing the past and thus negating the idea of non-reciprocity with non-contemporaries. However, I feel that this move makes a major leap of abstraction. Our perception and representation of the past is, of course, moulded or constructed in the present, using remains from the past. We can quite seriously change the effect the past has on us by how we choose to interact with its remains. In this way, the present can affect the past – or rather the *persistence* of the past in the present. But the trouble is, we are not talking about the past – we are talking about Abraham Lincoln. Talking about the past slips us back into the old terminology of past and present as periods or slices of time. The point about using contemporaneity to rethink these temporal relations is that the focus remains on things themselves and their persistence.

But in focusing the attention on the object – in this case Lincoln – we are forced to respond to the issue of how we then choose to define this object we call Abraham Lincoln. At a time when we freely talk about distributed persons and how people and their things are connected (e.g. Strathern 1988; Gell 1998; Fowler 2004), can we really say that Lincoln no longer exists if his coat (and no doubt many of his other personal possessions) are still around? If Lincoln was *more* than his body, then surely there is a case for arguing that, in some small way, a part of him still exists. Lincoln persists, albeit in a very attenuated form. One might counter this by pointing out that I am conflating Lincoln the being with Lincoln the idea or memory; Lincoln died over a century ago, but the idea of Lincoln, our collective or social memory of him, lives on through objects like his coat, but also through other things like the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, DC, the image reproduced in [figure 2](#) or even the 2012 Steven Spielberg film. But why create this division between Lincoln and the idea of him? Why revert to the deep division between world of spirit and world of matter? Can anyone separate their identity from what other people think of them? Can we separate the idea of Lincoln from the hundreds and thousands of objects, images, books and films that relate to him? Can we draw a line between Lincoln's coat (as a distributed part of Lincoln the man) and Lincoln's coat (as part of Lincoln the myth)?

If the idea of a distributed person collapses any ontological distinction between Lincoln and the idea of Lincoln, as I am suggesting here, then surely

we can argue that Lincoln and I are in fact reciprocal consociates, and by extension, of course, all the people in prehistory whose remains have survived for us to unearth and study. I think this is a reasonable claim, but once again rather than simply accept it, the real task is to define *gradients* of reciprocity: what precisely is the agential relationship between myself and Lincoln? How strong are the vectors of influence between us and what form do they take? Just because we cannot draw any ontological divide between Lincoln's coat and the Lincoln Memorial (or the Spielberg film) we are not prevented from still making a distinction. However distributed Lincoln might be, his core or centre resides around his body and that body interacted with that coat – unlike the memorial (which was erected in the early 20th century) or the more recent film. One might even talk of degrees of separation here; the coat lies at one degree, whereas the movie (and myself) lie at the *n*th degree.

To bring this discussion back to the topic at hand, namely the concept of contemporaneity in and of the archaeological record, it seems clear that there is a much more complex set of issues to be addressed than is often assumed. The concept of consociation, as articulated here, is offered as a way to think about how we articulate the idea of contemporaneity, both in our narratives of the past and in our comprehension of the relation between ourselves and what remains of the past. Indeed, ultimately this is significant because of the consequences it has for how we represent the past and its relation to the present. One of the most important of these consequences, I would suggest, is related to the temporal voice we use in archaeological narratives. We need to write about archaeology in the mode of the contemporary.

It should be clear by this point in the paper that by the contemporary mode, I do not mean something as naively simple as writing with an understanding that the narrative is written in the present. Contemporaneity is not the same as the present, which is merely a period designation, a *punctum*. A narrative written in the contemporary mode is one which is attendant to the changing interplay between present, past and future tense. And this will vary depending on the objects – or subject – being selected. Perhaps the most critical question here lies in deciding the subject position of the narrative. If everything I have argued here is accepted, then it should be clear that the temporality of any narrative is bound and relative to subject or object positions – there is no general chronology or periodization. This is not to reject chronology as a tool, nor is it to reject the use of periodization as a narrative framework; it is only to insist on its relativity to the subject. Each subject will have its own temporality, which frames the nature of contemporaneity and consociation. The temporal span of that subject will frame the beginning and end of the narrative and it is the interval between these points that determines the configuration of consociation, particularly the *gradients* of consociation and reciprocity.

A narrative that starts at 500 B.C. and ends at 400 B.C. has a different set of agential possibilities than one which spans 400–300 B.C. This field of possibilities changes as one slides the end point back or forward, and therefore, depending on what we take as our point of reference, history will appear slightly different each time. Gradients of reciprocity will change between objects as some objects either cease to exist or subsist weakly in a distributed manner, like Lincoln's coat. To write in the contemporary

mode means acknowledging the relevance of the time frame, it means acknowledging the relevance of the subject; history not only looks different depending on where one chooses to start or end the narrative, it also looks different depending on which subject position is chosen to write the narrative from. This is about embracing fully a multi-subject and multi-temporal archaeology, where the subjects can be anything from humans to horses, pyramids to pots, and where the temporality of *these* subjects defines the mode of contemporaneity.

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## **The knots of narrative. Contemporaneity and its relation to history** Zoë Crossland\*

In this wonderfully rich and thought-provoking article, Gavin Lucas exhorts us to write about archaeology in the mode of the contemporary. This is to attend to the shifting interplay between past, present and future, undertaken through a focus on the relations between objects, in contrast to the impoverished concern with succession and order that a notion of chronological contemporaneity imposes. His paper undertakes the useful task of disentangling concepts around time and contemporaneity, and raises a number of interesting questions. Here, I would like to discuss two of the most compelling contributions of Lucas's paper: the foregrounding of modes of persistence and of consociality, both of which I would like to explore by reflecting on my experiences of historical narrative and alternate temporalities in the history of highland Madagascar. The issue of persistence introduces the question of historical privilege – that is, how do some things persist while

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others fall to dust? And how is that persistence recognized and maintained? This same question of recognition (and misrecognition) is also at the heart of consociality; how are consociates acknowledged as contemporaneous, and what room is there for refusal?

The idea of writing in the contemporary mode is seductive, and offers a great deal in terms of a productive reorientation of our archaeological narratives. In many ways what Lucas proposes is a powerful new chronotopic configuration for archaeological narrative. As Lucas has explored elsewhere (Lucas 2005, 49–50), the chronotope concept, as developed by Mikhail Bakhtin (1981), offers a great deal for archaeologists. For Bakhtin, the chronotope was an expression of the various ways in which time and space were fixed and melded in literature. Taking the example of classical Greek adventures, he showed how they were populated with recurring spatio-temporal motifs, including meeting and parting, loss and acquisition, search and discovery. The chronotope is the ‘organizing center’ for narrative events; it is ‘where the knots of narrative are tied and untied’ (Bakhtin 1981, 250). Along these lines, Rosemary Joyce (2002, 34–38) has explored the narrative chronotopes of the quest and evolutionary progress in popular archaeology. Here, as Lucas observes, the narrative organization is tied to an understanding of the past as distanced from the present through a rigidly unfolding order of temporal succession. Lucas instead suggests that we move away from the automatic periodization of past and present in order to better understand the modes of persistence and consociality through which objects relate to each other and remain present. How is the relationship between past, present and future figured and narrated?

Understanding the narrative frame through which archaeological evidence is made meaningful is a key problem of archaeographical practice. Yet in doing this, Lucas’s paper works to do two things that perhaps don’t sit together entirely comfortably. It offers a powerful analysis of what contemporaneity is, and also suggests that archaeology should be written in ‘the mode of the contemporary’ (p. 14). There is a tension between the promise of an archaeology written in a chronotopic mode that takes as its orienting principle that the past is not past and that objects persist through their relations, on the one hand, and, on the other, the claim that such an archaeology is one that attends to ‘the changing interplay between present, past and future tense’ (p. 14). As a chronotopic configuration for narrating archaeological materials, the notion of writing in the mode of the contemporary is extraordinarily fecund. However, as a way of exploring the changing interplay between past, present and future, it seems to foreclose on historical possibilities that might indeed push the past into the past and distance it from the present. The mode of the contemporary seems to be a particular figuring of the relationship between past and present, rather than a means of discovering what that relationship might be at different moments.

Here, then, I would like to explore two issues. First, in highlighting contemporaneity as expressed through relationships between objects and subjects, how might other questions around non-contemporaneity be obscured? What room is there for less tangible dimensions of



non-contemporaneity (cf. Derrida 1994)? How should we make sense of those who refuse to recognize a relationship of contemporaneity with others? Equally, how might we expand the frame beyond of modes of persistence and consociality to consider how some objects and people are denied contemporaneity? Admittedly, the denial of contemporaneity (or of coevalness, to echo Johannes Fabian (1983) is closely related to understanding modes of persistence and consociality – but it also seems to demand something more.

Second, and related to this, is the question of how an archaeology in the chronotopic mode of the contemporary can be extended out of the realm of narrative critique and into the world of lived experience: how is history or contemporaneity understood as it is made? As archaeologists, we are concerned not only with narrative but also with enacted experience in the past and how this comes into recognition. Indeed, the question of recognition seems to me to be a primary and undertheorized area of concern for archaeology. Lucas's paper raises a number of interesting issues in relation to this, notably, what are the possibilities for other temporal frameworks through which history and contemporaneity are produced and anticipated? This question is clearly present in Lucas's paper, but is not as fully developed as other aspects of the theme. What kind of futures were imagined by past people, and whose futures were realized? How was the past conceptualized in relation to the present, and how did this preserve and promulgate the material and immaterial traces that we inherit?

In writing about Lincoln's continuing – albeit attenuated – existence in and through objects such as his coat, historical texts and national monuments, we attend to the way in which a particular past is privileged and narrated, and how it is made present today. But what might this offer for approaching Lincoln's understanding of his own relationships, his temporality, and relations to past and future? If we are to take seriously consociality and the non-contemporaneity of the present, how might that encourage a rethinking of temporal relationships not simply in relation to archaeological narrative, but also in earlier times? In other words, how might an archaeology written in the mode of the contemporary reframe the question of 'the past in the past'? A key issue here is how the future is imagined, and what its relation is to present and past. And here I would like to push back against Lucas's suggestion that we need to 'dispense with any notion of succession altogether' (p. 10).

There is a fundamental asymmetry in the contrasting relationships between present and past on the one hand, and present and future on the other. This is an asymmetry that must be grappled with. Following Reinhart Koselleck (2004), we can contrast the 'space of experience' of the present and past, and the 'horizon of expectation' that defines the future. Events and processes of the past and present have spatial extension and an existence that can be seen and documented; they also have a diachronicity that cannot be avoided. The future, in contrast can only be thought, anticipated, projected, but never experienced directly. Koselleck's conceptual categories of the present–past 'space of experience' and the future 'horizon of expectation' provide

a framework for examining the conditions of historical possibility. These exist in the variegated interplay between present–past and the anticipated future, however imagined – whether in a mode of the contemporary or of chronological succession.

I would like to turn to Madagascar at this point to consider an alternate way to imagine the relationship between past, present and future. Here, I hope to build on Lucas's discussion to further think about persistence and consociality in relation to the historical imaginary of the 19th century. Highland Madagascar is well known from Maurice Bloch's work (Bloch 1971; 1977) as a place where the past is vibrantly alive in the present. The past never recedes out of view but rather – with some important qualifications – remains present and known. This is reiterated in the terminology for time, where the word for the past (*taloha*) is translatable as 'there, in front of one's head' (Dahl 1999, 43). This is reiterated in the way in which 'today' is divided conceptually into two, with a term for the part of the day that has already passed (*androany*), and another for the part that is yet to come (*anio*). Here the key distinction is between the ultimately unknowable future, which lies invisible behind one, and the known and experienced present-past, which is quite literally available to view and interact with in the landscape. However, this present-past 'space of experience' was created through violence and political will. It was articulated to a particular future through the historical privilege of some actors and at the expense of others.

It is useful at this point to shift away from a notion of history as textual representation to use another formulation that draws upon history's characterization in many parts of Madagascar. Standing stones, for example, are described in oral histories of the 19th century as 'history' or *tantara*. This word – just like the English-language term 'history', is a complex bundle of concepts. *Tantara* in 19th-century Madagascar included textual sources and oral narratives, as well as standing stones and other monuments. But it also referred to ongoing traditions and practices, handed down to the living from the dead. History could be seen in the landscape, but that space of experience also included the actions through which the living reproduced the past and maintained its contemporaneity. This, then, is a notion of history as something experienced and lived as much as written and recorded. History was found in tradition and custom, in ceremonies and stories. It might seem that more or less anything could be history under these terms, but there was another important way in which *tantara* could be translated, and this was as 'privilege' (Delivré 1974, 164; 1979). To have history was to have privilege, and to see the evidence of one's past manifest in the landscape. It was also to have the privilege to expect continuity into the future, reproduced by one's descendants, who would care for the dead and interact with them at the site of the ancestral tomb. This privilege was also made visible by the destruction of history that took place when people were enslaved. Captives from raids, criminals, debtors and many others were enslaved and in the process had their ancestral land and tombs taken from them. Having no ancestral tomb, the enslaved were lost to history. This was a deliberate erasure of history by those with political might; the enslaved were excluded from the 'space of experience' of their ancestral past and from the 'horizon of possibility' for

future continuation of their lineage. History existed in the past, but also in the privilege of reproduction and in the ongoing traditions that it made. These could be traditions of narration or of reading, but could also be understood through habitual and quotidian practices – of walking, eating, gathering, building, commemorating and so on.

Lucas's call for an archaeology 'in the mode of the contemporary' is at heart a call for better attention to the relationships – temporal and otherwise – between objects, people and historical narrative. As he observes, what is needed is the development of a more sophisticated theory that will allow us to identify different kinds of temporal relationship and consider how they operate in different modes. The Allen operators that Lucas mentions in passing sound a promising line to pursue and I am keen to hear more about how these might play out in an archaeological case study. Another approach to thinking through temporal–material relations is through the dynamics of semeiotic processes – or semeiosis – as developed from the writings of Charles Sanders Peirce. This is a semeiotic theory that differs fundamentally from the more familiar Continental semiotics (hence the different spelling), one which allows us to construct a theory of material–semeiotic relations that operate in the world and in time. To explore this briefly, I would like to turn to the multiple meanings of the English-language term 'history' and to explore how it operates as a changeable and varying semeiotic process. This, I hope, will resonate with Lucas's discussion of the contemporary.

When we use the term 'history', we can mean at least three different things. First, history can refer to historical sources: archives, oral histories, national heritage and archaeological finds. These are the traces – or signs – through which history is known and written. Historical narrative, or history-as-representation, constitutes the second sense of history. It is perhaps this aspect which most concerns Lucas, at least in this paper. How is the past written, and how are the relationships between objects defined and conceived relative to each other and to the historian–archaeologist? From a highland Malagasy perspective, we might broaden this second sense of history to include all the contemporary practices and traditions through which the signs of history are interpreted. This is to say that history can be experienced affectively and energetically as well as through textual practices of representation. These modes of history-making include not only obvious interpretive sites like museums and national monuments, but also more mundane interpretive practices such as driving along an old turnpike road, or walking the Fosse Way. Equally, affective moods and responses are also forms of history-making from this semeiotic perspective. The feeling of recognition when presented with a forgotten toy from one's childhood is an affective state that interprets an object relative to a past, but without necessarily bringing it into narrative form.

Third, to speak of history can be to discuss the disappeared past – history-as-event in the parlance of conceptual history – but also, as Lucas indicates, broader practices, beliefs and processes. Our understanding of this history is mediated through history-as-trace – whether through objects that persist into the contemporary world, or through more intangible practices and traditions. We must always start with the signs of history – whether

these are material traces like pottery or visible absences like the tombs of those enslaved in highland Madagascar. So to summarize, history-as-trace brings us into relation with history-as-past – with other people, with other objects and places – and this relationship is recognized through history-as-interpreting-acts, which may be affective, gestural or representational, among other possibilities.

This, then, is a question of semeiotic traces – material or otherwise – in so far as they are experienced and understood in the present, and reach into the past and future. Along these lines, Lucas's paper encourages me to think about modes of persistence along multiple axes. There are modes of interpretive persistence through which the traces of history are understood affectively and through material and representational practices, some of which are projected into an indefinite future. We can also think through the modes of persistence of material traces, by inquiring into their being as signs, and as material things. Finally, we can ask about the nature of the relationships between such traces and the pasts that we understand them to show us. The objects of the past may be experienced only at a perceptual level, as part of the background of everyday life. Or they may be elaborated upon in narrative or through museological structures. But insofar as they tell us about history in some way they are always situated in an unfolding relation. History unfolds because every narrative or gesture has the potential to become another trace of the past, and in so doing to direct attention away from other semeiotic possibilities.

There is much more that could be said here, particularly in relation to consociality and the question of how we are brought into relation with the dead through their traces. Equally, the question of past futures is an important issue, with much to explore around the question of the anticipated response that was folded into past practices. Geoffrey Scarre (2006) notes that it is possible to affect the dead relationally, by acting upon their posthumous reputation. When the tombs of highland Madagascar were forcibly abandoned, this was designed to have an effect on the dead contained within them as much as on the living. These were people who had lived and died with an expectation that they would be respected and remembered. Slavery acted to devalue them posthumously, and to deny them the care that they had anticipated. This in turn damaged the future of the living. The destruction of tombs acted on the present-past and the future, and in so doing denied contemporaneity to the dead.

Coming back to the question of an archaeology of the contemporary as proposed by Lucas, it is clear that this is a particularly rich chronotopic orientation for writing the past, and one that is consonant with the broader interest in contemporaneity as an alternative to the tropes of modernity. I find the concept to be stimulating and productive, and think that it could be usefully developed to encompass more than the relations between archaeological objects and subjects. In this I see great potential for productive conversations with semeiotic approaches. However, I would also emphasize that room needs to be found to take proper account of those excluded from history and contemporaneity, and to allow for full recognition of different chronotopic configurations in the past.

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**Assemblages, relationality and recursivity. Comments on  
'Archaeology and contemporaneity' by Gavin Lucas**  
*Andrew Meirion Jones\**

I warmly welcome Gavin Lucas's discussion of time and contemporaneity. I view this as another component of a sustained (and much-needed) investigation of the ontological character of archaeology. Gavin Lucas is presently at the forefront of this line of enquiry. His analysis is much more than an exploration of the ontology of archaeology. It is also a radical rethinking of the basis of the discipline. His analysis takes us back to 'first principles' and reveals unexpected and thought-provoking conclusions. Excitingly, his discussion touches upon the very basis of archaeological chronologies and archaeological stratigraphies, and forces us to think about them afresh. Worsaae, Montelius, Childe: these figures stalk the pages of elementary textbooks on archaeology, yet Lucas's analysis allows us not only to appreciate their analytical skills, but also to rethink and question them.

I particularly appreciate the fact that his analysis takes us beyond the arid observation that the past is a contemporary phenomenon, often used as the excuse for postmodern flim-flam and intellectual hand-wringing. Rather than being an intellectual problem that prevents analysis of the past, Lucas demonstrates that the contemporaneity of the past has been recognized since the 19th-century origins of the discipline, often in terms of anachronism. In fact, he demonstrates that the issue of contemporaneity lies at the heart of archaeology.

One of the clear insights that emerges from Lucas's analysis of the question of contemporaneity and the archaeological record is the point that relationality is central to the analysis of archaeological chronologies. This is interesting as the history of archaeological chronology begins with building relative chronologies and then shifts in the radiocarbon era to building absolute chronologies. We have been living in the era of absolute chronologies for at least half a century now, and have experienced several radiocarbon revolutions, the most recent of which claims to provide ever-tighter chronologies by linking radiocarbon dates to Bayesian statistical analysis. While radiocarbon dating has improved our understanding of absolute chronologies immensely, it has also presented us with a past composed of discrete packets of time, a succession of time, though accurately measured. Each of these successive periods of time is then occupied by synchronic relationships. One of the outcomes of this view of time is that archaeological perennial: the study of transitions. As soon as we define chronological periods as a series of successions we are required to explain the transition between them. Archaeological careers have been built on the

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study of transitions of this kind between distinct units of time, perhaps the most obvious being the transition between the Mesolithic and the Neolithic – the so-called agricultural revolution – though we could also include the transition from feudalism to capitalism or the emergence of anatomically modern humans to the list of well-worn transition debates.

Yet we all know (but don't care to admit) that this model of time is an archaeological fiction. In fact, the archaeological record is composed of a series of different relationships. Simply analysing archaeological relationships in terms of synchronicity or anachronism is a narrowing of the possible relationships between archaeological entities that can take place. Neatly, and carefully, Lucas demonstrates the importance of contemporaneity to archaeological analysis, both at the level of the reconstruction of site chronologies and in terms of consociality: the set of associative relationships that pertain between things. Interestingly, Lucas's work builds on the growing body of research on memory in archaeology, all of which likewise recognizes that relations of contemporaneity (and, in particular, consociality) are crucial to understanding memory. Whether, like Olivier (2001; 2011), we recognize the contemporaneity of a series of architectural forms and artefacts or describe these relations of contemporaneity in terms of citation (Jones 2007) or temporal percolation (Witmore 2006), Lucas shows that the study of memory in archaeology is simply the 'tip of the iceberg' in identifying the significance of contemporaneity. In fact, relations of contemporaneity lie at the heart of the discipline; it is a condition of the study of archaeology.

Lucas emphasizes relationality in his analysis of relations of contemporaneity. This is especially important. Relational approaches in archaeology have mainly been discussed as a development of postprocessual approaches, and have characteristically been associated with hunter-gatherer ontologies (Watts 2013; Hill 2012). There is nothing wrong with this, though this is a very narrow reading of relationality. If we are to acknowledge the truly relational character of archaeology, the ramifications are immense. A number of authors have already begun to delineate the relational character of the discipline (Fowler 2013; Lucas 2012; Alberti and Bray 2009; Alberti, Jones and Pollard 2013). The genius of Lucas's approach here is that he shows us that relational relationships occur at various stages of the interpretative process. They occur as we establish the contemporaneity of excavated features just as they occur as we grapple with the relations of contemporaneity between the things we have excavated and ourselves. To consider contemporaneity is to consider the relational character of archaeology at all levels of investigation. Importantly, this approach differs radically from processual and postprocessual approaches in which we observe a disjuncture between the methods of archaeological excavation and the application of theory to the analysis of the features and artefacts excavated. Instead, Lucas offers us the possibility of a seamless approach to both excavation recording and post-excavation analysis and interpretation, achieving the kind of procedural equivalence between the theories we deploy and the worlds we produce argued for by Ben Alberti and colleagues (Alberti *et al.* 2011, 905).

Lucas offers us the possibility of an exciting future for archaeology. Rather than facing a future dominated by yet more micro-measurement of

chronologies using various radiometric dating techniques, the discipline will instead begin to focus its energies on defining and analysing different kinds of relationship. How these relationships are variously assembled says something about the changing character of the archaeological record. Thinking of the archaeological record as so many assemblages to be understood, disentangled and reassembled offers an active role for the archaeological theorist (both Fowler (2013) and Lucas (2012) show that the archaeologist is an active component of the archaeological record) and refashions archaeology as the ‘science of assemblages’. As a ‘science of assemblages’, archaeology may begin to offer a methodological and theoretical lead to other cognate disciplines, both in the humanities and in the sciences. In that sense, Lucas’s analysis of relations of contemporaneity offers the possibility of the kind of recursive analysis discussed by Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (2013) and Martin Holbraad (2012) in anthropology, i.e. an analysis that not only illuminates the particular (in this case archaeological chronological relationships), but also bleeds through to illuminate and affect the discipline as a whole.

Added to this, Lucas’s work on chronological relationships resonates with the recent call by John Robb and Tim Pauketat, in the edited volume *Big histories, human lives* (2013), for an increased focus on scale and in particular on history, something they rightly note has been overlooked in postprocessual archaeology. Contributors to the volume, including Clive Gamble (2013) and Tim Pauketat (2013), argue for a relational and networked approach to the issue of scale. The most profitable analysis of these issues comes from Pauketat’s discussion of North American practices of bundling (or assembling). He discusses differing types of bundling practice from Aztec, Hopewell and Puebloan contexts as bundles of, in and as time. Pauketat’s analysis is based on an understanding of relationality. Bundles are composed of a series of relations, and these can in turn be bundled together and attached to further bundles to carry forward historical change. One of the aspects that is lacking from Pauketat’s discussion is a thoroughgoing analysis of types of relation. It strikes me that the detailed analysis of chronological relations that Lucas outlines here would benefit the kind of large-scale analysis of history as a series of bundled relationships offered by Pauketat. The approach Lucas takes here begins by discussing relations of contemporaneity during excavation and then goes on to discuss consociality at a slightly greater scale of analysis. Does Lucas feel that he would wish to stop his analysis there, or can his analytical methods be extended to greater scales of analysis (such as those entertained by Pauketat)? It seems from his analysis of relations of consociality that he would be prepared to extend these relations over quite some temporal range. Is there a temporal point where the network can no longer hold, or becomes cut, and, if so, what is it?

I really like the notion of consociality, and in particular Lucas’s coopting of the term to an ANT perspective: a consociality of people and things extended through time. However, the issue of gradiency bothers me. In introducing this term, are we not in danger of returning to a successional view of time in which we measure time by its gradiency, or degrees of separation from its consociate? I would like to see this point expanded. How does gradiency relate to time? Is a gradient always atemporal?



Throughout the paper contemporaneity is taken as a given. Things persist or perdure over time. This is what allows them to be cotemporaneous. This lends a slight asymmetry to the final analysis of consociality. Lucas ends the paper by arguing that ‘gradients of reciprocity will change between objects as some objects either cease to exist or subsist weakly in a distributed manner’ (p. 12). Is this not a view of relationality from the perspective of the subject rather than the object? How do we account for material perdurance and ephemerality? Should we also account for practices of maintenance and repair? Is material perdurance purely the result of continued relations of consociality or do we need to factor the differing properties of material substances into models of consociality and contemporaneity? I would like to see this point developed.

Finally, I would like to thank both Gavin and the editors of *Archaeological dialogues* for the opportunity to comment on this paper. Although I was a member of the audience at the Southampton seminar at which this paper was given, the significance of the argument was not apparent until I sat and carefully engaged with the written paper. I hope that from my comments it is obvious that I think this is a crucially important paper discussing a topic that is fundamental to the discipline. It is precisely the kind of topic we should be debating, and it deserves to be widely read and discussed.

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## **Existential contemporaneity. Or what we as archaeologists can learn from Archie Leach** *Håkan Karlsson\**

### **Introduction**

From my point of view, discussions of the content of the concept of time are always welcome in archaeology since the archaeological discourse on this topic has for many years been anchored in a quite simplified and axiomatic chronological approach. Discussions of other aspects of, and approaches towards, the concept of time have – with few exceptions – been neglected. It is therefore with pleasure that I have been presented with the opportunity to comment briefly on Gavin Lucas’s article ‘Archaeology and contemporaneity’, which approaches the concept of contemporaneity in and of the archaeological record. I would like to start this comment in a rather unorthodox way with a brief quotation from the movie *A Fish Called Wanda*<sup>1</sup> since I think this quotation encapsulates both my agreement with, and my critique of, the reasonings presented by Lucas:

**Archie:** Wanda, do you have any idea what it’s like being English? Being so correct all the time, being so stifled by this dread of, of doing the wrong thing, of saying to someone, ‘Are you married?’ and hearing, ‘My wife left

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me this morning,' or saying, uh, 'Do you have children?' and being told they all burned to death on Wednesday. You see, Wanda, we're all terrified of embarrassment. That's why we're so – dead. Most of my friends are dead, you know; we've these piles of corpses to dinner. But you're alive, God bless you, and I want to be, I'm so fed up with all this (*A Fish Called Wanda*, 1988)

It may be concluded from the quotation above that the time horizons of past, present and future are interconnected and intertwined in Archie's and Wanda's contemporaneity. At least Archie is heavily influenced by the past and its traditions, and his contemporary situation is grounded in the past as well as in the future, when he is trying to break free and direct himself towards a new future. Thus Archie's fictional life is a blueprint of the conditions of our own existences where past, present and future are inseparable and interconnected in a manner where they cannot be divided into separate chronological time horizons. I will return to this observation and to Archie and Wanda further on, but I believe that Lucas agrees with my initial observation concerning the relationship between past, present and future as inseparable and blended entities – this, since his article approaches the concept of time and contemporaneity in and of the archaeological record in a thought-provoking and inspiring manner.

### Lucas and contemporaneity

In his article, Lucas focuses on a discussion of the concept of contemporaneity as used in archaeology today, in relation to dating and chronology (synchronism), and he is straightforward in his disclosure of the shortcomings of our present use of the concept. Lucas's critique of the traditional archaeological manner of using a linear model of time is convincing as it focuses on chronology and the definition of contemporaneity as the relation between the archaeological record and a unit of time, and I agree in total with the presented critique. This circumstance is also valid for the critique of the common use of subjectivity and analogy as elements in the interpretation of the archaeological record, and the understanding of the archaeological record solely as a contemporary phenomenon (anachronism). This is so since subjectivity and analogy also fulfil a function when making contemporaneity a question of belonging to a certain unit or stretch of time. According to Lucas, both these conventional archaeological usages of the concept of contemporaneity lead to a situation where we adopt a simplified view of the concept and its content, either as synchronism or as anachronism, since contemporaneity is defined as a relation either to a unit of time or to a stretch of time.

Lucas proposes that we rethink the concept of contemporaneity in such a manner that the concept and its definition are principally about the temporal relations between things, rather than between things and an abstract measure of time. For Lucas, this does not imply an abandonment of the use of dating and chronology as tools, but rather that we shift our focus in a manner where chronology is relative to the temporality of, and the relationship between, the objects investigated. In his presented approach, which he anchors partly in the reasonings concerning *persistence* in Henri Bergson (1991) and Edmund Husserl (1966), this implies that we need to abandon

synchronism and anachronism and the traditional linear and successional view of time. This means, for instance, not that the contemporaneity of the archaeological record is about its existence in our present, but that its contemporaneity instead consists of its interconnection and intertwining of past, present and future. When trying to develop a more complex concept of contemporaneity of the archaeological record, Lucas approaches the writings of Alfred Schutz (1967) and his concept of *consociality*. Lucas redefines this concept to fit the reasonings concerning the relationship between things and their persistence and he does so in a convincing way. Lucas clearly shows that the archaeological record cannot be isolated into time horizons of past, present and future, but that it instead interconnects and intertwines these horizons in both interesting and thought-provoking ways. Thus the concept of *consociation* is offered as a fruitful way to think of our articulation of the idea of contemporaneity. Lucas stresses that we may use this concept to think about how we articulate the idea of contemporaneity both in our narratives of the past and in our comprehension of the relation between ourselves and what remains of the past. According to Lucas this is important

because of the consequences it has for how we represent the past and its relation to the present. One of the most important of these consequences, I would suggest, is related to the temporal voice we use in archaeological narratives. We need to write in archaeology in the mode of the contemporary . . . [A] narrative written in the contemporary mode is one which is attendant to the changing interplay between present, past and future tense (p. 14).

On a general level, I agree with the arguments presented by Lucas. This is also the case when it comes to the multi-subject and multi-temporal archaeology he proposes as a possible outcome of the reasonings and arguments presented in the article. However, I would also like to add a point of critique that perhaps may develop and/or radicalize the arguments presented even further. I would argue that there are other, more profound, consequences to be found in the arguments and conclusions presented by Lucas. If we as archaeologists try to abandon synchronism and anachronism as well as the traditional linear and successional view of time, the outcome cannot solely be a situation where we ‘need to write about archaeology in the mode of the contemporary’ (p. 14), as proposed by Lucas. Of course, we need to stress the changing interconnection between past, present and future in our writings, as much as we need to reflect on the relation between ourselves and what remains of the past. However – and this is perhaps even more important – I believe that we also need to reflect on our own existential temporality in the same way as Archie Leach is doing. In short, why just write about contemporaneity? Why not live it?

### **An existential twist**

At this point, it is time to return briefly to the quotation presented in the introduction of my comment and to the contemporaneity of Archie Leach and Wanda Gershwitz. As already stressed, their lives are past, present and future simultaneously since these horizons are interconnected and intertwined in their existential temporality, as well as in Archie’s wish to break with the

past and create a new future. With Archie and Wanda in mind it may be fruitful to add some existential arguments from Martin Heidegger to the discussion. According to Heidegger, the division of time into constructed isolated horizons, such as past, present and future, and the view of time as objective, linear, endless and independent, is extremely simplified. Instead, he stresses that these horizons ought to be characterized as ‘the character of having been’, ‘the present’ and ‘the future as approaching’, since they are interwoven – and affect each other – in our temporal existence in a manner where they cannot be separated or isolated from each other (Heidegger 1927, 350; Karlsson 1998). Heidegger apprehended temporality as a horizon of our understanding of ourselves, as well as the horizon of our understanding of all other human beings and of the things that surround us. In short, if it were not for our temporality we would not be able to orientate ourselves in the world. Thus Heidegger stresses that existential temporality precedes all forms of reckoning and division of time in any clear-cut horizons, whether those are minutes or decades, past, present or future. These horizons are just reflections of our existential temporality that conceals the existential nature of time and its dependency upon our existential temporality. In accordance with Heidegger, Western thought has been dominated by an understanding of time as measurable ‘datability’ that conceals our existential temporality (*ibid.*).

Furthermore, Heidegger stresses that in our existence we are always ahead of ourselves, since our projects are directed towards ‘the future as approaching’, or more precisely towards ourselves and our possibilities since we are always incomplete (Heidegger 1927, 325 ff.; Karlsson 1998). This is exactly what Archie is up to. With his existential anchorage in the traditions deriving from the past as ‘the character of having been’, his contemporaneity as ‘the present’ is already directed towards the future as ‘the future as approaching’. He is trying to break free from the traditions he has been born into but this is not so easily done: he is terrified of embarrassment but at the same time he is fed up. According to Heidegger, the sociocultural and historical tradition that we are thrown into has both positive and negative dimensions. The tradition may act negatively in a situation where it keeps us from our future possibilities in the form of *das Man*.<sup>2</sup> According to Heidegger, *das Man* prescribes our state of mind and determines what and how we see, think and interpret the world (Heidegger 1927, 126 ff., 146 ff.). Thus tradition through *das Man* creates a restricted world that excludes the possibility of being challenged by the unfamiliar and the alien. However, tradition can also act positively and let us open up to our (future) possibilities, as reflections upon the alternate modes of understanding derived from historical existence provide us with the possibility of counteracting the closure of *das Man* and viewing the world in a new light (*ibid.*, 328 ff.). Here, Heidegger is undoubtedly inspired by Søren Kierkegaard, especially when he stresses anxiety as an important element in our state of mind. In a state of anxiety, the world and ourselves, according to Heidegger, lose their meaning and, as a consequence, it becomes clear that the interpretation of the world in which we exist is just one interpretation among other possible interpretations. This implies that in anxiety we can project ourselves towards new possibilities and towards a new understanding of the world (*ibid.*, 184–92). I do not know

whether or not Archie derives the inspiration for his future possibilities in *das Man*, in his historically directed reflection or in a state of anxiety. The main point to be made here is that his projection towards (a possible) new future is a consequence of his existential temporality.

### Existential contemporaneity

In my opinion the arguments and conclusions presented by Lucas in his article can be developed further and more radically if we also take into account the existential dimensions of temporality as presented by Heidegger and as I have discussed briefly above. If not prevented by *das Man* in our archaeological traditions, a move towards an acceptance of our existential temporality can produce a situation that leads to more radical consequences than solely to the writing of texts, which present the insights of contemporaneity and temporality. Rather, they could lead to existential changes due to the realization of the conditions for our own contemporary existence, and for the discipline of archaeology. But what does it mean to live one's contemporaneity? In such a state, it is obvious that archaeological existence and archaeology become something more than solely a search for a more or less fictional objective understanding of prehistory, or a presentation of sociopolitically anchored subjective interpretations of the past. Rather, archaeology, with such an approach, would become an individual as well as a collective existential project containing philosophical as well as critical dimensions that approach, for instance, what it means to be human, or more precisely what it means to be human in a socially unequal and unfair world. In this respect I argue that we, as individual archaeologists, as well as the archaeological discipline, could learn something from Archie Leach and his existential contemporaneity and the conditions it presents for his attempt to achieve a changed existence in 'the future as approaching'.

### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Charles Crichton and John Cleese wrote the script of the film, and the film was directed by Crichton and produced by MGM in 1988. It starred, amongst others, John Cleese as Archie Leach and Jamie Lee Curtis as Wanda Gershwitz.
- <sup>2</sup> The German term *das Man* refers to the 'levelling-out', the 'ought' or the 'must' tendencies of social reality. I use this term untranslated, because of the lack of an English term that renders the content of the German term clearly enough.

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## Archaeology and contemporaneousness *Laurent Olivier\**

Gavin Lucas has returned to the theme of archaeological time, which has long interested him, and, in this paper, to contemporaneousness in archaeology. For a historian, contemporaneousness is a straightforward matter. The

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First World War and the Russian Revolution, for example, are considered contemporaneous because the two events took place during the same period of time. Both significantly influenced the course of 20th-century history and influenced each other as well. But for an archaeologist, the very notion of chronology is fundamentally problematic. We date an archaeological object or feature on the basis of morphological attributes that allow us to estimate the time during which it was created. In other words, a historical date (the actual date when some vestige came to be) corresponds, in archaeology, to a probable length of time. Archaeological time floats.

Dating artefacts or features moreover requires chronological markers that are relatively precise, and on most digs they are simply lacking. This was demonstrated again this past summer in Marsal, in Lorraine, when we excavated a pit silo dug into salt production waste materials that contained many pottery shards from the 6th century B.C. Eight human bodies had been tossed into this pit before it was finally filled in. The layer of filling covering the bodies contained pottery and metallic fragments dating from the end of the 6th century B.C. to the first quarter of the 5th. We naturally assumed that the bodies dated from the same period, or perhaps slightly after. Then we got the radiocarbon dating results for the skeletons, which all belonged to a period between 400 and 200 Cal. B.C. The pottery shards and small metallic debris that had been mixed in with the filling certainly dated to the end of the Early Iron Age, *but they were still there* in the ground when the bodies were thrown in during the fourth or third century B.C. In other words, these material remains were contemporary with that traumatic event even though they were in no way related to it. Historical time – the time of what happened – is the time of events, whereas archaeological time, which is the time of matter – pottery shards, bone fragments, pieces of metal – deals in lengths of time. Events vanish once they are over; not so pottery shards or bone fragments. They *remain* long after they were made or used.

Given this observation, what can be done? How can we know if archaeological remains are truly related to each other – that is, truly contemporary in historical terms? Gavin would have us draw on Alfred Schutz's notion of *consociality*, which defines, to put it roughly, the relation between people and the things around them. But isn't this just another way of trying to (re)introduce history into matter – I mean, of course, archaeological matter – that is fundamentally alien to it? Archaeological matter does not conform to the time of historical events. Its future is always just the reworking of what is old, of what is 'already there', along with its reshaping in every present that follows. And simply because 'they're there', things are often brought back into play in untimely fashion. That is why archaeology is far better understood as a memory of the past than as the story of 'what happened there'. Why, then, don't we acknowledge this? Why do we persist in trying to make archaeological remains speak to us as if they were historical documents? As Gavin reminds us, archaeological matter is multi-temporal in that all these objects and features that were created at different times coexist in our present, as they did, by the way, in each present after their creation. The future is not just made of things that are newly created, but rather of the infinite plasticity of the past, of its open-ended potential to become something else, even as it

brings its heritage forward. In fact, the future is the transformation of the past, and in that archaeology offers a ‘reading of the past’ that is completely different from traditional history. Why not just come out and say so?

Therefore Gavin shows us that certain seemingly obvious concepts, in particular contemporaneousness, have actually changed over time. In the 1860s, when archaeology was flourishing in Europe, there were people living in the Americas and Australia very much as mankind had lived in the Stone Age. To travel from 19th-century London or Paris into the Welsh or the Breton countryside was to leave an industrial metropolis for a remote rural world where lifestyles and mentalities had changed very little from how they had been 200 or 300 years before. The past existed like an ocean of surviving practices surrounding small islands of modernity with steam-powered engines and public transport systems. That is probably why scholars, at that time, believed comparative approaches to be a powerful tool for reconstituting the distant past: they had only to look around to see that the most ancient ways were still out there, just beyond the gates of the modern world. This is not at all the way we view things today. Our experience of the world has dramatically changed. In an age of Facebook and Twitter, contemporaneousness is a form of simultaneity. We find ourselves in a single present, with individual moments simultaneously experienced all over the world. We are now cut off from the past, which is more and more removed from us, whereas in the 19th century the present bore the full weight of the past.

The way in which we order time has changed, or rather, ‘the regimes of historicity’ (*régimes d’historicité*), as the historian François Hartog (2002) phrases it, have been transformed. Our relation to the past is no longer the same. Following the French Revolution, historians believed that reason would lead mankind towards progress and the emancipation of peoples everywhere. But that view came undone in France with the advent of the First Empire, the return of monarchical rule, the outbreak of new revolutions, and then the ephemeral return to a republic just before a Second Empire took over. Clearly, history didn’t lead anywhere. It did not, as people had thought, pave the way for the future. After the middle of the 19th century, the events of the past related by history were seen as a relic, a dead thing that had just happened once. It was now obvious that mankind never learned anything from the failures of the past. History was just one instance after another of the strong dominating the weak in different ways. Marxism gained favor by feeding on our disillusionment and on the hope it offered of giving history new meaning, or at least some direction, thanks to the notion of ‘class struggle’. The ‘terrible 20th century’ taught us that this, too, was an illusion.

Thereafter, the terrible shock of the mechanized slaughter of the First World War, followed by Europe’s moral collapse after the Second World War, definitively severed whatever ties still linked the present to the past. Today, the recent past of the 20th century is something that, overall in Europe, we would rather forget, and by which we prefer not to define ourselves. As for the future, it seems to hover over us like a vague threat, and we now live our lives in that ‘risk society’ whose workings have been so thoroughly described by the German sociologist Ulrich Beck (2001). We live in anticipation of catastrophe, in ‘the Final Age’, having retreated into a permanent present

that moves along without ever moving on (Anders 2007). The repressed past has not ceased ‘haunting’ the present as if it were still current, as if it had never ended (Hamel 2006). We are living a period of ‘latency’ that has not been able to take its place in history, one that seems doomed to keep on repeating itself in the present (Gumbrecht 2013). This overwhelming, never-ending, absolute present is that of the globalized, overcapitalized world that flourished from the end of the 20th century.

Our thinking is shaped by that world. In other words, we cannot conceive our relation to the past and to the present independently of the way in which we exist in the world historically. It is our experience of the world, as that world is given to us, which fashions our understanding of the phenomena we observe. That relation is basically ideological, yet ideology is strangely absent in the works of scholars who deal with matters of archaeological ontology, especially North American scholars. But we can’t make ideology disappear by pretending that it doesn’t exist. Quite the contrary, by acting as if it does not matter, we confer on it the force of a given, something that doesn’t have to be questioned. And in doing so, we unknowingly become its spokesperson.

In the end, the only question truly asked of us is this: do we consider archaeology to be a field of speculative reflection that has no impact on the world, or do we deem the way we conceive archaeology to be inseparable from our attempts to change things, or at least to free our minds of the assumptions and preconceived notions that fetter our thinking? I obviously subscribe to the latter view. If thought does not serve to relieve us of the pressures of ideology and convention, then it necessarily maintains us in a state of subjugation and dependence. Worse still, it makes us instruments for reproducing social norms. For, as Michel Foucault noted, we now live in a society in which power expresses itself as normalcy, ‘which implies an altogether different kind of surveillance and checks that involves maintaining constant visibility, categorizing individuals, establishing a hierarchy, labeling, setting limits, and identifying types. *The social norm has become the social divide*’, he wrote (Foucault 1994, 75). And that is why it is so important for us to think deeply, as Gavin urges us to do, about matters that deal with our relation to the past, for they have a natural tendency to slip into the mould of normalized concepts, such as contemporaneity.

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## Archaeology, anthropology and the stuff of time *Thomas Yarrow\**

Lucas’s discussion of contemporaneity makes an important contribution to archaeological understandings of chronology and dating and to broader debates about temporality. Extending his earlier work on time (Buchli and Lucas 2001; Lucas 2001; 2005), Lucas’s central insight is that

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contemporaneity is not a function of a shared unit of time but of the specific relations through which objects are imbricated. The approach is likely to have profound implications for archaeological approaches to chronology. Whether or not it undermines the current preoccupation with absolute dating, it should certainly give renewed impetus to those branches of archaeology that make it possible to examine time as a matter of the specific material properties of artefacts. This is important, first, because it opens up the possibility of more nuanced empirical understanding of the very stuff of time (literally how it is materially manifest) and, second, because such empirical understandings enable conceptual refinement and extension of the categories through which time is understood. Of broader interest for non-archaeological readers are the ramifications of this discussion of contemporaneity for the ways in which time is investigated and conceptualized. Writing as an anthropologist, interested but with no expertise in archaeological dating, it is these latter considerations that I want to pursue in my comments, as these relate to contemporaneity and to the broader investigation of time.

Lucas's move to situate contemporaneity as a relative property of the objects of investigation opens up the possibility of an archaeology that is *of* rather than simply *in* time. Rather than an external determining system (what Lucas terms the 'envelope' concept), time is a product of the relations between things and is therefore contingent and relative to the object(s) of investigation. In an influential paper in this journal, Ingold (2007) argues for a shift from materiality to materials, suggesting that a focus on material culture was accompanied by a generic concern with the material world, entailing a dualistic opposition to (immaterial) society, and foreclosing attention to the actual, specific and processual properties of materials. I read Lucas's paper as a parallel move, insofar as this urges a shift away from universal understandings of temporality as an abstract, determining principle (independent of people and place) to the actual, specific and multiple ways in which time is produced; time against temporality, to paraphrase Ingold, is materially and socially situated, emergent rather than pre-given as a universal organizing principle.

This theoretical move resonates with recent anthropological discussions of time on a number of levels. While temporality has been a long-standing focus of anthropological interest, at least from the time of Evans-Pritchard, recent commentators have pointed to the ways in which anthropological models and methods internalize assumptions about time, to the detriment of empirical investigation of the actual relations and understandings through which time is constituted. Informed in part by post-human thinking, this entails a move from the study of socially constructed representations of time to an understanding of time as a distributed property of the relations between people and things as they interact in practice (Bear 2014; Ingold 2010). In terms that echo Lucas's, this approach proposes that the situated investigation of these temporal practices conditions the analytic framework rather than vice versa (Dalsgaard and Nielsen 2013). Theoretically speaking, new temporal understandings are continually extended and reconfigured through ethnographic encounters with temporal contexts that, in their specificity, call for conceptual refinement. New theories of time are produced through taking seriously the specificity of these ethnographic articulations. If



time is always something different – differently specified in different situations – then its conceptual implications are always, recursively, a challenge to theoretical models derived from elsewhere. Rabinow's influential calls for an anthropology of the contemporary in some ways echo Lucas's approach in this paper, suggesting that we approach this not as an analytic or methodological given but as 'an assemblage of both old and new elements and their interactions and interfaces', as 'a moving ratio of modernity, moving through the recent past and near future in a (non-linear) space' (Rabinow and Stavrianakis 2014, 142).

These resonances might lead us to imagine disciplinary convergence, specifically in an approach to time that, in attending to articulations of people and things, collapses any straightforward conceptual separation between its social and material determinants. Indeed, attempts to elucidate the temporality of materials and the materiality of time represent an exciting arena of mutual interest, if not as yet much collaborative research, across archaeology, anthropology and other disciplines (Ingold 2010). However, if time is a relative property of practical interactions, indissolubly social and material, then Lucas's account itself makes clear how disciplinary traditions of fieldwork and analysis (re)produce their own temporal frameworks, as much as they can be used to understand the temporal logics inherent in the practices of others. Insofar as what we know about time relates to how we know about it, time matters to archaeology and anthropology in literally different ways.

As Lucas highlights, chronology creates various issues for archaeologists: insofar as contemporaneity becomes a matter of temporal coincidence, attention to processually unfolding relations is foreshortened. Ethnographic methods also routinely engender and reproduce assumptions about contemporaneity but in rather different ways. Dalsgaard and Nielsen (2013) have recently highlighted how, notwithstanding the turn to multi-sited ethnography, anthropological definitions and demarcations of the field as a temporally bounded unit foreclose attention to the multiple temporalities at play as unfolding properties of interactions in the field. From the perspective of the 'ethnographic present', time is effectively collapsed into place, even as conceptions of place are distributed and extended to encompass non-localized processes. If time poses problems of different kinds for archaeologists and anthropologists, then these disciplines also create different kinds of 'solution', insofar as different interpretive and methodological practices create different interpretive artefacts.

I read Lucas's discussion of contemporaneity not only as a critique of the temporal assumptions embedded in prevailing archaeological approaches, but also as a more positive explication and amplification of existing archaeological disposition. His account makes clear a latent capacity of archaeological research to unfold time from the material properties of artefacts and the ways in which they are spatially related. The question whether and how things are contemporary is thus a matter of empirical investigation. Lucas and others have elsewhere made evident through discussions of the 'contemporary past' how, regardless of the object of investigation, the archaeological method inheres in sustained empirical

attention to the physical properties of things. Archaeological orientations to these questions are not just a matter of theoretical perspective but of the distinctively embodied ‘skilled visions’ (Grasseni 2007) – methodologies practically embodied as sensibilities, dispositions, ways of interacting, knowing and seeing. Archaeology, thus conceived, is less a practice of putting things in temporal context than of making time out of things. In relation to the current discussion, this means that time is made visible *through* space, and hence materials are methodologically prior to time. Such a perspective helps locate the limits of the kinds of contextualizing move that anthropologists routinely engage in.

Lucas’s reformulated vision of archaeological contemporaneity makes clear, by contrast, the materially and temporally reductive consequences of a commitment to the ethnographic present, and foregrounds a broader problem latent in a range of sociological perspectives. Even where the temporal horizon is extended to embrace past and future, these emerge after the fact of the primary object of attention: methods and analytic concepts that privilege contemporary social relations and interests, and locate past and present as various kinds of projection from this, whether conceived in terms of temporal ‘imaginings’, ‘representations’ or ‘memories’. The past as a reflex of present interests leads to an attenuated understanding both of the historical process, and of the ways in which time is materially embodied (Jones and Yarrow 2013). In the context of anthropological discussions of heritage, Christoph Brumann suggests that conceptual frameworks that privilege contemporary social relations and interests render historic artefacts as ‘empty signifiers’ (Brumann 2014), whose material properties participate obliquely, if at all, in the meanings that are (socially) made of them. Some time ago, Marilyn Strathern (1990) highlighted how the anthropological move to put artefacts in social and historical context forecloses consideration of the temporal contexts that artefacts themselves contain. Ingold (2010) has made a related point about the ways artefacts enfold time, as much as they are enfolded within it. Yet even if such conceptual insights have accompanied renewed anthropological attention to the material ‘stuff’ of which time is literally made, ethnographic approaches continue to situate this interest through fieldwork that routinely privileges the spoken words and practical interactions of people. My point is not to suggest that this is problematic per se, but that it locates the question of what time is and how we can understand it. Even if anthropologists are increasingly committed to conceptual frameworks that highlight how time is folded into things, it remains the case that our interests have rarely been accompanied by the kinds of expertise that would allow us to investigate these dynamics with anything like the sophistication of archaeological research. Lucas’s discussion is a useful reminder to anthropologists of the interpretive limits that ethnographic investigation imposes, and of the ways in which these necessarily locate our understandings of time in general and of the contemporary in particular.

My comments so far have attempted to draw out the reflexive implications of Lucas’s discussion of time in archaeology for anthropological enquiry. In my final comments, I want to suggest that anthropological approaches to time

might in turn help to locate some conceptual limits of the approach that Lucas espouses. For Lucas, temporality is a product of ‘things in relation to one another’ (p. 11) and from this perspective contemporaneity is conceptualized as a matter of ‘how temporality is bound to an object’s identity and how it mediates its relation to other objects’ (p. 11). This ‘ANT view of consociality’, may, as Lucas contends, have the benefit of enabling a more spatially and temporally distributed understanding of the person. One can certainly see how the approach makes sense in relation to archaeological methodologies that routinely route interpretive relations *through* things. Writing as an anthropologist and ethnographer, however, the approach seems in some respects to narrow the interpretive possibilities for tracing relations, insofar as these become primarily if not exclusively a question of action, and ‘things’ become their primary locus. Paul Rabinow and Anthony Stavrianakis have recently suggested that in actor-network-theory approaches, ‘the range of affectation that is open to actants, human and otherwise, consists entirely and uniquely of one type of action, which ultimately is a kind of mechanics in its insistence that all phenomena can be explained by a micro- and macrophysics of action’ (Rabinow and Stavrianakis 2014, 71). Lucas’s formulation of contemporaneity borrows explicitly from ANT approaches and seems to imply a similar ‘physics of action’. From a more ethnographic perspective, one might then wonder about the range of ways in which relations of contemporaneity can be defined and understood. While Lucas is right to highlight how the material properties of artefacts and assemblages themselves participate in these meanings, relationships of contemporaneity are also and indissolubly a product of how people think about, talk about and conceptualize these. Contemporaneity involves relationships between objects, and Lucas’s account makes evident how archaeologists are uniquely placed to draw out the relational implications of their material properties. However, contemporaneity can also be seen as a function of the various ways in which people narrate and conceptualize their relations with one another and with the non-human elements of the worlds they inhabit.

While Lucas is himself keen to open ways of tracing temporal relations, the invocation of ANT therefore seems in some ways to work against this aim. My broader point is not simply to highlight the diverse ways in which temporal relations – and hence contemporaneity – can be traced, but also to foreground the extent to which the specification of relations will always be relative to the conceptual framework(s) with which one starts. Here, my comments rejoin and extend Lucas’s paper in drawing attention to the situated nature of our own interpretive artefacts. An archaeologist examining contemporaneity as a matter of ‘things in relation to one another’ might produce a different sense of the contemporary to an anthropologist whose ethnographic sensibilities make her more attuned to relations made through spoken words, or the everyday interactions of people. What we know about time is situated by how we know about it – by the kinds of sensibility, vision and interpretive framework we employ as much as the theories and concepts. Anthropology and archaeology do not look at the same world differently – they make the world available to themselves in qualitatively different kinds of ways. From this perspective, time is not so much a shared object as a shared set of interests. Each discipline

constitutes a perspective on the other that helps to locate and define these limits. As such anthropology and archaeology's mutual interests – in time in general and in the contemporary in particular – lie as much in how these disciplines differ as in what they share.

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## **Contemporizing the contemporary** *Gavin Lucas*

I would like to thank all my respondents for taking the time to read my paper and offer their critical and constructive feedback; in their varied responses, they have highlighted aspects which I had not considered, challenged me to elaborate on some of the less clear points I made and revealed ambiguities or even contradictions in how I have articulated the concept of contemporaneity. Rather than respond individually, I would like to try and answer what I see as the main points which collectively emerge from these comments.

One of these concerns the form of archaeological narrative that my investigation into the concept of contemporaneity would imply. Indeed, I would be the first to acknowledge that my discussion at the end of the paper regarding this matter was somewhat perfunctory, to say the least. From the comments, I want to address two related problems that arose. First, both Olivier and Jones pick up on a similar issue that they regard as problematic: the implicit reversion to a conventional chronological narrative of sequence which would seem to contradict the very claims I make in this paper. Second, and in contrast, Crossland sees my rejection of chronological time as actually preventing the possibility of acknowledging other, specifically past, perceptions of time and contemporaneity. These are both important points so I will respond as best I can to each in turn.

Olivier is perhaps the most direct when he challenges my use of the concept of consociality as being simply another version of conventional history and suggests that I am forcing archaeological matter to conform to historical time rather than the time of memory. There are some important points I would like to make in response here. First, I am troubled by this dichotomy of memory and history which Olivier deploys, a dichotomy which is central both to his very important work on archaeology and time (Olivier 2011) and also generally, it seems, to French historiography after the studies of Pierre Nora (1989). The basic assumption here seems to be that events (i.e. history) are sequential but objects (i.e. archaeology) are not. This is why Olivier stresses the persistence of his pottery sherds in a feature two centuries later; it is not a point about formation processes and residuality but rather a point about artefacts not having any kind of temporality in a chronological sense. The sherds are no more 6th-century than 3rd-century. They exist equally in both times. However, there are two problems here. First, in Olivier's own example of the backfilled silo pit, the very possibility of acknowledging the

survival of these older sherds depends on a historical time frame. It was radiocarbon dating that showed the incongruity in the first place. Even to talk about the non-historicity of the archaeological object presupposes historical temporality as a context. Moreover, the fact remains that while the sherds could be described as equally 3rd-century B.C. and 6th-century B.C., they could not be described as 10th-century B.C. They did not exist at that time. Which challenges the notion that objects have no historical temporality; I would argue that they do by virtue of the fact that at some point in historical time they come into existence, and probably at some future point they will cease to exist.

The second problem concerns the relevance of those pottery sherds. In purely chronological terms, one cannot call them 6th-century any more than 3rd-century – or indeed 21st-century, as those sherds still persist. But so what? How does one use this recognition in a meaningful way? One can talk about these sherds in terms of memory, but I do not see how using memory is necessarily counter to talking about history. These sherds can be deployed in a narrative about 3rd-century Marsal in Lorraine, or about a 21st-century excavation in the same locale. One could even juxtapose these narratives together with a third about the vessels these sherds came from in the 6th century B.C. in a non-linear way. But however you do it, it is hard to frame any narrative without reference to historical time, simply because the relevance of these sherds and their agency changes depending on which time frame you choose to discuss them in. For me, the interesting challenge is not *opposing* memory and history but juxtaposing them in ways which deal adequately with what I have called modes of persistence and attentiveness to a more thoughtful concept of contemporaneity. It simply means we cannot reduce the presence of 6th-century sherds in a 3rd-century feature or a 21st-century excavation to one of mere residuality.

It is this issue of juxtaposition that I also want to emphasize in regard to Jones's concerns about my use of the term 'gradients of consociality' (p. 12). Jones suggests that the concept could return us to a successional view of time – or what Olivier might call historical time. In the example of my relation to Lincoln, for example, I suggested that my consociation with him was separated by several degrees because he died a century ago and my relation to him is mediated only through other objects, directly or indirectly connected to him. These degrees of separation constitute the gradient. Like the opposition of history and memory, I would argue that we cannot forgo successional time and simply replace it with a temporality of the contemporary. Rather, the structure of archaeological narratives is best seen as the conjunction of successional time and relational time. The gradients of consociality are defined both by the persistence of stable objects (e.g. Lincoln, the body) and by the entanglement or co-relation of objects (e.g. Lincoln's body with Lincoln's coat) which constitute more fluid assemblages. Measuring persistence depends on successional time; measuring entanglement depends on relational time or contemporaneity. This point also relates to Jones's misgivings about my presumption of persistence, where he asks about the conditions for stability or ephemerality. These are, indeed, crucial questions, but ones which would take us into another realm of questioning concerning the integrity of objects and

their identity, even drawing us into debates about relational and essentialist ontologies. It also relates to questions of scale and how far one might be able to stretch gradients of consociality, a point raised by both Jones and Yarrow. I am not sure I could do any justice to such questions in the short space available here, so I leave these for another occasion.

If Olivier and Jones are both correct in seeing successional or historical or chronological time as still embedded in my argument, Crossland takes my initial rejection of such time as a point of departure to question whether my arguments do not deny other past perceptions of temporality. This is a complex issue which Crossland proficiently explores, and in response I need to clarify a number of points. First, I do not ultimately wish to ‘dispense with any notion of succession altogether’, as both Olivier and Jones already observed. This phrase was used in a very specific context, in terms of the relation between *tensed* time – that is, between past, present and future – I still do not see the relation between these terms as successional. However, there are other temporal terms which are fundamentally successional (e.g. earlier/later) and these guarantee that there will always be an aspect of time which remains successional. Second, it is precisely the non-successional nature of the past–present–future nexus that would allow us to explore other perceptions of the past in the past.

It is at this point that I think my articulation of writing archaeology in the mode of the contemporary was unclear and this is why Crossland has perhaps misunderstood me on this issue. To elaborate on this, I want to use her own very clear exposition in which she draws on Koselleck’s asymmetry of the ‘space of experience’ and ‘horizon of expectation’, as these illustrate my argument equally well. As she puts it: ‘Koselleck’s conceptual categories of the present–past “space of experience” and the future “horizon of expectation” provide a framework for examining the conditions of historical possibility’ (p. 17–18). This is also the point I was trying to make, albeit very poorly, and more specifically to argue that these very conditions of historical possibility change over time because of shifts in the gradients of consociality. While it may seem perverse to quote a section of my own text, I do it precisely because it clearly needed further elaboration:

A narrative that starts at 500 B.C. and ends at 400 B.C. has a different set of agential possibilities than one which spans 400–300 B.C. This field of possibilities changes as one slides the end point back or forward, and therefore, depending on what we take as our point of reference, history will appear slightly different each time (p. 14).

Contained here is a clear sense that successional time has not been dispensed with, but also a clear imperative to retain this idea of temporal asymmetry. The fulcrum between Koselleck’s ‘space of experience’ and ‘horizon of expectation’ will shift. The horizon of expectation was most certainly different in 400 B.C. than it was in 300 B.C., as was the space of experience; it is precisely the idea of consociality and its gradients that, I suggest, we can use to explore these differences. Indeed, if one relies solely on successional time, then it seems to me that such a task is more likely to be foreclosed. Moreover, surely Koselleck’s temporal taxonomy underlines the point that the

relations of past, present and future are not successional at all, but rather more relational. I believe that the same non-successional character of tensed time is also quite clear in Karlsson's discussion of Heideggerian temporality, which had a clear influence on Koselleck. Contemporaneity, specifically consociality, then, actually allows us to do what Crossland wants, rather than preventing it.

Writing archaeological narratives is one thing, but is that all that is at stake here? Crossland, Karlsson and Olivier raise questions of the broader relevance of such discussions of time in archaeology. Karlsson asks what it might mean to *live* contemporaneity as opposed to just writing it. Drawing on Heidegger, Karlsson hints at the possibility of archaeology as an existential project, both individually and collectively. How does thinking about contemporaneity challenge our perceptions of what it is to be human – to be an archaeologist, in fact? In a sense, what is at stake here is the broader relevance and purpose of archaeology and what Karlsson seems to say is that this, too, is a question bound up with our notions of time. And he is right. The contemporaneity of the archaeological record which I discuss is not simply about how we might write narratives about archaeological material, about the consociality of things like potsherds and burials; it is also about our own consociality with that thing we call the archaeological record, indeed with anything which has been on this earth far longer than us. Our understanding of that consociation shapes our actions in the present – and future. As both Olivier and Karlsson effectively argue, doing archaeology is not simply writing or talking about the past, it is a fully temporal project where the past matters, because of its intersection with the present and future. This is both an existential (Karlsson) and political (Olivier) question and one which is not really drawn out in my discussion but with which I concur. To what extent, though, are the answers to these questions given by this consociation, or are they rather a matter of ideology, as Olivier suggests?

It is in the same spirit that I read Yarrow's comment on my restricted focus on contemporaneity in relation to objects; as he points out, an anthropologist may see things differently, where contemporaneity is something articulated through discourse or practice. In the realm of the spoken word or interpersonal interactions, a very different sense of contemporaneity might emerge. While I appreciate this point – and especially the point that I am articulating a very *archaeological* perspective on contemporaneity – I am wary of polarizing the world of discourse from that of material things. In my discussion on Lincoln the myth versus Lincoln the man, I tried to argue that consociation is a concept which can be used to cut across such distinctions. Even if we only *talk* about Lincoln, Lincoln consociates (his coat, the memorial, the movie) will not be easy to extricate from such talk. At the same time, Crossland, Karlsson, Olivier and Yarrow all impel me to question whether the political or ethical dimension to contemporaneity is something that is adequately captured in my use of the term 'consociation' and especially in the object-centred focus of my discussion. Of that, I do have doubts. Even Olivier's discussion of presentism, as a dominant historical ideology of our time, seems to be rather ambiguous in asserting the weight of historical events in shaping this ideology and the ability of this ideology to be disconnected



from the material world (not to mention the irony of this in terms of Olivier's own critique of historical narrative).

It is Crossland's comments, however, that perhaps go deepest in regard to the political and ethical dimension of my discussion. Relating to the point raised earlier about the potential implicit in my position for denying past/other perceptions of time and contemporaneity, she also questions the way this does not address how certain pasts are privileged, how certain people, events, stories are excluded from history – and excluded from being contemporary. Reading Crossland's comments, I was immediately reminded of the work of Michel-Rolph Trouillot and his book *Silencing the past* (1995), where a politics of elision and selection infiltrates every stage in the production of the historical archive. This is about politicizing source criticism, politicizing formation theory. I have discussed Trouillot in my work on the archaeological record (Lucas 2012; also see Wylie 2008), and while I emphatically see the politics of history as inextricably entangled with ontological questions about the nature of the archaeological record, it is certainly not a theme I have elaborated much upon and Crossland is right to draw attention to it. But the ontology is important.

Thus I have reservations about the way Crossland articulates this issue, through a typical Peircean triplet of history-as-trace, history-as-past and history-as-interpretation. In particular, I find the idea of history-as-past deeply troubling – as something distinct from history-as-interpretation and history-as-trace. Trouillot's work was precisely an attempt to bypass the whole opposition of history-as-past versus history-as-interpretation by focusing solely on history-as-trace (i.e. as archival production). This is how I also see the matter. We don't need a historical past, nor do we need history as representation. Objects, people, ideas – they enfold the past, present and future in a way that does not require such separation, which is how I have tried to discuss the idea of contemporaneity in my paper.

I have only touched on some of the more immediate concerns I perceived in the comments of Crossland, Jones, Karlsson, Olivier and Yarrow and tried to respond to them as best I can in relation to my original arguments. Perhaps in the process, I have misrepresented them, but I hope not. However, it is also clear there are a number of issues I left hanging, issues which clearly require more work, as these commentators have all so eloquently demonstrated. One concerns the question of identity in relation to time; as Jones remarks, the idea of persistence presupposes stable identities. When is Lincoln still Lincoln? Is there an answer to this that can take us beyond the sterile riddle of how many grains of sand make a heap? Another issue hinges on the distinction between contemporaneity as an operational concept one uses in archaeology (as I have argued in my paper) and contemporaneity as a culturally relative idea related to other projects – political (Crossland), anthropological (Yarrow) or existential (Karlsson). In one sense, we should be wary about overstating the distinction between these two uses of contemporaneity; at the same time they cannot be completely collapsed. If I have tried to argue against certain dichotomies in my response (e.g. between events and objects, history and memory, language and materiality), others have seemed to become more entrenched (e.g. successional and relational time). But underlying this second



issue is another one – between archaeology as epistemology and archaeology as ethics. This may just turn out to be the most important one in the face of current ontological discussions in archaeology regarding agency, relationality and materiality.

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